Pastor Yonggi Cho

1. Birth, Growth, and Calling

Pastor Yonggi Cho was born on February 14, 1936 in Southern Kyung-sam Province, Sam-nam district, Kyo-doeng area. He was the first born of five sons and four daughters of Mr. Doo-Chun Cho and Mrs. Bok-sun Kim. During his childhood he was greatly influenced and trained in Buddhism, Confucianism, and eastern studies.

Yonggi Cho graduated from middle school with honors. However, his father failed in his bid for an elected office, which also ruined his family financially. So he went on to technical high school to gain skills suited for finding work soon after graduation. An American army base was situated near his school and he was able to learn English from the soldiers stationed at the base. His English proficiency level enabled him to be an interpreter for the principal of his school and chief commander at the army base.

When he was 17 and a sophomore in high school, Yonggi Cho contracted tuberculosis, which put him at death’s door. Even as he neared death, he continued to study English by memorizing the English dictionary and his lesson books. Then his sister's Christian friend visited him, and he accepted Christ as his personal Savior.

As the disease continued to plague him, Yonggi Cho went to his hometown to continue receiving treatment for the disease. One day he attended a crusade in Pusan led by missionary Ken Tize, and he received the blessing of God.

After that he began helping missionary Tize with interpretation as well as reading various Christian books, which helped him understand the Christian truth in greater depths. However, since he lacked firm conviction, Yonggi Cho struggled inwardly and began to fast and pray. Then one night while fasting and praying he met Christ through a vision of light. Through the vision, he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The night he met Christ, Yonggi Cho was called by God to study theology. He came to Seoul in 1956 and entered Full Gospel Bible College on a scholarship. It was here that he met his future partner in ministry and his future mother-in-law, Pastor Choi Ja-shil.

2. The Daejo Church

After graduating from the theology school, Pastor Yonggi Cho along with Pastor Ja-shil Choi and her three children held the first worship service at her home. The home church began to grow more and more and had a membership of fifty. Then a tent was pitched out in the yard. At night, even in winter, church members prayed all night and then went out to witness all around the Daejo area during the day.

Amid the chaos and destruction of the war's aftermath which brought great hardship and poverty to the people of Korea, Pastor Cho proclaimed the message of the Three-fold Blessing: the well-being of the spirit, body, and circumstances. With the fullness and the miracles of the Holy Spirit, many suffering from various illnesses were healed and Christians who came to church were filled with hope.

The church was growing remarkably well when Pastor Cho received an enlistment letter in January of 1961. The church had grown to a membership of 400 within three years of its founding and had just purchased a plot of land to build a church. So the mandatory enlistment was truly devastating. A few days prior to his enlistment, Pastor Cho asked missionary John Hurston who had been led by the Holy Spirit to the church, to take charge of the church, and Pastor Cho went into the army in January. While in the army, Pastor Cho suffered from an intestinal illness, which required surgery at the army hospital. However, even after major surgery—which took him to the brink of life and death, his condition would not improve. Therefore, Pastor Cho was discharged from the army after seven months of service.

3. The Seodaemun Church and the Implementation of Cell Groups
A few days after his discharge from the hospital—even before the surgical wounds had healed, Pastor Cho served as interpreter for Pastor Sam Todd who led a revival crusade at the Seodaemun intersection. Half a month after the crusade, which had been full of the miracles of God, Pastor Cho pitched a large marine tent at the site—the first expansion of his pioneer church.

By November of 1961, a church was constructed to accommodate 1,500 people and on February 18th the following year, the dedication was held to commemorate the church sanctuary as the Full Gospel Revival Hall. On April 26th of the same year, Pastor Cho became an ordained minister, and the church became officially registered as the Full Gospel Central Church.

Three years after the relocation to the Seodaemun area, in 1964 the church membership grew to 3,000. Amid the rapid growth of the church, Pastor Yonggi Cho married Pastor Ja-shil Choi’s daughter Sung-hae Kim on March 1, 1965.

Pastor Cho had been working without proper rest and without regard for his health, and he finally succumbed to overwork and fainted as he was leading a baptismal service for several hundred church members. However, after a week in the hospital, he was discharged for the Sunday service, at which time he again fainted due to weakened health, necessitating another stay in the hospital.

During his second stay in the hospital, he began to realize the physical limitations in his ministry. He further realized, “The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Exodus 18:18). He began to understand the necessity of delegating work to others as Moses had delegated work to various appointed persons among the Israelites to lead them through the desert. The Holy Spirit gave him the understanding of how the members of the early church, especially the women of the church came to work and have fellowship together (Romans 16). Home cell groups became the launching pads for the explosive growth of the church.

A week later after his discharge, Pastor Cho informed the leaders of the church about his vision and began formulating cell groups. He divided the city of Seoul into 20 areas and encouraged the members of the church in given areas to come together in the homes of the members for worship and fellowship during the week. Many of the women were also chosen as cell leaders and trained to lead cell worship. Later, as the men of the church felt challenged by the great organization of women members, they also began meeting in cell groups with other male members of the church. Today the cell leaders in various organizations, (women, men, young men, young women, children and so on), number 32,500.

In 1968, three years after the formulation of home cell groups, church membership stood at 8,000, and there were three worship services on Sunday. Even with three Sunday services, it became harder to accommodate all the members of the church. This led to the purchase of land at Yoido for a new church building.

At the time, Yoido was an island consisting mainly of sand, and it lacked any means of public transportation into the area. This led to much criticism within the church for its selection. To make matters worse, the total cost for the church building was estimated at 800,000,000 Korean won, of which the church only had 1,000,000 won. Regardless, Pastor Cho believed in the miracles of God and went ahead with his plan for the new church. The strong faith of Pastor Cho convinced the board of directors, and with the issuance of promissory notes, church construction began in April of 1969.

4. The Church in Yoido and its Phenomenal Growth

As soon as the construction began, there was a worldwide oil crisis, which caused a rapid drop in the exchange rate of the Korean won to the dollar. As a result, the cost of construction materials skyrocketed because they were mostly imported. Church tithe income dropped as many lost jobs, and the banks tightened their belt in terms of loans. All of these factors threatened to bankrupt the church, and the construction on the church came to a halt.

Every night Pastor Yonggi Cho went into the base of the skeletal construction, getting drenched with
rust-soaked dewdrops as he called out to God in prayer and fell from exhaustion on the cold cement foundation.

Many in the church were affected by Pastor Yonggi Cho's heart-rending prayers and the "Save the Church!" movement began bringing many members of the church to the cold cement church floor for nightly prayer alongside Pastor Cho.

Consequently, the construction resumed in spurts and finally resulted in a completed sanctuary; this accommodated 10,000 people. The first tear-filled worship service was held on September 23, 1973.

With the successful completion of the Yoido Church in 1973, the establishment of Prayer Mountain occurred in the same year because it would greatly aid the growth of the church. With more and more Christians making their way to Prayer Mountain, construction of a sanctuary to accommodate 10,000 people at Prayer Mountain was completed in September of 1982.

The cemetery storage shack for all-night fasting and prayer which was begun by Pastor Ja-shill Choi in a small hamlet in Kyung-gi-do has now become the Prayer Mountain which serves an average of 3,500 people a day and about 10,000 foreigners each year who come to pray at Prayer Mountain.

Following the church's relocation to Yoido Island, church growth skyrocketed. By 1979 the membership numbered 100,000, and by 1981 the membership had doubled again to 200,000.

For the purpose of educating and enhancing the faith of the congregation, the first and second education buildings were constructed as well as the missions center through which missionaries are fostered and trained for evangelizing the world.

In 1984 the official registration of the church name was Yoido Full Gospel Church. The church membership stood at 400,000, and by 1992 the membership had reached 700,000. For those living great distances from YFGC, satellite sanctuaries were built. Many independent churches were established and supported for reaching greater areas throughout Korea.

Pastor Cho continually thanks God for his 42 years of blessed ministry and is a true servant of God to the 780,000 currently registered members of the church today.

The goal for the new millenium is to establish 500 to 5,000 satellite churches and 500 prayer houses throughout the peninsula within the next 10 years, to expand the evangelical reach to the world through the support of the internet, and finally to expand evangelical missions work to the third world—including North Korea. For such purposes, Pastor David Yonggi Cho prays along with all the members of the church for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
Rolland and Heidi Baker

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:3

Rolland and Heidi Baker began Iris Ministries, Inc., an interdenominational mission, in 1980 and have been missionaries for the past twenty-five years. They were both ordained as ministers in 1985 after completing their BA and MA degrees at Southern California College in Biblical Studies and Church Leadership. Rolland is a third-generation missionary born and raised in China and Taiwan. He was greatly influenced by his grandfather, HA Baker, who wrote "Visions Beyond the Veil," an account of the extended visions of heaven and hell that children received in his remote orphanage in southwest China two generations ago.

Heidi was powerfully called to the mission field when she was sixteen and living on an Indian reservation as an American Field Service student. She was led to the Lord by a Navajo preacher. Several months later she was taken up in a vision for several hours and heard the Lord speak to her and tell her to be a minister and a missionary to Africa, Asia and England. When she returned home to Laguna Beach, California, she began ministering at every opportunity and leading short-term mission teams. Rolland and Heidi met at a small charismatic church in Southern California and married six months later after realizing they were united in their calling and desire to see revival among the poor and forgotten of the world.

Rolland and Heidi spent twelve years in Asia. The first six years they led Christian dance-drama crusades in Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Hong Kong. They made use of their backgrounds in creative media and the performing arts, and saw thousands come to Jesus.

After meeting Jackie Pullinger-To and working with her ministry to drug addicts in Hong Kong, however, they had a strong feeling that the Lord wanted to change the direction of their ministry. Their hearts were increasingly broken for the poor and unwanted. They wondered about their crusade converts and wanted to concentrate more on the specific daily needs of those to whom they ministered. This was a time of change. They began to plant works among the poor--first in the slums of central Jakarta, Indonesia, and then among forgotten streetsleepers and elderly in the most crowded urban area in the world, central Kowloon in Hong Kong. God was giving them his heart for the poor and abandoned.

In 1992 they left to do their PhDs in systematic theology at King's College, University of London. At the same time they planted a church among the homeless, drug addicts and alcoholics who lived on the streets in central London.

In 1995, after twenty years of praying and waiting, they arrived in Mozambique, the poorest country in the world. The government offered Iris Ministries a horribly delapidated and neglected "orphanage," and with no promised support such a project they simply said, "Yes, we'll take it!" They began with eighty children, but their hearts were broken for the lost and abandoned children still on the streets of Maputo. After many years of brutal civil war, thousands left orphaned, displaced and abandoned. The Mozambican and foreign staff of Iris Ministries began to pick up and take in these lost children. God poured down his love and provided food day by day. They grew to 320 children. They planted a church in the community and began to see hundreds turn their hearts to the Lord.

The former communist directors of the government orphanage were furious ever since the Bakers took over, since their extreme corruption and thievery had been stopped. Scheming together with an equally corrupt faction of the government, they concocted accusations and issued a legal decree to Iris Ministries forbidding prayer and worship, Christian singing, etc., and all forms of "unapproved" food and clothes distribution and medical assistance. If they and their children did not obey these new rules, they all had forty-eight hours to leave. Heidi was also told that there was a contract out on her life, and that she was not allowed back on the property. Overwhelmed and exhausted by the fight, they had to evacuate to their office in the city.

At the center the children entered the dining room, which had also been used as a church, and began singing praise and worship songs at the tops of their lungs! They were beaten and told they were not allowed to worship God! One-by-one they began to walk the twenty miles to the city office. They told Papa Rolland and Mama Aida that they would go wherever they were because they wanted to worship...
God! Not knowing what to do, they all cried out to God in total desperation. They had lost everything. There was no place for them to go. There was not even a pot to cook for all these children! A friend, Nelda Lawrence from the U.S. Embassy, came over with some chili and rice for the Baker family. Heidi said, "We have a very large family!" Nelda said, "No, no this is only for you and your two children." Heidi said, "We have a lot of children and the Lord said there would always be enough!" They prayed over the pots of food and told the over fifty children to sit down. Everyone ate and was full, including the Bakers!

Two other missions, hearing of the situation, offered the use of some unused buildings for three months. As the time ended the Lord graciously provided a piece of land. The children prayed and interceded with the whole staff and believed God for another miracle. Like always God came through and provided a huge circus tent and some used army tents in which the children could live. Holes were dug for toilets and everyone prayed for months for water from the earth (a well) and spiritual water from heaven (more of the Holy Spirit). God answered both prayers and provided a well with clean, fresh water, and poured his Holy Spirit out on the children in a powerful way. Through the trials all have grown stronger in the Lord. The greatest joy for the whole center is that they are now free to worship God.

The challenges of providing physically and spiritually for so many children under unspeakable conditions of poverty and evil are being met in Jesus. Time after time as discouragement and exhaustion have threatened to collapse the entire ministry effort in Mozambique, the Holy Spirit has poured out more grace and mercy on the ministry.

For example, at one point Heidi came back to the States to attend a renewal conference (being in drastic need of renewal!). She was exhausted by the work and the responsibility of over three hundred children who all called her "Mama Aida." The enemy tried everything to stop her from making the trip. It looked financially impossible, and two doctors told her she absolutely could not make the trip because she had pneumonia. Stubborn as she is, she got on the plane for the thirty-some-hour journey. Mercifully, at the start of the conference God opened up her lungs and allowed her to breathe freely. Each day her strength increased. She spent many hours receiving prayer from loving people on the ministry team. It was difficult, and at the same time deeply healing to simply receive after preaching and teaching for so many years. One night she felt she was in birth pains and was groaning in intercession for the children of Mozambique. There were thousands of them coming towards her and she cried, "No, Lord, there are too many!" And she felt Jesus say, "Look into my eyes. You give them something to eat." Then he took a piece of his broken body and it became bread, and she began to give it to the children. Then again the Lord said, "Look into my eyes. You give them something to drink." He gave her a cup of the blood and the water that flowed from his side, and she gave this to the children to drink. The Lord spoke to her heart and said, "There will always be enough bread and drink, because I paid the price with my life. Don't be afraid. Only believe." She returned to Mozambique healed and strengthened.

Today Rolland and Heidi cry out for a continuation of the visitation of God experienced by the children of HA Baker's orphanage in China long ago. That is beginning to happen, and more testimonies are accumulating than can be communicated! May the Word of God spread in power to the remote corners of the world, and may the the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, people who have never before tasted the goodness of God, be drawn the King's great banquet!

[Since this background article was written, Iris Ministries has expanded to over 5,000 churches all over Mozambique and into neighboring countries. The disastrous flooding of 2000/2001 catalyzed an overwhelming hunger for the things of God in the refugee camps where we ministered, and the Gospel continues to spread like wildfire. We now care for almost 2,000 children at our centers, and our churches are taking in orphans as well. Jesus is revealing Himself through signs and wonders, visions and dreams, and we have never seen such a harvest before us. May the Lord of the harvest send us workers!]