

## **Testimony: Dennis Hirotsu**

For those I haven't met, my name is Dennis Hirotsu, and I've been coming to Hope Church for 3 years. It's a privilege to share my testimony with all of you today.

I may seem to be a normal person. But the people closest to me know I am a bit odd, and know that my life has been a bit odd also. Some examples:

- 1) When I was growing up, I lived in a house which included 8 men [my father, three older brothers, my grandfather, two uncles, and me] with one woman: my mother...I can hear the women in the audience thinking "your poor mother". This upbringing has led my occasional over-enthusiasm for sports.
- 2) In my family, I am far outnumbered by women [my wife and three daughters]. This is something I was completely unprepared for. I have committed myself to understanding women. First, I needed to start with remedial training in topics like putting the toilet seat down after using the bathroom.
- 3) I grew up on a farm, even though none of my parents or relatives are farmers. No time to explain today. Our farming community in California listened to country music, and I developed a love for country music also.
- 4) Although I enjoy interacting with really smart and interesting people at work, I am even more intrigued conversing with middle schoolers. I can't really explain why, but my says this is the age group can interact at my maturity level.

And therefore my testimony follows this odd pattern. The title is "A Japanese-American Buddhist goes to Japan, seeks Buddha and finds Jesus". Go figure...

### **Before**

First of all the Buddhist part needs some explanation. My Grandparents came to California from Japan in the 1920's along with a large number of Japanese immigrants. The Japanese-American community was very close. A pivotal moment for the community came during the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, where my grandparents, and parents were interned for several years, and two of my uncles were born.

Through these challenging times, a key point of identity for the Japanese-American community was the Buddhist church network, which had sprung up throughout California before the internment, and became very strong afterwards.

As I was growing up, I attended a Buddhist church with my family.

- Service was on Sundays with sermons, chants in Japanese that I did not understand, and songs.
- I played for the church basketball and baseball teams against other Buddhist churches in the area.
- The big event was the Buddhist church bazaar which is a huge fund-raiser for the church, making money through games like bingo and sales of home-style Japanese food.

- Although I did not realize it at the time, we were culturally Buddhist, as this was a key part of the Japanese-American culture, and not very religiously Buddhist. I didn't have much knowledge of the religion itself.

Until I was 31 years old, I'd continued down a very uncommitted, uninvolved religious life. I would describe myself as agnostic, and sort of Buddhist.

My definition of success in life was completely worldly, and by my worldly measures, everything was going great.

- I had graduated from a famous University with a degree in Engineering.
- I had joined a fortune 500 company.
- I had married an amazing girl [a Christian who was willing to marry an agnostic Buddhist].
- We had just had our second daughter together [although the 30 hours of labor for Dale in delivering Kelsey was not all that terrific].
- My career was going well with promotions and new opportunities.
- And now at 31, I was offered a promotion and an assignment to work in Japan. In my mind I was doing fine, getting what I deserved from all of my hard work.

### The search

But something was missing. Witnessing my daughters births shook me into the realization of the miracle of life itself, and that there is more meaning to life than meets the eye. But I was not connected to this meaning.

I was also realizing that worldly success measures are not all their cracked up to be. My life was good on the surface, but hollow on the inside.

- Although I worked well with others, I was also viewing my coworkers as "competition" for rewards...I appreciated them, but I also occasionally resented them and made a few enemies.
- And I was often self-critical and agonizing with guilt over my own failures and imperfections.
- I also found myself keeping score with my wife on such rudimentary things as who was changing the most diapers on the weekends and getting upset if I felt she was falling behind on the scoreboard.
- And what a pain these babies could be! I would dream of an easier day when they would be teenagers [yes I was also very naïve].

In summary my life was pretty much all about me, and something was missing.

So, as we moved to Japan, I determined this was a great opportunity to really engage in the Buddhist faith to get answers.

- But to my shock, all of the familiarities of the Buddhist church in California did not exist [no Sunday services, no church bazaar, no sports teams].

- There were beautiful temples and monks, and people visiting the temples to honor Buddha and the deceased, but little more than this.
- I then bought books on Buddhism, and learned of the seven steps to enlightenment. But this was a very difficult path to nirvana, that did not deal with the wonders of God.
- I was frustrated.

So then Dale suggested that we start attending the International Christian Church in Kobe. I think she had been waiting for this moment. As I started learning about Jesus, I found the sermons to be interesting, and his life to be intriguing, but a bit unbelievable. And I could not put my disbelief aside.

*And then I was struck by Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7-8.*

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*And John 14:6*

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me*

I thought, wow, Jesus is one confident guy! He is stating that there is one truth, that this truth will surely emerge if we seek, and that the truth is him!!

My Engineering mind took these words as an intellectual, analytical challenge!

- So I read the Gospels, and I was startled by the profound truth in these ancient books.
- I even read a book called the Tao of Physics, which explained how physicists were learning more and more about the mysterious order of the Universe, and how this generally atheistic group, was becoming believers in God.
- But then I started reading books by non-believers, and getting comfortable with logic that Jesus was a great wise teacher in history, but we should not get carried away with declaring him the Son of God.
- Then I read Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis, who pointed out that either Jesus is the Son of God or he is a complete lunatic who is professing to be something he is not.

I needed to know which is true, but my purely analytical approach was not working.

### My Conversion

And then I began to pray. And I prayed more and read the bible more, and more. The difficult part in prayer was that I had to surrender my analytical, total logic approach and let God take over. But over time I did, and the answers started coming.

After months of prayer, the pivotal moment came as I was attending service and we sang the song "Here I am Lord". As we sang the words,

I will break their hearts of stone,  
Give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my words to them.  
Who shall I send?

### Chorus

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.

Tears were streaming down my face, as I sang. After months of prayer, I realized it was all true.

- God loves me.
- God wants us to love our neighbors and our enemies.
- God wants to have a relationship with me.
- God was here for me anytime I asked.
- God does not need me to work for my salvation, merely to accept it through his Grace.
- God sent his son Jesus to die for me.
- I had knocked and the door had been opened. I had sought and found. I had asked and received.

The next month I was baptized at the age of 34 in front of the congregation, my wife, and my children. A Japanese-American who found Christ's salvation in Japan.

### After

My life is different now, although on the surface much is the same.

- I am married to the same woman, now for 25 years.
- I am working for the same company.
- I am still outnumbered by females in my home.
- I still love sports and country music.
- I still enjoy goofing around with middle schoolers.

But my conversion from an agnostic Buddhist to a Christian has changed my life completely.

- 1) I have a friend and counselor in Jesus. He is always home whenever I knock. He listens to my daily thoughts and guides me in the truth. And I need him constantly.
- 2) Family life is more joyful and less stressful: As we have brought Christ into our family life, this calms the times of stress [and although I thought infants were stressful, I have learned that teenage daughters can really crank it up]. Jesus provides me the example of complete forgiveness and unconditional love that strengthens my relationships with each member of our family.
- 3) Work is more fun and meaningful: Jesus is replacing my desire for hard-earned worldly rewards with gratitude and service. I realize that any talent I have is from God, and that I can serve God through the focus and nature of my work. Once I started loving and

praying for enemies, they aren't enemies anymore...and a workplace without enemies is a great place to be.

4) I have peace. Peace in knowing that I am with our Lord and he is with me.

God has rescued me. In worldly measures, I didn't need to be rescued. But in God's world I was among the most desperate.

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony. And I am grateful to be standing before you today: as a disciple of the lord and your brother in Christ