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Setting the Record Straight on David Yonggi Cho

1:30PM EST 2/25/2014 | [BOB RODGERS](#)



David Yonggi Cho

David Yonggi Cho, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, has been a personal friend of our family for more than 40 years. He has stayed in our home, and my father and I have served on his church growth board for a combined 38 years. Presently, I serve as president of Church Growth International of the Americas.

Because of the slant of some of the media reports, it is important certain details of the situation be made known. Not only was I present in Seoul during much of the trial, but there was also information disclosed during closed-door meetings which has not yet been made public. I want to share some of this as follows.

First, the Seoul Central District Court sentenced Cho, 78, to a three-year prison term suspended for five years. He had been indicted for allegedly causing financial losses worth more than \$12 million. He was also fined \$5 million. He will not have to serve prison time, but he is on probation. Second, Cho's son, Cho Hee-Jun, 49, was indicted for the same charges. Because he was considered a flight risk, he was immediately taken into custody following a court order after being sentenced to three years in prison.

Cho has three sons. The second and third sons are very productive and work in church-related ministries. His eldest son has been the prodigal. He has been married four times and has been involved in sexual scandals with national personalities. In addition, he has served prison time for investment scams and embezzlement. His scandalized life has been an embarrassment to his family and the church.

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Twelve years ago, this son purposely defrauded the church in excess of \$12 million in a stock-related scheme. Cho testified that he trusted his elders and son and didn't check and read the thousands of pages of paperwork, which was prepared for him to sign. Because Cho relied upon the direction of his choice elders and son, he signed the papers. He never received any monies from the transaction.

Third, the presiding judge said, “The court considered that even though Pastor Cho had the final say in the church, he never took the lead in any of the crimes, including tax evasion, committed on the suggestion of the accounting firm.”

The court also considered Cho’s life journey as a religious leader and his long-term contribution to social welfare as mitigating circumstances on his behalf. The court ruled that his son, Cho Hee-Jun, was the instigator of the crime related to the purchase of the shares of 1-Service stock.

Even though Cho established the world’s largest church, with more than 1 million members, he lives a simple life in a 1,000-square-foot church apartment. Neither does he own a car. Cho has raised and given personally to the church more than \$170 million.

Dr. Bob Rodgers Sr. *is pastor of Evangel World Prayer Center in Louisville, Ky.*

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