

The Personal Story of Dr. Kyung Chul Kam (Chancellor, UAUT/UATC)

Part 2: The Calling

Five members of my family began their lives together in a one-room flat in a hillside shantytown. As these neighborhoods were usually located on elevated ground, the moon was always clearly visible perhaps that's why they were called "moon villages." We shared a communal water tap and a public restroom. Every morning, people lined up in front of what we called "the toilet." Whenever I visit Africa, I'm reminded of those old shantytown days. Just opening my eyes in the morning would ignite my frustration. I used to run a thriving business, moving forward like a ship caught in a favorable wind. Remembering that only deepened my despair and made me feel life wasn't worth living anymore. But I had a family to support. What held me together was the sense of responsibility as the head of the household.

About a year into our life in the moon village, I received a notice for reserve forces training. The venue was Kwanglim Methodist Church in Gangnam-gu, Seoul, Korea. In the 1980s, churches and public facilities often hosted political and morale-building education sessions. At the end of our training session, there was a lecture by Rev. Sun Do Kim.

Rev. Kim had graduated from Methodist Theological Seminary and served as a chaplain officer in the Air Force. During his service, he pursued further studies in the United States, earning a Master's degree in Religious Education. After completing his studies, he returned to serve as a chaplain at the Korean Air Force Academy. Upon retiring from the military, he was appointed senior pastor at Kwanglim Methodist Church. Even during his military service, he was known as a gifted preacher. In every lecture he gave, he emphasized the vast, untapped potential within each of us, instilling hope and courage in many trainees who lived without vision or purpose.

The title of his lecture that day was "The Spirit of Challenge and a Positive Attitude." Rev. Kim repeatedly declared, "Never Give Up!"—quoting Prime Minister Winston Churchill. At the time, many people were suffering from the aftermath of the oil shock, so such a message felt especially timely. All of us trainees were under 40, sharing similar circumstances and struggles.

I sat in the front row, listening intently. At that point in my life, I was desperate, as if grasping at straws. It might have been the lowest moment of my life. I wasn't particularly connected to church or Christianity back then, but his words pierced through to my heart. And that day, I made a decision—I would go to church. That decision would eventually lead my entire family to become Christians. For my wife, it meant converting from Buddhism to Christianity. Since her family was devoutly Buddhist, I felt it was right to let them know of our decision.

I explained everything to my in-laws and told them that we had decided to attend church. They didn't readily embrace it, but neither did they oppose it. We had our own family now, and they entrusted the decision to me as the head of the household. Then and now, once I make up my mind, I act without delay. So, the very next week, all five of us registered as new members at Kwanglim Church.

Later, Rev. Sun Do Kim began sharing my story frequently in his sermons during lectures across the country. He would mention that our church had a 'reserve forces elder' named Elder Kam. That's how I came to be nicknamed "the Reserve Forces Elder." One day, someone who had heard one of his sermons even asked me if I was that "reserve elder."

When I was consumed with business, I hardly had time to even look at my children's faces. But going to church together brought a new kind of joy. After worship, we began eating meals together as a family. I once asked the kids what they wanted to eat, and they shouted, "Jajangmyeon!" Fortunately, there was a neat Chinese restaurant just outside the church, so we could enjoy dining out every Sunday without breaking the bank. We began to experience a kind of family harmony and peace we had never known before. After accepting the Lord, we started receiving blessings we never expected—one after another.

What if I hadn't attended reserve training at Kwanglim Church that day? What if I had never heard Rev. Sun Do Kim's message? Would I have just continued running my business, living with pride in my own achievements?

But being at that specific place, at that specific time, changed the entire course of my life. Such is the overwhelming power of what we call "chance." Yet, after coming to know God, I realized that what the world call's "chance" is in fact God's providence His preparation, His guidance, His calling.

"God had been waiting for me all along."

I do not know how many more days I will walk this earth, but I want to spend them fulfilling His will, within the sacred coincidences He has prepared. (to be continued)