

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

Part 1: The Calling

Every person's life is a drama, a novel in itself. That's why it comes with foreshadowing, plot twists, crises, and climaxes. Perhaps the more of these elements it contains, the more meaningful and fascinating the story becomes. In fact, quite a few people around me often say something like this: "If I wrote a book about my life, it would fill several volumes."

Whenever I recall what I once called "crisis moments" in my life, I find myself smiling. Of course, at the time, I was inwardly burning with anxiety. But looking back now, I see that those crises were like jewels that adorned my journey. Especially for a Christian, a crisis can be the moment when we draw closest to God.

Now, I carefully begin to unfold the dramatic story of how I encountered God and experienced a turning point in my life.

Until my mid-thirties, I was relentlessly chasing after business success and wealth. At first, my primary motivation was to earn a lot of money. But as I got into business and commerce, I realized that what thrilled me even more than money itself was the sense of accomplishment. That sense of achievement became a powerful force that pushed me to take on new challenges. So I ran hard, driven by the desire to gain both wealth and fulfillment.

But money is a means, not an end. I've come to learn that when money is needed for something that truly benefits others and revives souls, God will surely provide it. I've experienced this truth firsthand. That's why even now, I never say, "I can't do this or that because I don't have money."

My business was thriving, and I was soaring with wide-open wings. At the time, I ran tirelessly with the mindset that the company and I were one and the same. I would leave the house under the stars and only return after the nightly curfew was lifted. Since I had no separate sales team, I personally handled all client relations. After the first and second rounds of entertainment with clients, I would often rush

across the Yeongdong Bridge just before curfew. There were military and police checkpoints on the other side, and I got to know the officers there by face.

Then I came across a key piece of information: the government was planning to expand the roads connecting Seoul with various regional industrial complexes. I immediately sent staff across the country to lease land near the industrial road network. In the outdoor advertising industry, the competition is all about who secures the prime spots first. Once you capture a good location, the flow of advertising contracts naturally follows. Around that time, I heard that a certain company in the same field was on the verge of bankruptcy. Without hesitation, I acquired the company and brought in its employees as well.

Then came the second oil shock in 1979. With the outbreak of war in the Middle East that year, oil production and transport were disrupted, triggering a global economic crisis that shook not just Korea but the entire world. International crude oil prices more than doubled from just over \$15 a barrel. The Korean government issued emergency supply and demand control orders, imposing strict restrictions, including a ban on neon signs. As part of its national energy-saving policy, all existing advertising structures had to be dismantled.

Originally, when businesses are hit by an economic downturn, the first thing they cut is advertising expenses. Naturally, my once-thriving business took a direct hit. The advertising market shrank drastically, and independent entrepreneurs were especially hard hit. I was no exception. By that time, I had already acquired another company and leased land across the country to secure prime billboard locations. On top of that, being someone with an ambitious drive, I had made substantial upfront investments to dominate the market. My strategy was to invest heavily at the outset and then recover the capital through marketing and sales in order to launch additional ventures. Just when it was time to reap the returns—installing billboards and receiving payments—the demand vanished. In other words, I had secured the inventory and assets, but the distribution pipeline had collapsed.

Within less than six months, I experienced what is called a “profit-based bankruptcy.” This means that although a business may show strong sales and no financial

irregularities on paper, it still goes bankrupt due to a sudden cash flow crisis. I had products in abundance, but they weren't being liquidated, leading to financial insolvency. To make matters worse, I had made investments overseas, and with the sudden surge in the dollar exchange rate, the damage was devastating. Adding insult to injury, I was charged twice under the Dishonored Check Control Act and had to stand trial. I thought I was soaring, but my wings melted away, and I began to fall.

In the end, I lost my house. I could have sought help from my in-laws, but my pride wouldn't allow it. So I moved with my wife and three children into a single-room home in a hillside shantytown. My once-prosperous business had collapsed, and a life of hardship began in the back alleys of the city.

Many of today's younger generation may not even know what a "daldongnae" is. In fact, there are now even tourist courses that let people "experience" what life in a daldongnae was like.

A daldongnae is the Korean version of a slum or shantytown. After the Korean War, many people built makeshift homes from tents amid the ruins. It is said the name "daldongnae" (literally "moon village") came from the fact that when people lay down at night, they could see the moon through the cracks in their tents. Others say it symbolizes the hard life of those who saw the moon on their way to work before dawn and again on their way back home late at night. Another interpretation is that "dal" refers not to the moon in the sky, but to the twelve "months" of the year, specifically tied to the dialectal term "dalse," meaning monthly rent. These neighborhoods were filled with people who lived in month-to-month rental homes, hence the name "daldongnae." Whatever the origin of the name, my life in the moon village signaled that everything had completely fallen apart. *(to be continued)*