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HAVE FAITH IN GOD

His father was a poor peasant farmer in a rural village. His mother had given birth to eight children. However, four died at birth or shortly after, and she was full of sadness as she raised the remaining four children. Then Jang Hwan (Billy) Kim¹ was born. Later the Kims had a tenth child, who died at age three after she drank a cleanser she thought was water, which had been left on the outside wooden step. His mother always seemed to feel sad that five of her children did not survive. He was now the youngest of the remaining five.

After World War II and the country's liberation from Japan, his family moved to Suwon, twenty miles south of Korea's present capital, Seoul. There Billy began attending a six-year agriculture and forestry school. His course of study would be three years in the middle school plus three years in high school. Attending the school had seemed a nearly impossible dream to this son of an impoverished peasant farmer. Prospective students had to pass a stringent entry test to enter what was essentially a professional school about agriculture. Then there would be the cost of six years of education. But his mother and he knew admittance to a vocational school almost assured later entry into the workforce.

Billy passed the test, but his funds were limited. The farm villages had

no financial programs to assist with an education. Although there was no tuition, monthly supplemental fees would add up. He could only help his older brother load cow-carts with rice and deliver the food all around the rural area. He had to get up at dawn to make gruel of beans and straw for the cattle, only to receive a little pocket change. Billy's oldest brother and his mother tried to help him pay these monthly fees.

A DREAM OF BECOMING A STATIONMASTER

Three years passed as he struggled to pay for his education; he made the fees payments either just on the due date or late. Continuing into high school seemed unthinkable. However, if he was unable to go to high school, it would be impossible for him to accomplish his elementary school dream of becoming a politician, or his middle school dream of becoming the minister of agriculture and forestry. Whatever it took, he was determined to continue his education.

Then he found a way to continue into high school. He could enter the government-funded Railroad High School located in Yongsan, Seoul. He had heard that not only was it tuition and fee free, but they even gave students an allowance! It would move him away from agriculture, but graduating from the Railroad High School and becoming his hometown Suwon stationmaster sounded pretty good!

Billy got choked up at the mere possibility of continuing his education.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea with 135,000 troops. Yet Jang Hwan's (Billy's) family was totally unaware that the Korean War had just begun. Like on any other day of the previous years, his family was busy transplanting rice seedlings. On the following day, he left for Seoul to take the Railroad High School entrance exam. He kept hearing booming sounds, yet never realized that they were indications of war.

He was planning to stay at his uncle's house, so his mother packed him a five-gallon bag of barley to give for the cost of his lodging. He grabbed the bag and followed the men from his village who were working at the Seoul railroad, as they got on the train headed toward Seoul.

A DREAM ENDED

After he arrived at his uncle's house, he dropped his bag of books and barely and got on the tram to the Railroad High School. When he arrived, he saw that the school's iron gates were shut tight with a public notice posted: "Entrance Exam Indefinitely Postponed." Then, he heard loud, continuous explosions from somewhere close by. Though still very young, he knew that something unusual was happening. He stopped a man who was urgently rushing past the school.

"Sir, what's all the commotion? Is something wrong?"

"The People's Republic Army has already invaded the hills of Miahri," the man said.

Jang Hwan decided against going back to his uncle's house to retrieve his books and barley, and returned quickly to the Seoul Railway Station. The trains had stopped operating.

Boom! Boom! Ba . . . Boooooom . . . Boom! Just over one hundred feet in front of him, several bombs exploded in succession. A mother ran away, abandoning her own child. The People's Republic Army from the north, under Soviet influence, had extended its invasion into the south. Airplanes indiscriminately continued bombing for several minutes. Although his heart should be trembling in fear, everything was so unfamiliar to him that it was strangely fascinating.

Jang Hwan stayed alive by hiding under the vehicle wheels. After the planes had passed by, he kept on walking along the railroad. He was fortunate to be able to hitch a ride on a loaded train and safely arrive at his home in Suwon.

Though he had arrived back home, his family did not evacuate but chose to remain in Suwon to face the Korean War that now overtook their area. Soon, the People's Republic Army seized Suwon. Their leader called out people from place to place and formed them into groups, with names that no one had heard before.

The invading army placed the cow-cart of Jang Hwan's older brother under requisition. However, through the ingenuity of their mother, not even one member of the family was forced to join the militia or become involved with the militia army, and they were all unharmed.

Three months would pass. By September 28, 1950, the news had spread . . . Seoul had been recovered! Their town was now free of the invaders, although the Korean War would continue until July 27, 1953, taking the lives of more than five million soldiers and civilians.²

To a young sixteen-year-old, war was not a scary thing. After the recovery of Seoul, Suwon was no longer an immediate battleground and it was hard to feel the war, but there were still evidences of the war.

Most schools were so devastated and ruined by the bombings that they could not accept any students. Jang Hwan and other young boys of his age could no longer go to school and spent their days doing household chores to help their parents. Jang Hwan and his friends were responsible to chop wood to use as household fuel. The main logging area was four kilometers away from home. After breakfast, he met eight of his friends to collect firewood.

A VISIT TO THE US ARMY 21ST REGIMENT

At three or four in the afternoon, they finished their logging, and they always stopped by the Suwon prison on their way home, because the United States Army 24th Division, 21st Regiment, was stationed there. The boys stopped not to talk with their American defenders but in hopes of the chocolates and chewing gum that the soldiers would sometimes give them. As they prowled inside the fence, if they were fortunate, the schoolboys would meet a sympathetic US Army soldier.

Then one day . . . young Jang Hwan received something much more important than chocolate or gum! As on any other day, he and his friends were snooping for some sweets. One soldier saw them and pointed directly at Jang Hwan, beckoning him to come inside the barracks.

Jang Hwan was not sure what would happen but stepped forward. Years later, after he had faith in Christ, Billy would realize that the soldier's pointing finger was that of God—God had been drawing Jang Hwan to Himself. In this moment, a verse from God's Word proved to be true in Jang Hwan's life. Isaiah 43:1 says, "I have summoned you by name; you are mine" (NIV). It was as though the Lord's hand had led young Jang Hwan to come inside the barracks.

The US Army soldier pointed toward the stove heater and spoke a few words in English. Not understanding a single word, Jang Hwan easily understood by his gesturing that he was to build a fire in the stove. Jang Hwan ran out, took straw from the field, started a fire in the stove, and fanned the flames to keep the fire going.

As he gazed into the flames, the boy noticed that the barracks were in shambles. So he washed the dishes; then he shook and dusted off the blanket and hung it in the bright sun. Next he shined the dirty army boots and reorganized everything into a neat and tidy condition. This was easy work compared to his household chores, working in the fields since childhood, logging and collecting wood, and having to walk back and forth three hours every day.

When he was almost done cleaning, the soldier came back inside his barracks. His eyes opened wide with surprise. He raised his hands and gave Jang Hwan a big “thumbs-up,” his face showing his satisfaction.

The boy knew he was “saying” something else: “Come back again tomorrow!”

MEET THE HOUSEBOY

This was the beginning of Jang Hwan’s days as a “houseboy.” Houseboys had no set wages. They were given instead cigarettes, chocolates, chewing gum, and stick candies—all part of the rations that soldiers received every five days. What the GIs didn’t need became currency for the houseboys.

Among the American goods, the cigarette was the most welcome payment. In those days, American cigarettes included Kool, Lucky Strike, Camel, Chesterfield, and Philip Morris. The most expensive of these was Kool. Just one pack would sell for 4,000 won in the so-called Yankees’ black market. In wartime Korea, this payment was equivalent to five huge loads of wood. The entire family was able live better because of Jang Hwan’s part-time job.

But only a week later, there was a shift in the state of the war. The Chinese Red Army was invading Korea from the north! The US Army began relocating to the south, until finally only a few soldiers remained.

The soldiers suggested that Jang Hwan leave with them. He wanted to follow them, but his mother adamantly tried to dissuade him.

“Jang Hwan, even if we are to die, let’s face death together here.”

“DIE IF YOU WILL. GO!”

Giving up on going, he headed back to the Suwon prison site in hopes of scavenging leftover goods from the US Army soldiers. As the soldiers saw Jang Hwan, they urged him again to join them in going. Seeing them finalize their preparations to depart made his heart burn with desire to follow them.

He asked them to wait while he ran back to his home. He begged his mother in tears.

“Die if you will. GO!”

Without a moment’s hesitation after his mother’s permission, he ran, not turning back, straight to the US Army base and jumped onto the army truck. All he had heard from his mother’s statement was one word, “GO!”

That was Christmas Day 1950.

He was assigned to one of the four barracks. Now he was in charge of helping some twenty American soldiers. His living style had not changed from his days in Suwon as a houseboy, except now, he didn’t have a home to go back to in the evenings.

“GOOD MORNING, BILLY!”

The supply goods delivery that came every five days was pure bliss. Besides the cigarettes, chocolates, and chewing gum, the soldiers enjoyed canned food, coffee, socks, parkas, underwear, etc. Everything they needed was there, and as time passed, Billy’s payment in cash-equivalent goods was piling up nicely in his secret storage container.

Life at the barracks was extremely busy. Yet Jang Hwan, who was now sixteen, trembled like a small bird in his loneliness. The region had many orchards filled with apple trees. Every time he missed his mother and family, he would sit under an apple tree and play his harmonica.

“Good morning, Billy!” It was Sergeant Carl Powers. He was from

the neighboring barracks and in charge of personnel there. Jang Hwan knew him to be very kind and that he didn't drink or smoke. The American soldiers thought Jang Hwan's name was too difficult to pronounce, so they gave him an American name. Now he was simply "Billy."

He greeted Carl merely by glancing with his eyes as he continued playing his harmonica. But then Carl held Billy's small shoulders as he said, "Would you like to go to America?"

Suddenly, Billy took his mouth away from his harmonica, looked at Carl's face, and without hesitation answered, "Yes!"

Whenever idle from barracks work, he had indulged himself in reading the American Sears Roebuck catalogue. Inside were pictures and descriptions of things he had never seen before. He wanted to go to America so that he could see them in person.

Later, he realized that Carl had paid close attention to him from the first day he had arrived. Billy had jumped off the truck and warmly greeted other American soldiers as if they had been longtime friends. This left a strong impression on Carl. After that day and the very special invitation to visit America with him, Billy made a point of spending more time with Carl.

Pale, pinkish-white apple blossoms bloomed and then withered at the army camp. In their place were quite greenish apples, each about the size of a plum. About this time, the winds of the war shifted again.

YEARNING TO BE HOME

The Korean Army was gaining ground northward. The US Army naturally retraced their steps north as well. Carl was relocated to the front line and for a while, Billy was unable to see him. Even so, he was nearer to his hometown in Suwon. He began to yearn to see his mother and family, so much that soon it seemed too much to bear.

Eventually he acted on his desires. After five months, Billy had filled his storage container with GI rations, including candies, treats, and especially cigarettes. He rushed to visit the nearest carpenter and had him make two wooden crates. One he filled with the cigarettes. The other he piled up with canned goods, chocolates, and other things that could be

sold at the Yankees' black market. He asked a jeep-driving soldier he had come to know if he could hitch a ride. The driver was glad to give Billy a lift home.

Imagine the scene of a "houseboy" who had left with the US Army soldiers returning to his hometown on an American Army jeep, loaded with two wooden crates full of American goods, while still in the middle of a war. Not even a parade held for an Olympic gold medalist would have caused more of a stir among the hometown folks than he did.

His heart was pounding as he rode home . . .

"Mom!" Among the surprised town people, he saw his mother. He jumped off the jeep before it could stop and ran to her. He was in his mother's arms . . .!

Ab! . . . My mother's scent. His senses revived. It now seemed much longer than six months away from home.

"Jang Hwan! You came back alive!" His mother's roughened hands continually patted her youngest son's back. Her feelings of blame and sorrow, relief and joy, made his heart pound. Between the mother and son, many tears fell.

He sold the two wooden crates of American goods at the Yankees' black market. It provided greater profit than he had hoped. He gave the money to his older brother who had lost his delivery business when the People's Republic had requisitioned his cow-cart.

"Brother, you're going to take care of my tuition now."

AN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION?

Billy was determined to go back to school and give up the life of a houseboy. He ran back to the Suwon agriculture and forestry school, only to see a large sign posted on the main door: "No Classes Until Further Notice." Bomb-ruined schools were in no condition to accept students anytime soon. God redirected him back to the US military headquarters.

After returning to the headquarters, Billy watched as the mobile base moved farther north toward the North Han River. The soldiers began on-going military maneuvers to keep the enemy off guard, while the houseboys stayed at the division headquarters and waited for the GIs' return.

Each time the base relocated, Carl would try to visit Billy.

Each time Carl could visit, Billy would become more determined to go to America. And each time Carl asked if he still wanted to go to America, he would answer with a determined heart, “Yes!”

Still, nothing seemed to happen. Billy began to question in his mind whether Carl would really take him to America and wondered if perhaps Carl was only teasing him. Repeated disappointments drained his hopes, making him feel helpless. His dreams and desires to go to America, built up through Sears Roebuck catalogues, began to wane.

Then one day, Carl visited Billy. “Billy, sign here!” He held out a document in English. It was an admissions application to an American high school called Bob Jones Academy. All the blank areas had been filled in by Carl. Billy was not a Christian, but something told him that he could trust Carl to keep his promises of sending him to school if he went with him to America. Billy would not understand anything about Christianity even if Carl had attempted to explain Bob Jones Academy’s Christian faith principles. But the teenage houseboy dreamed of receiving a better education in America, especially since all Korean schools were closed throughout the war. The boy signed the paper. Sergeant Carl grabbed the papers in one hand and patted Billy’s shoulder with the other, and then he walked away.

Of course, Billy had no idea what God had planned for him. Moreover, Carl had no opportunities to visit him for several months. Occasionally, Billy thought about words like *Sears Roebuck*, *America*, *Sergeant Carl Powers*, and *admissions application* . . . but now, he didn’t expect much from it.

FEAR INSTEAD OF JOY

On May 25, 1951, a letter arrived from Bob Jones Academy in Greenville, South Carolina. The letter of acceptance welcomed Jang Hwan—“Billy”—to the academy. The next day the army ordered Carl to return to the United States. Together the two events should have brought rejoicing to the houseboy. But after Carl presented the letter, Billy felt a sudden fear instead of joy.

“I don’t think my mom will let me go,” he told Sergeant Carl. Yet equally troubling to Billy was his limited English. All the English he knew

were a few simple words and some swear words used during a couple of months' stay in the barracks with the soldiers. The language limits plus the fact that he didn't know anyone in America had suddenly frightened him.

Carl just stood up and left the barracks, without saying a word. The look of his weary, drooping shoulders seemed very sad. Long, conflicting hours passed by sluggishly. After a few days, Carl returned.

"Billy, you will grow taller. Don't worry about English, you will be good at it in a short time, and if your mother disapproves, I'll get her permission." Carl was more serious than he had ever been previously.

Later, Billy would learn that Carl had postponed his opportunity to be stationed back in the States just to be able to help him with the school's admission process.

Still, Billy squatted down, lowered his head, and drew meaningless symbols on the ground.

"Billy, don't miss this chance." Carl held Billy's shoulders with his hands. Then Billy noticed in Carl's eyes the kind, heartfelt tears. But Billy still felt he could not go to America.

Several hours later, Carl reappeared, this time with someone else. "Billy, get in the jeep!" Carl's eyes were glaring with grave determination. The person in the vehicle seemed like an interpreter.

Billy got on, thinking that his mother would never allow it. He simply got on the jeep as his last gesture of friendship and appreciation toward Carl for his efforts. Then Carl drove them to Billy's home in Suwon.