



Hearts In Seoul



Hans

Gretchen

To the Ends of the Earth



Abi, 22

Mike, 20

John, 17

Last month I had the opportunity to attend a “workgroup meeting” of Missouri Synod missionaries in the Asia region. As they shared details of their various ministries I was struck by the diversity of mission fields these brothers and sisters served. Large, small, rural, urban, churches, schools, new endeavors and ministries that have spanned generations—some are sophisticated while others would be happy to have consistent electricity. Yet no matter the precise nature of the mission work, the mission **itself** remains the same: bringing the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ where people need to hear it. Some of those mission fields are bearing rewarding fruit while in others there’s a lot of fallow ground to be broken up, first. Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:1-23) came to mind as I listened to them. God have mercy on the ones who labor in difficult fields! *Somebody* has to deal with the hard-packed pathways, the rocks in the soil, and the weeds overrunning the land!

Notice that, in the last paragraph, I said we were bringing the Gospel to those who *need* to hear it...not necessarily those who *want* to hear it! It’s part of the Old Adam’s nature to have a “stony heart”—one that’s not really open to the message of Jesus. Hard, proud, content with the sins it has.

Sadly, some of that same tendency remains in Christians, doesn’t it? And that’s why we need the message of the Law just like everybody else: that Law reminds us we’re still sinners in need of redemption. Of course, very few people like being reminded of their sins and failures. Faithful servants of God often face as much criticism as confirmation, as they do their work.

But like the sower in Jesus’ parable, we never know which seeds will fall onto which kind of soil, nor do we know which ones will take root and (even against all odds!) bear wondrous fruit. What looks to us like hopeless, hardened ground may yet be broken up by God’s ploughshare and become fertile soil! Did you know that in Bible times, the sower sowed the seed first, and *then* the plow came along and broke up the soil? That’s when the seed, which *appeared* to have been “sown in vain” on the hard path, etc., would be given the chance to penetrate deep into the freshly-tilled earth...and bring new life.

The sower didn’t despair because of the way things looked to his eyes—he sowed in **hope**. The same is true for Christians today! For each one of us, God has chosen very specific and particular fields in which to labor. He’s matched the fields to our gifts, to our talents...and to His ability to make His strength perfect in our weakness.

Please pray for me as I labor at Luther University & Seminary, that God would be pleased to use this imperfect vessel (me) to bring the message of hope, and certainty, and eternal life to my students. Some are committed Christians, hungry to learn more. Some are not Christians at all, and can’t figure out why their American professor always prays and talks about Jesus in English class! Still others are somewhere in between, trying to figure out whether that Christianity stuff they learned as children has any place in this new, exciting, super-stressful young-adult reality they’re living. Pray for our family, too, as we continue to live lives “set apart” for God—in the world yet not of it.

To God alone be the glory!

Fun Korean Fact

Koreans have a few different superstitions. For one, instead of the number 13 being unlucky, they think the number 4 is unlucky. This is because the word for 4 is similar to the word for death. Also, they believe that if you sleep near a fan that is on all night, you will be dead in the morning. For this reason, all electric fans in Korea have timers.

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SIBLING STRIP

When we first came to Korea, we went to a good number of palaces and mountains and whatnot during the first few months. Then the tourist spell was over and it was time to settle into whatever life was going to be like. Now, we don't really go to any of the cool places any-more...unless we have company!

In October, we had two sets of house guests. First were some relatives on my Mom's side, and second were some friends from the homeschool co-op we used to attend. Suddenly we were getting to travel around all the places we haven't been to for some time.

It was strange to see how different the places seemed after having lived here for a while. They were still interesting, of course, but in a different way. (Didn't hurt that I could speak some of the language this time...) The things that used to be so surprising didn't surprise me anymore, seeing them in the context of all I'd learned about Korea during the past three years.

...And since I know that the *places* haven't changed, I guess that *I* have.

Before we moved to South Korea in September 2016, some American friends told me about a documentary they had seen about a baby "drop box" located here in the Seoul area. I watched the documentary on YouTube (which explained the details of this ministry) and was touched deeply. Evidently, about ten years ago, a South Korean Christian pastor installed a two-sided box into his home where mothers--most often, single teenagers--could bring their "unwanted" babies. The pastor and his wife, along with volunteers, care for these little ones and eventually bring most of them to the local orphanages. (The pastor and his wife have adopted some of them.)

During the past three years here I have thought about this ministry many times and wondered how our family could help support the pastor who manages "the Baby Box" (as it is called here in Korea). All of the people I have asked about it have told me that the pastor and his church prefer to have Koreans, rather than foreigners, volunteering with the ministry, so I set my desires aside to pursue any direct involvement there.

A few months ago, however, I was invited to help with a program called Open Arms, a ministry which supports the children at one of the orphanages here in Seoul. I gladly accepted the invitation and have been volunteering on Tuesday evenings ever since mid-September. We are working with the 4-6 year olds, helping them practice their English skills and giving them as much love as we can during the time we are with them each week. Imagine my delight when I was told that a sizable percentage of the children at the orphanage come from the Baby Box! The Lord is so very kind and gracious to give us the desires of our heart--even if it is not exactly the way we expect them to be fulfilled!

Please pray for the ministries of the Baby Box and Open Arms, all the volunteers, and especially the children we are serving--that the love of Jesus will flow freely through us to the hearts of these precious little ones. (For more information on the Baby Box, you can look up "South Korea Baby Box" on the internet.)

Gretchen

Hans



1. Hans, Gretchen, Abi, Mike, and John with Gretchen's parents and sister at Gangwha Peace Observatory with North Korea in the background
2. Gretchen giving an address to the deaconesses at our Korean church with Kim Jun Hyun interpreting
3. A bullet train that Hans took at his missionary conference in Taiwan
4. Gretchen with her dad and sister helping at the orphanage

Prayer Request

This pretty much sums it up:
 That we would be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."
 (Colossians 1:9-12, NASB)
 For more detailed prayer requests, see *Gretchen's Pearl* and *Hans's* article.

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