

My Observation on Christianity in South Korea

As many of you are aware, two weeks ago I was in South Korea. My trip to South Korea was part of my Doctor of Ministry last study requirements.

While there, we visited the largest churches in the world: Kwanglim Methodist Church with 85,000 members and Yoido Full Gospel Church with 900,000 members. We met with their senior pastors and leaders and learned about their leadership. We were, so to speak, drinking from a fire hydrant all week. The food was great. The people were amazing. And some of the cultural differences were shocking, and I noticed some contrasting differences between Westerners and Asians.

One observation, in particular, was that Koreans, in general, are not individualists; they have a culture of collectivism. They are compliant with each other, and their main concern is the greater good. This cultural context influences the ways in which they practice their Christian faith, including how they read the Bible and pray.

Here, in America, a question that typically we ask is “What is God’s will for my life?” is not a question that is common in Korea. A more common question for them is, “What is God’s will?” Period. The difference between these questions is that the latter focuses on God, not in ourselves.

To us, this may not be a big deal since we have been taught about the value of individualism. For example, a slogan that went along for over 40 years that reflects this culture is what Burger King used to say, “Have it your way!” Now, is just “Your way!” which is basically the same.

For Koreans, this is not typical. They don’t ask the question of “What is God’s will for my life?” They seek collectively God’s will by studying the Bible and praying. Their main concern is not asking for God’s will but aligning themselves with the teachings of Jesus. The concept of having a tailored plan for oneself is an alien one to them.

In essence, they fulfill God’s will for their lives not by waiting for a specific answer from God about a plan for them but by pursuing what they already know God is doing. Their prayer life is more about *joining* God than *asking* God.

So, in my asking of how they are so successful in making disciples, I reflected the following:

There is nothing wrong with asking and talking with God about our wants and desires. In fact, God welcomes that very much. However (in my Korean experience), prayer is not only about asking “what’s in it for me?” or “where is my stuff?” but a pursuit to learn to align our lives with God’s Word and the teachings of Jesus.

So, my encouragement to all of us is to don’t stop when we are finished asking God what we want or need. Once we asked, then let’s consider also praying like Jesus did “Not as I will, but as you will.” (Luke 22:42 paraphrased)

Let’s not stop asking, but let’s also never stop pursuing the kingdom of God and offer ourselves in complete obedience to what God is doing around us today and every day.