

# LIVING BETWEEN

A Christian Curriculum for Korean North American Youth

Edited by

Hak Joon Lee, Kil Jae Park, Kevin Park



Christian Education Center

*Equipping generations of Asian American Christian leaders through education and empowerment.*

## **Praises for "Living Between"**

"What could be more important than having the right tools to pass along the living hope and love of Jesus Christ to the next generation? This creative, thoughtful, biblical, and culturally tailored curriculum for Korean North American youth is just such a tool, meeting a very real need that no other resource does in such an accessible way. I have no doubt it will stimulate conversations and insights that move Korean North American youth to deeper levels of understanding, community, and faith."

*-Dr. Mark Labberton, President of Fuller Theological Seminary*

"The stories of Scripture and North American Korean teenagers find common ground in this remarkable and contextual curriculum. I can't imagine a better path to the hearts of our young people than through this perceptive and faithful gathering of lessons which speak eloquently of God's amazing grace."

*-Dr. Gregg A. Mast, President of New Brunswick Theological Seminary*

"Many thanks to G2G Center for producing this wonderful curriculum! I believe that *Living Between* will be a great tool and resource to raise up the next generation of faithful Korean North American Christians. It will help many Korean North American youth to develop deeper and stronger relationships with the triune God, the Korean North American church, and the global world that is in need of caring and faithful leaders."

*-Rev. Mark Young Ho Ro, Education Pastor of Young Nak Presbyterian Church, LA*

"The Korean North American community has long awaited a contextual curriculum that speaks truly to the Korean North American youth. This Bible study curriculum, 'Living Between,' addresses the specific needs of the Korean North American youth in ways that are cogent, relevant, and nurturing. This is an excellent resource for churches and parachurch organizations that work with Korean North American youth who are indeed "living between" the cultural boundaries!"

*-Dr. Kirsten S. Oh, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, Azusa Pacific University*

"The new curriculum 'Living Between' uses many relevant examples from the Korean North American context to help youth deal with the challenges and questions that they encounter in the development of their identity as Korean North American Christians, as well as future leaders in the community. I highly recommend this curriculum for the churches."

*-Hyepin Im, President of the Korean Churches for Community Development, LA.*

"This resource offers a much needed series of lessons for adolescents in navigating the complexities of being a daughter or son of Korean immigrant parents. The strength of this curriculum is its linking of the Korean North American context to the Bible through the use of powerful stories of faith. Beyond this, it is a lived faith that the authors promote, so that youth will have the opportunity to reflect on how these stories are enacted as disciples of Christ today."

*-Dr. Kathy L. Dawson, Associate Professor of Christian Education, Columbia Theological Seminary*

"Hak Joon Lee and colleagues have created a new and historic resource uniquely dedicated to encouraging the faithful discipleship of Korean American young people. For years those who serve in Korean American contexts who have had to rely on synthesizing or re-writing curriculum to contextualize their ministry, now there is a current resource written by and for those serving in Korean American churches that helps resolve this need."

*-Dr. Chap Clark, Professor of Youth, Family, and Culture, Fuller Theological Seminary*

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# 17

**LESSON**

*"Absent God"*

# Lesson 17



## Story

Debbie beat her fists on the floor as she cried uncontrollably. Her parents had just told her that they were getting a divorce and she was so angry. Ever since her dad moved out of the house, Debbie had been praying and praying that her parents would stop fighting and get back together. “*I prayed so hard!*” Debbie sobbed angrily. “*Is God even real?*” Debbie wasn’t sure she could even believe in God anymore since she wasn’t sure He was real. Her youth pastor had just given a sermon on how Christians should trust and believe in God. How could she have faith now that God hadn’t answered her prayers? Was she a bad Christian? Debbie didn’t know how much more she could take.



## Questions

1. Is it okay for Debbie to have doubts about God? Why or why not?

Allow honest responses to this question, without correction.

2. What would you say if Debbie asked you why God didn’t answer her prayer?

Once again, allow honest responses. Most likely, answers will be some variation on the idea that God has a plan, but we don’t know what that plan is. While this is true, it is also important to recognize that this answer is often not helpful as comfort to someone struggling with a deep hurt, and can often encourage unhealthily hiding our feelings of sorrow, anger, or doubt.

**Text:** Psalm 13 (ESV)

**Theme:** Christ

**Materials Needed:** None

**Additional Resources:** None

**Lesson Summary:** Doubt is a natural part of our spiritual lives. Most often we experience doubt about God in times of deep struggle—those moments when we have cried out to God for help, but have heard only silence in response. Unfortunately, our Christian culture has often thought of doubt as the opposite of faith, as unbelief. Because of this, many Christians feel that they cannot express their doubts about God in the church. However, the Bible looks at doubt differently. The Psalms provide many powerful examples of how doubt can be expressed as part of a strong and faithful relationship with God.

**Learning Objective:** In this lesson, students will...

- Struggle with their own attitudes about doubt.
- Learn how the Bible acknowledges our experiences of doubt through the psalms of lament.
- Be provided with resources to help them cope with their own doubt in a healthy and faithful way.

## Summary

Like Debbie, most of us have probably experienced times when God has seemed absent or silent. It is natural during these times to wonder where God is, or even to doubt if God is really present. At the same time, these doubts can be difficult to talk about in the church, where we are expected to simply trust and believe in God. Yet the Bible is very honest about our human experience of doubt. It does not hide the fact that God sometimes feels very absent. In the Bible, doubt is not the opposite of faith. In fact, wrestling with doubt can be a critical stepping stone toward deeper faith.



## Text

**Psalm 13 (ESV)**

**To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.**

- <sup>1</sup> *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?*
- <sup>2</sup> *How long must I take counsel in my soul  
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*

<sup>3</sup> Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;  
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,  
<sup>4</sup> lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"  
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.  
<sup>5</sup> But I have trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
<sup>6</sup> I will sing to the LORD,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

## Commentary

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has called the Psalms the "Prayerbook of the Bible." This is because the Psalms cover the whole breadth of human needs and emotions in our relationship with God. There are psalms of praise, psalms of thanks, psalms of wisdom, and even psalms of sorrow or lament. Psalm 13 is a psalm of lament in which the psalmist (David) pours out his sorrows to God. However, even as David is praying to God, he is lamenting the fact that God seems so far away, so distant. Psalm 13 is a deeply honest prayer, as David even wonders if God is listening to his cries for help.

Importantly, psalms of lament follow a standard structure. They begin with a pouring out of one's struggles and suffering. This is often followed by an accusation against God, asking why God has abandoned the psalmist in his time of need, and asking God to remember their covenant relationship. Finally, the psalm ends with an expression of trust in and praise to God. This shift in tone, from sorrow to praise, may seem strange. However, it demonstrates a particularly Biblical understanding of doubt—doubt that happens in the context of a covenantal relationship with God. The very reason the psalmist can pray to God, accusing God of abandoning him, is because the psalmist recognizes the fact that he has a relationship with God. This relationship has a history. God has been with him in the past. God has made promises to him. In other words, this type of Biblical, relationship-oriented doubt is not the same as the very abstract kind of doubt about God's existence. This is why the psalm can end with praise, because the psalmist can still remember the blessings he has experienced in his relationship with God. That is exactly why he feels such sorrow at God's absence now.



## Questions

1. What feelings are being expressed by David in verses 1-4? Does it surprise you to find such feelings in a prayer to God? Why or why not?

Here, David is expressing his sorrow and anger. He feels distant from God. He even feels that God is purposely hiding God's presence from his life. He also feels overwhelmed by his struggles and by his enemies. He is desperate for God.

2. How does the tone of the psalm shift in verses 5-6? What feelings are being expressed in these verses?

In verses 5-6, the psalm of lament shifts from a tone of sorrow and accusation to one of praise and trust in God.

3. In verses 5-6, what does David decide to put his trust and his hope in? Why do you think David continues to trust even when he feels abandoned and ignored?

David continues to trust in God's love for him, and in God's plan for his salvation. Importantly, David's trust in God is founded on his recognition that "God has dealt bountifully with me." In other words, David has experienced God's love and provision before, and this gives him the strength and faith to trust God even now.



## Food for Thought

*"Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time."*

~Oswald Chambers

David's faith is founded on his trust in the "character of God." He had already experienced God's goodness, and knew that God loved him with "steadfast love."



## Application

1. Think about Debbie's situation one more time. After reading Psalm 13, do you think it is okay for Debbie to have doubts and to be angry? What could you say to someone like Debbie who is struggling with doubting God?

Psalm 13 provides an excellent example of how doubt, if it is founded upon our relationship with God, is a natural experience. The Psalms teach us how to understand and express our doubt—not by covering it up or trying to ignore it, but by expressing our hurt and frustration to God.

2. Was there a time in your life when you struggled with your faith? How did you cope with it? Share with your group.

## Biographies of Editors

**Hak Joon Lee** is a Professor of Theology and Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. He received his Ph.D. (1997, *summa cum laude*) degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and has published several books including: *Covenant and Communication: A Christian Moral Conversation with Jürgen Habermas* (University Press of America, 2006); *We Will Get to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Communal-Political Spirituality* (Pilgrim Press, 2006); *Great World House: Martin Luther King and Global Ethics* (Pilgrim Press, 2011); *Bridge Builders* (Doora Media, 2007); *A Paradigm Shift in Korean Churches* (Holy WavePlus Press, 2011); and numerous articles. He has been a keynote speaker for several celebrations of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday in multiple cities. An ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PC (USA), he founded G2G Christian Education Center, a research institute on Asian-American Christianity and Culture in 2007. With two other Korean American scholars, he published the first systematic curriculum for Korean-American youth, *iDentity: A Curriculum for Korean American Christian Youth*. In 2011, he delivered the Schaff Lectures at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary under the title of "God and Globalization," and served as a fellow at the Christian Leadership Initiative of American Jewish Committee in Jerusalem, Israel.

**Kevin Park** immigrated to Toronto, Canada from Seoul, Korea just before turning ten years old. He has a B.A. from University of Toronto, M.Div. from Knox College, Th.M. and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He served in various church youth, college, and young adult groups in Canada and the U.S. He was an Adjunct Professor of Theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey, as well as the Assistant Director of the Asian American Program at Princeton Theological Seminary. For five years, he was the pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church, a multicultural community in Bloomfield, New Jersey. He also served as an Associate for Theology at the Office of Theology and Worship at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, KY. He is presently the Associate Dean for Advanced Professional Studies and Assistant Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. He is also one of the authors for *iDentity* (2012). Kevin enjoys his time with his family, who still lives in Louisville—he is looking forward to be reunited with his family in June of 2014. He is married to Irene Yang and they have three daughters, Jubilee, Emily, and Natalie.

**Kil Jae Park** is a 1.5 generation Korean-American who is bi-cultural and bi-lingual. As an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, he is currently the pastor of Teaneck United Methodist Church in Teaneck, NJ—a multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural congregation. Before taking a full-time appointment in local parish ministry in 2005, he had been a pastor for children, youth and young adult for 18 years. He is a frequent speaker at retreats for Korean American youth and college students and leads numerous workshops and seminars for parents and teachers in many Korean American churches on the topics related to Korean American identity formation and Christian Education. He is also one of the authors for *iDentity* (2012). He is an avid golfer who is happily married to Jee Young, and they are parents of two boys, Jeremy and Daniel.