



I Got Problems... (1997)

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No one is free from distress. Grade school kids are concerned about to figure out how to champion over a tic-tac-toe among their friends. People seemingly doing well are struggling with their monthly credit card bills. Young men and women, though full of dreams and potentials, are no exceptions; they got their own share of agony – surprise, surprise! It is because the “struggle” is the nature of the human being.

What I want to share with you today is based on the discussions with numerous young men and women like yourselves, who visited L'Abri with agonizing doubts and unanswered questions. We used to talk through numerous nights burning mid-night wood. Throughout the process, I came to notice common issues and concerns.

The major concerns of the Korean young adults, as “I” perceived, are:

- 1) What should I do for living – the issues of career paths and college majors,
- 2) Whom should I live with – the issue of dating and marriage, and
- 3) What should I believe – the issue of faith and spirituality.

Of course, there were relatively much bigger issues such as the future of the World, the unification of Korea, nuclear weapons of North Korea, Korean Church and etc. My focus today will be on those three issues as I presented above. However, I can only talk superficially today. More detail discussion can be found in my books, “There is the Answer” and “Turning my worldview upside down”

First, let's think about choosing a career path including college major.

The Korean society is generally ruled by the elitism or academic factionalism. College students, not to mention of those who just started their career, are victims of the frontline of

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this culture. In campus, you can easily find those who are working for degrees that they don't like. They did not choose their majors according to their talents or visions. I encountered many college students who were seriously discontent because they were studying just for the sake of a degree even though their majors were something other students might be envious. How about you? Are you happy with your major and school?

Many college and university graduates actually work in areas unrelated to their majors. Even those who found a job in line with their major still couldn't settle down and would switch jobs several times within the first 5 years of their graduation. It would be a tremendous waste of time and investment, eventually waste of your life, if you have studied several years on one thing but you end up with choosing an unrelated career.

Therefore, I encourage you not to compare with what others do but to find out what you want to study or pursue with confidence. At times we are so preoccupied in comparing to what others do that we cannot finish our own tasks at hand. Susan Schaeffer Macaulay said it well, "It is like looking enviously at the ladders other people are climbing up while you are standing yet at the bottom of your own ladder." This is not how you live your life.

If you are not happy with what you are doing - work, study, or anything else - and contemplating on changes, you first need at least marketable skill set(s) - something that can uniquely identify your capability. Future job market will focus on your capability rather than your degrees or licenses. Without specific knowledge and ability targeted for a job, you won't be hired for the position.

Choose your career path according to your vision and talent. There are three theories of vision in Korea. First is the theory of the high elevated area. Try to be one of the top persons or successors and glorify God. Second is the theory of the uncultivated area. Try to be one of the pioneers or adventurers and glorify God. Third is the theory of the low elevated area. Try to be one of the servants or shepherd dog and glorify God. (Read my paper on 'Low elevated vision')

If you are to take any vision for a task, you should be willing to pour in double or triple of the efforts of your colleagues. Likewise, studying for higher degrees is not easy. It asks your devotion and persistence. Your effort will be not in vain but rewarded. So I dare to ask you to press on (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Regardless, when you choose your career path according to your talents and gifts the Lord has given you. Remember that whatever we do in the name of the Lord is a holy and sacred occupation. We commonly misunderstand that only certain occupations - usually religious ones such as clergy or missionary - are sacred. That is not true. That's ugly effects of dualism. (Read my paper, 'Dualism') If God has called you upon a particular "secular" occupation, that is the God-ordained job for you by our Lord.

Joseph went through an interesting career path consisting of a private house secretary, a deacon of a prison, and eventually the secretary of State (Gen 39:1-41; 45). If your job is to help others in one way or another or to ultimately contribute to the kingdom of God, the job is sacred.

Whatever you do, your job is holy and sacred in Christ if it's not sinning. You may be a construction worker or a farmer. If you are seeking His glory through your job in your workplace, the assignment you are working on is holy and spiritual.

This is an era that calls for countless God's people like you who are willing to carry out "sacred" tasks in a "secular" workplace where sins are prevailing and corruption is a common sense. However whatever your "sacred" occupation may be, never overlook that you still need to have the required job skills and proper spiritual maturity.

Second, the issues of dating and sex bring in lots of struggle, as well.

Beautiful is falling in love between a man and a woman. But it is not for everyone. Did you know that there is a difference between "being an unmarried and single" and the "celibacy"?

I define the "unmarried" as someone who intends to get married at some point in their life and the "celibacy" as someone decided not to get married at all. What is the real difference? The Apostle Paul says that the celibacy is a gift of God (1 Cor. 7:7) that requires exercising self-control (1 Cor. 7:9) and that will save oneself from the trouble of the present distress (1 Cor. 7:26-31) and will secure undistracted devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:35). The gift of celibacy is honorable. Unfortunately, it is deemed to be of least favorable one in the contemporary society.

The "unmarried" or "single" are those who are willing to get married, are pursuing sexual fulfillment through marriage, and are willing to accept the distraction of life and inevitable division of heart away from serving God. Most of the young generation belongs to this category. If you are dating someone, are you protecting your date to keep her sexual purity? If you are not dating, are you keeping yourself clean from all sorts of sexual temptation, when you are alone or from even homosexual temptation?

Therefore, it is for your best to decide whether to pursue marriage or the celibacy. Make the decision while young; otherwise you may end-up with unexpected life. Rev. John Stott chose celibacy, when he was 25 years old; it was after he failed two serious dates successively. C. S. Lewis broke his celibacy at his 57 to get married to Joy Gresham, divorced with two children and ill.

Being unmarried does not mean incomplete or imperfect. Korean traditionally viewed them something wrong; even K. Barth described those as "incomplete". Those views are wrong. Jesus

and the apostle Paul lived in celibacy and C.S. Lewis did not marry until his late 50's. But we don't call them either incomplete or disabled.

If you are single for one reason or another, I strongly encourage you to develop a sincere and good friendship with men and women alike - whether they are Christian or not. The unmarried needs to date openly within a community that supports pure courtship. You also need to make an intentional effort not to transfer your bitterness from your family background or from your previous broken relationship to other person.

When you date or develop friendship with other people, you should refrain yourself from excessive touch or pre-marital sex. The Bible never says about the minimal acceptable touches. Remember what Jesus tells us, "but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:28).

Jesus points out two particular misconceptions on sex;

- 1)Men are equally responsible, for the sexual misconduct, as women,
- 2)Adultery is an ethical and psychological sin, not just a physical one.

Be careful not to corrupt each other; develop your friendship as a life-long friend and as a brother and sister of a healthy family. I bless those who are already married that your love for each other may grow every moment.

Thirdly, you should be aware of your spiritual health.

Ilsik Hong, a former president of Korea University, described that "the spirituality of Korean is very likely based on a mixture of various religions - syncretism". He also added that "the monotheism was foreign to our ancestor; even now, we are polytheistic. Our daily ethical model is primarily based on the Confucianism; our thinking process follows the pattern of Buddhism; however our religious life turns to shamanistic practices."

I think these undesirable characteristics come from our tendency to conform to the peer for survival. I can see this when I talk with someone whose spiritual life is as dry as a desert.

Maybe you are the one 1) whose spiritual foundation is made of a mixture of religions, 2) living a disrespectful lifestyle, or 3) submerged in the endless doubts. If so, you may be already 1) desensitized to the sinful habits or lifestyle, 2) preoccupied with religious activities and the looks of them, 3) feeling uncomfortable to be around your fellow Christians, 4) finding every excuse to avoid reading the Bible or time for prayer, or 5) overwhelmed by doubts on your belief.

That is the spiritual crisis. Wise are you, if you are aware of these and have started looking for an answer. These days, it is hard to find someone serious about thinking of an issue

thoroughly. Even for those who are serious about issues of the day, I perceive that they tend not to discuss about it openly. The fact that you have questions or doubts on something could be a unique opportunity to experience God's Grace. It is not something to hide.

Where does a spiritual crisis come from? Among the young generation, there are three primary causes that trigger the spiritual crisis: 1) various emotional and psychological wound, 2) intellectual confusion and doubt in your worldview, or 3) moral sins in your life. If none of these apply to your spiritual struggle, you might need to seek help from professional counselor.

Although it may differ for each case, a real and practical spiritual life calls for honesty to deal with your issues. Then, you need a complete and thorough repentance and you should cut away from your sinful lifestyle, if necessary. You don't have to live as a slave of your past experience, your sin, or your old nature. Just as the Bible says, you should take off your old nature but put on the new creation (your born-again self) in Christ (Acts 2:37-42; Ephesians 4:22-24).

Be aware of that you are living a supernatural life in Christ. You are walking with the Holy Spirit whatever you do - whether you are eating or drinking, studying or dating, working on computer or sitting in a movie theater, playing ball games, reading Bible, or praying (Romans 8:9-17). We are breathing not just the air on Earth; we are to breath with the Holy Spirit in the supernatural world.

Therefore, you should know that, except for committing sins, anything and everything you do is spiritual work in Christ. You should equip yourself to live a holy life that every aspect of your life - your thoughts, your feelings, and your walks - may glorify our God (1Corinthians 6:9-20, 10:23-33; 1Timothy 4:1-10). Prayer, meditation of the Bible, fellowship with other Christians, and serving others, for example, are good spiritual exercises that you should pursue regularly and intentionally.

Persistent reasoning for answers adds depth to your life.

These days, I feel like your generation doesn't seem to care much about your life in the Truth. You seem to be preoccupied to find fun in your life. The curiosity on "new idea" as Athens in old days did or the "burning passion" for the Truth as Bereans did, is hard to find these days among the young generation.

It may be because this generation is infected with "narcissism" that claims "I" am the center of universe and fulfilling my needs has the highest priority. Or it may be the disease called "cynicism" that denies any authority and ridicules any tradition or common sense. These are the disease that leads to spiritual death or even the judgment day (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Therefore, though your quest for the Truth and the answers may be agonizing, you should

be encouraged because that's an evidence of the livelihood of your spirit. But how can we get through this struggle? I would like to suggest three principles that might be helpful.

First, don't be ashamed that you are struggling with doubts or questions.

I say that because it is not just you who are struggling with those thoughts. It would be abnormal if you don't have doubts at your age. Because you are struggling, I say to you, "Welcome to the world of true freedom and the true truth!"

You will definitely grow by as much as you struggle with agonizing questions. Those times are the moments you can experience God's grace upon you, specifically. You should know that you don't have to drift away or wonder around with your struggle because many are there who can help you.

This is the time God has planned for you; for you to struggle, to doubt, and to ask questions. As you grow old, you realize that you don't want to spend time with agonizing thoughts; you don't want to dwell on them until you find the deep root of your doubts and questions; you just want a quick and easy answer. Then, you don't ask honest questions; neither do you wait for the honest answers - what a tragedy...

What a nice world it would be, if we can do away with those painful struggles. Instead, you may as well anticipate many sleepless nights to struggle with your doubts and questions. If you can't avoid them, embrace them; don't hate them, rather welcome them. You are not supposed to be ashamed of it at all.

Second, be willing to face with the struggles you have.

Unless you are honest with your problems, nothing can be changed; no one can help you and no one can change you. You may have to go through a thorough examination process. The doubts and questions cause pain to you not because you are thinking too hard but because you are still dwelling on the superficial questions. Scratching merely the surface deepens the wound.

Let those who are mature and whom you trust know that you are "struggling with questions". A "mature" Christian or honest people would have already passed through the deep-deep valley of death where you are right now. Talk with them about your story, not about someone else's. Don't pat around the bushes! Be direct! Focus on your struggles, your doubts, and your issues!

Don't stop your agonizing quest until "you" identify "your" problems. Never, look for easy short-cuts - you don't know what you are missing!

Third, bring your struggles to God.

No matter how easy your struggle may be and how intuitive its answer may be, you really haven't gotten "the" answer until you have dealt it with God. Any struggle is not genuinely resolved until you found answer(s) from or confirmed your answer(s) with God. Only fools and cowards may be desperate to avoid agonizing questions. Be brave to gird up your loins like a man and hold up your waist belt and debate with God (Job 38:3)! Now you have heard what to do - it is the time to wrestle with God.

Even the hardest questions and struggles you might have, God has answers for you. HE is the only One who knows the truth and the One with honest answers. "There the upright would reason with Him; and I would be delivered forever from my Judge" (Job 23:7).

Look! Here's the invitation from Jesus - "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). May the Peace and the Blessings of Jesus be with yours who are on the journey for honest answers to honest questions!