

**Sermon Title: Father to the Fatherless** – March 2, 2014 (Scripture is from the NIV)

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 68:5-6

### **Introduction**

Hello Jubilee Church! My name is John-Michael Becker and it's a privilege to be here for your Sunday service. I'm originally from Northern Virginia and graduated as an engineer from Virginia Tech. God led me to Korea at the end of 2005 to serve full time as a missionary in an orphanage, and I've been doing orphanage work since. I direct an orphanage volunteering ministry called Jerusalem Ministry that plugs in volunteers at different orphanages around Seoul and I also oversee a scholarship and mentoring program named Oak Tree Project for orphans who want to go to college. In 2011 I married my lovely wife Sky and she has been serving with me in these ministries.

Today I'm going to be sharing with you all about Oak Tree Project and share some testimonies about how God has been working. But before I do that, I want to show a short video about Jerusalem Ministry that will give you all a good background about the orphanage ministry...

### **Jerusalem Ministry Video**

<http://vimeo.com/40266103>

### **Father's Heart Ministry**

Because Jerusalem Ministry is an independent NGO, we have volunteers from a number of churches in Seoul, including Jubilee. At Jubilee, the **Father's Heart Ministry** is directly connected to Jerusalem Ministry and Karin Lim, one of the leaders here at Jubilee, is also a member of our staff. The Father's Heart Ministry and Jerusalem Ministry work hand in hand together, with the Father's Heart Ministry providing extra discipleship and covering for the volunteers from Jubilee.

As you saw in the video, serving at an orphanage requires commitment, with 6 months being the minimum for part time volunteers. But if you're unable to make such a commitment but really want to serve the kids, we also have two three-day camps each year. Every January we have an Arts and Crafts camp for elementary school girls, and every July we have a soccer camp for elementary school boys. These camps get better and better every year and provide a perfect environment for connecting with the kids. They love our camps! Check out our website, [jerusalemministry.org](http://jerusalemministry.org), or our Jerusalem Ministry Facebook page for more information.

### **Oak Tree Project**

Now I want to transition to sharing about **Oak Tree Project**, our scholarship and mentoring program for orphans who want to attend university.

**James 1:27 – Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by this world.**

It didn't take long living and serving in the children's home for me to notice the tough situation facing kids who were graduating from high school and moving out of the orphanage to live on their own. At the children's home the kids are rarely alone, are well fed and clothed, and are taken care of by the different social workers who we call dorm moms. But once they graduate from high school the kids are deemed adults and must move out. The government

gives the kids a stipend of about \$5,000, but that's it. \$5,000 isn't enough to get a place to live or to pay for a year's tuition at a school. What usually happens is that the children's homes will try and look out for their graduates and make sure they have a place to live. Some of the kids move in with distant relatives who are willing to house them, some of them are put into cheap government housing, while many others will get a very small apartment and live together, sometimes as many as four or five living in a small one room apartment. The children homes will try and help them find work, but beyond that the homes are limited because they have to continue to look after the kids still living in the homes.

While living in the children's home I began to hear about the struggles of graduates, not just from my children's home but from other homes as well. Many of the graduates lose a lot of weight because they no longer have meals prepared for them and can't afford to eat out much, so instead they eat ramyun and cheap meals to get by. Many of them struggle with loneliness and depression, and suicide can become a strong temptation. Because they don't have a mentor or family member looking out for them, they can make poor decisions and get caught up with the wrong people. Orphans are looked down upon in Asian societies, so the kids often get overlooked for jobs because of their background or have to take lower pay. Some graduates have shared with me about being advanced upon by their bosses. When I would ask if their bosses treated other co-workers in the same way the response would always be, "No, only me." Orphans are easy prey because they don't have someone to defend them. Because of the need of emotional connection and the need for money, prostitution, sex trafficking, and gangs can become alluring.

While teaching at the children's home I found that the majority of the kids were at the bottom of their class at school. These kids are smart, but because of the rejection in their past and because they haven't had older influences encouraging them and believing in them, a lot of the kids don't want to try at school. For them to try and then to not do well will only deepen their insecurities, so they prefer to not try at all. For the kids who do try, the children's homes can only afford a certain level of after school academies for the kids to go to and advance in their studies. Most top students in Korea attend excellent academies and advance well, but for the kids in the children's homes they aren't afforded such opportunities. They have to work extra hard.

Some of these kids from the orphanages who work hard and succeed in getting into university manage to get scholarships to help with their tuition. But, their scholarships only provide so much so these kids must get part time jobs to provide for their living expenses: food, transportation, cell phone, books, clothes, and other basic needs. For some of them the only part time jobs they can find are at bars, which are especially unhealthy for 18 and 19 year old girls who just came out of the orphanage. Because of the part time jobs, the kids lose valuable studying time and also have almost no social life. Some of them fall back in school because of the lack of studying time and others struggle because they have no source of emotional connection or support.

Just last year Sky and I met with two girls who had graduated from the children's home a few years earlier. We met during the three-day Lunar New Year holiday when Koreans usually go visit their families. When I asked one of the girls what her plans were for the holiday she burst into tears. She cried so much that Sky had to take her to the restroom to wash up. There she shared with Sky that life for her has been really hard and she has felt really alone. She had absolutely no plans for Lunar New Years. When we messaged her a few weeks early about having lunch together during the holiday her heart had leaped. She told Sky she was

also crying because she was so thankful for our love and us reaching out to her. She was soon able to pull herself back together and we were able to enjoy the meal, watch a movie, and spend some time together. These graduates need connection. While it is easy to love young, cute looking kids at the orphanage, often the older children are forgotten.

My other staff with Jerusalem Ministry all had similar stories with graduates from their children homes. Some of them had fallen into bad lifestyles. Others were pressing through college, but in great need of someone to speak into their life and also for financial support. For years I felt the responsibility for this scholarship and mentoring program should be on the Korean church, but as I've lived here I've learned that much of the church is unaware of the kids' situations. Soon it became clear we couldn't wait for someone else to step up and care for these kids, so towards the end of 2011 we began vision casting for ways to help the graduates.

In 2012, thanks to the help of Caelyn Shin here at Jubilee, Jerusalem Ministry held our first benefit concert. With the money raised from the concert along with a special offering from an AIM Good Friday service, we were able to start Oak Tree Project. Oak Tree Project provides a 500,000won, or about \$500, a month scholarship for the students' living expenses. Our hope is that by providing the living expenses, the students can have more time to study well and earn scholarships that will provide for their tuition. The scholarship funds also protect them from having to take the unhealthy part time jobs that many have to settle on. Along with the scholarship fund, we also set up mentors who are committed to their student until the student graduates from college. These mentors are required to call their student once a week for about 10 – 15 minutes to check in on how the student is doing, mentor them, and pray for them. Mentors also meet with their student once a month for a good meal and for some good bonding time. Through these mentors the kids can receive the emotional support and connection they desperately need, while also receiving wisdom and prayer to protect them from poor decisions.

### **BEGIN SLIDESHOW**

Here is a picture of our logo for Oak Tree Project. Isaiah 61:1-3 is the vision of Jubilee Church. It begins with: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."

Isaiah 61:3 ends with, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor."

Our prayer is that as we love these children, as we bind up their broken hearts and set them free, they will rise up as mighty oaks of righteousness. If you look at the logo you can see a mighty tree growing up out of a storm cloud. The tree is actually rooted in the storm. Through the mentoring and support of Oak Tree Project, we want to see every student rise up out of the storms around them and become unshakable in their identity in Christ. Our vision is not to see the kids just get by in life, but rather to see them prosper in all they do and help bring change to Korea.

You may know the names of Steve Jobs, Johann Sebastian Bach, Nelson Mandela, and John Lennon. What you might not know is that each of them had similar backgrounds to the kids living in the children homes of Korea. Our hope is that through Oak Tree Project we will see

some of these Korean orphans who wouldn't have had a such a chance before, become who God really made them to be.

In 2013 we started Oak Tree Project with four recipients. I want to introduce them to you...

Slide 2 – This is a picture of Ji Hwi, a theater major. The picture was taken during one of our monthly meetings. During Ji Hwi's first year in college she accepted Christ and began growing with Him. Towards the end of that year she learned about tithing and how we are supposed to trust God with our money. At that point she was working a part time job and barely getting by. If she were to tithe that would mean she couldn't eat a few meals, so it was a difficult decision for her. But out of love for God and a pure faith, she went ahead and tithed, trusting God would provide. That same week that she gave her first tithe, she found out about Oak Tree Project. She knew God was providing for her. God is so good!

Slide 3 – This is a picture of Young Suk, a social welfare major. He desires go back and work at a children's home as a social worker.

Slide 4 – This is Chul Joon who is studying tourism. He wants to become a tour guide and has also been studying Japanese.

Slide 5 – This is Ha Neul, a computer information technology major. All three boys attend the same university south of Seoul.

Slide 6 – This is a picture of one of our monthly gatherings where all the mentors and recipients got together. We met at our apartment and had a family meal together. The students really love these gatherings, especially when we meet like a family at one of our apartments.

Slide 7 – This is a picture of some of us after our benefit concert last October.

Slide 8 – And this is a picture of Ji Hwi's graduation, which was just last Monday. Ji Hwi was a two year theater major. Living and working as an actress in Korea is hard work that requires odd work hours and only gives minimal pay. Ji Hwi was nervous about how she would get by after graduating and her scholarship ending, but her mentor encouraged her and prayed for her. As Ji Hwi trusted in the Lord, a professor at her school offered a part time position at the university. Through this job Ji Hwi will have enough funds to get by and to continue to pursue her passion in acting. Praise God!

Through God's provision, this year we were able to accept six new students to the program.

Slide 9 – This is Young Shim, another social welfare student who wants to work in the children's homes after she graduates.

Slide 10 – This is So Ra, who is studying to be a dietician.

Slide 11 – This is Se Bin, yet another social welfare student.

Slide 12 – This is Soo Jin, a nursing major.

Slide 13 – This is Tae Yang, who is studying Green Engineering at Konkuk University.

Slide 14 – This is Dae Hyun, who is studying architecture. Dae Hyun’s mentors might be familiar to some of you at Jubilee.

Slide 15 – Here are Dae Hyun’s mentors: Alex and Heather Lim who attend here at Jubilee. They’ve committed to mentor him until he graduates.

Slide 16 – Just a week ago we had our first group meeting with the new students. This is a picture of us giving them orientations and training. I taught them a bit about the power of thankfulness. All teaching and mentoring must be done in Korean since the kids cannot speak much English.

Slide 17 – Here is a group picture of the new recipients with the mentors.

Slide 18 – And this is a picture of my wife Sky at the far end with our two students, Se Bin and Soo Jin, who both grew up in the children’s home I serve at. I want to share with you all a testimony of God’s faithfulness regarding these two girls, particularly Se Bin.

Slide 19 – This last picture is of Se Bin and me back in early 2006, when I first moved into the children’s home. Se Bin had just become a 5<sup>th</sup> grader at this time and I still hadn’t learned how to speak any Korean.

Se Bin and Soo Jin were two of the kids I grew closest with when I first moved into Geon Christian Children’s Home. I began teaching them English when they were in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and I taught them for five years until they graduated from middle school. Once they entered into high school they had after school study programs that went late into the night, so I couldn’t teach them any longer and I didn’t see them as much the past three years.

Se Bin and Soo Jin both progressed well in high school and Soo Jin got accepted into a university in Seoul to studying nursing. Se Bin got accepted into a smaller university in Bucheon, just outside Seoul, to study social welfare. Both applied for the scholarship this year. My heart was to accept both of them, but more applications came in and soon we had twelve applications, with many of them excellent. While our goal for 2014 was to have a total of nine scholarship recipients, we only had enough funds for eight. That would mean accepting five new students while retaining our three returning students.

In early February I met with my staff and we looked over all the applications. Because my Korean is only so good, I had to rely on my three Korean speaking staff to read through all of the applications and make the decisions. They knew my heart to accept the girls from my children’s home, but we wanted to make a fair judgment in deciding who would get the scholarship. I shared a bit about Soo Jin and Se Bin, but confessed that I knew them best as middle school students and wasn’t sure of how well they matured in high school. Our scholarship requires that recipients must attend church, take sermon notes, and read some books we would give them. While I knew Soo Jin was growing in her faith, I had never noticed Se Bin showing much interest in God and wasn’t sure where she was at in her faith. I wasn’t sure whether Se Bin’s heart was set on growing with God or on experiencing worldly things after graduating. As my staff went through the applications it became clear which applicants stood out from the others. Soo Jin would be accepted, but Se Bin didn’t make the cut. My heart was heavy about the decision, but I knew the other applicants were just as

deserving. We had also had to say no to six other applications, six other kids who could really use the program.

Our decision led to an interesting week for me. On Monday of the week I had to go to the office of my children's home and inform them about the decision. I didn't see Se Bin that day so the office staff relayed the information to her that she hadn't been accepted. The next day, Tuesday, I saw her in the cafeteria during dinner time and when we saw each other we both paused for an awkward moment before greeting each other and then she went away to her seat. My heart was heavy, but thankfully later that night we were able to talk a little and she seemed okay. I promised her I would attend her high school graduation and she smiled. I could tell she was looking forward to that.

The following day, Wednesday, I received an e-mail from a financial supporter. He asked if it was too late to sponsor one more Oak Tree Project scholarship. His e-mail surprised me. We had already gotten the commitments from mentors weeks before and made our decisions. Because a number of people we had approached about mentoring students had declined, I was concerned we couldn't find another mentor. My heart was heavy for Se Bin though and his e-mail brought a slight hope that maybe we could accept her. I immediately contacted my staff and we e-mailed two people about becoming a mentor. Mentors must commit until their student graduates, which can be as long as four years. Mentors also need to be able to speak Korean well and be at a good level of maturity to care for the kids. As I e-mailed the two different potential mentors I prayed that one of them would come through.

The very next day, Thursday, I received some text messages from Se Bin in the afternoon, "JM, where were you?" "Why didn't you come to my graduation?" At first I thought she was joking, but as we texted I realized she was being honest and I panicked. I called her and found out that Soo Jin had gotten the dates mixed up and had told me the wrong day. Their graduation day was Thursday! I apologized to Se Bin over the phone. In my eight years at the children's home I had never missed a graduation for the kids. Se Bin and Soo Jin's graduation was the first one I ever missed. I felt horrible. I told her that I would be coming to the children's home to teach and that I would see her at night. I told her we had to take a picture together and that I had a small graduation gift for her. I can't tell you how bad I felt as I spoke with her over the phone. She was okay, but out of all the graduations I had attended the past eight years Se Bin and Soo Jin were two of my very closest kids. I couldn't believe I missed it.

I called Soo Jin after hanging up with Se Bin and she immediately asked me as well, "JM, where were you???" In exasperation I told her, "Soo Jin, you told me your graduation was Friday!" She paused, and then said, "Oh, I did, didn't I." I could tell with Soo Jin she wasn't as disappointed, and I knew it was because she had gotten accepted into Oak Tree Project and would still be seeing me throughout college. For Se Bin though, I probably wouldn't see her much at all.

That night I went to their room after teaching. They both changed back into their school uniforms so that we could take a picture together. I gave them their graduation gifts, which were printed pictures of them from the past eight years. Kids at the homes rarely get pictures of themselves and they always treasure gifts like this. Both of them slowly went through the pictures, reflecting on the different memories each picture held. We had a good time together talking and joking. Before I left, Se Bin thanked me and told me the pictures meant a lot to her. As I left, she smiled and told me, "나...중에 보자" which means, "See you laaaaater." I

smiled and said, “No, no, 나중에 보자.” No, no, see you later... not laaaaaater, just later. Se Bin and I both knew that because she would have to work part time while studying and because she wouldn't be living at the orphanage anymore that we probably wouldn't see each other for a while. I was holding out hope in my heart though that God would make a way for her to get the scholarship.

The next evening my friend Semy met with Se Bin for dinner. Semy had met Se Bin years earlier and connected with her well. Since then they had met every now and then. Over dinner Se Bin shared with Semy how she felt when she found out she didn't get accepted for the scholarship. She was disappointed and a little upset at first, but she knew Soo Jin really needed the scholarship. Se Bin told Semy that she then prayed about it and committed everything to God. She knew somehow everything would be okay. Se Bin also shared with Semy some different struggles she had with other girls at the home and how she had worked through them. Semy was really impressed by how much Se Bin had grown in her maturity and she shared everything with me later that night. I felt like that was confirmation that Se Bin should receive the scholarship.

The next evening we received a commitment from one of the people we had contacted about mentoring. This mentor was highly recommended and we knew would be a good fit for the program. My other staff all agreed we should accept Se Bin. Joy swelled up within me.

The next day, Sunday, was the day Se Bin would be moving out of the children's home. I couldn't wait to tell her the news and I called her in the morning before church. I told her, “Se Bin, I have good news... a few days ago someone contacted us about sponsoring one more scholarship. We then found a mentor. And you've been accepted for this scholarship!” She kept responding, “Really? Really?” and then “Thank you, JM!!!” I told her, “나.....중에 보지말고 나중에 보자.” “Let's not see each other laaaaaater, let's see each other soon.” She laughed and said, “Okay, see you soon!”

The next day I visited the children's home and Se Bin's dorm mom was so happy. She told me that she had been standing next to Se Bin when she got the phone call from me and immediately thought, “Maybe? Maybe she got a scholarship?” She told me that right after Se Bin hung up, Se Bin screamed with joy and they danced together in the room. Hearing that about Se Bin, who is usually more reserved, really blessed me. God is so good. He is so faithful.

As a staff we had prayed for nine scholarships this year, but in January it looked like we would only have five. Then by God's provision we got another sponsor, and another, and another. And then when it looked like Se Bin wouldn't get a scholarship, we got one more sponsor at the last minute. God also provided all the mentors. He is so good.

More than anything, I'm thankful for God's faithfulness in the lives of Se Bin and Soo Jin. As I said before, I was very close with them especially during my first years at the children's home. In 2007, though, they were in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and they began to go through puberty. They began to be moody, rebellious, distant, and difficult. I was still learning Korean at that time and could only communicate so well with them and I kept getting hurt by their actions. They were getting into more trouble and I was worried for them. 2007 was by far my hardest year at the children's home. I began questioning if I was really having much of an effect on the kids and I soon fell into depression. I felt hopeless in ministering to the kids and I was concerned for their future.

During that time of depression I attended one of my church's prayer meetings and before the prayer meeting I asked some of the leaders to pray for me. I shared about my struggles with the leaders and then received passionate, loving prayer from them. But after their prayers I still felt the heaviness hanging over me. I chose to praise God regardless and claim healing, and with a heavy heart attended the prayer meeting. After the meeting ended one of the prayer team members approached me. She told me she had a vision earlier while she was praying for me. In the vision she saw two young girls running and jumping off a balcony. I then came running from behind to the edge of the balcony. I reached my hands down and my arms stretched through the air. I caught the two falling girls and lifted them back up to the balcony. The prayer team member told me she then saw a ton of kids standing in front of me. As I reached out to hug them she saw my arms stretch really long so that my arms could surround them in a big hug. She smiled, and then said, "I hope that means something to you."

I knew the two girls in the vision were Se Bin and Soo Jin. And I knew that my arms stretching out represented my prayers for them. While I couldn't catch them and save them in the natural, God was able. I could feel God telling me that if I just be faithful to love the kids where they are at and pray for them, that He will be take care of all of them. I can entrust the kids to Him. He is a father to the fatherless. He sets the lonely in families. He is good.

I stopped teaching Se Bin and Soo Jin after they finished 9<sup>th</sup> grade. They were still maturing and I was concerned for them, but there was little I could do but entrust them to the Lord. To see Se Bin and Soo Jin now and to see how God has provided for them and taken care of them, I am so blessed. I know God has amazing plans for them.

I want to encourage you, Jubilee Church, that God hears your prayers. His love for you, your children, your small group members, and those you influence, is so strong.

**Philippians 4:19 – And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

Whenever you feel inadequate or whenever you know circumstances are out of your control, know that God is for you and that God is love. God's love never fails. Sometimes what is in the physical may appear hopeless or discouraging, but God is always working. God works all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Cast your burdens on Him, because He cares for you (1Peter 5:7).

## **PRAY**

Pray for family members, loved ones, those beyond our reach. Pray that just as God lifted up Se Bin and Soo Jin that God will lift up your loved ones.

Pray for Oak Tree Project to grow and for all future applicants to be accepted and none turned away. Pray that in 2015 we will have 20 recipients.