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Orphans: A Global Response

Guests: Eddie Byun and Paul Pennington
From the series: Orphans: A Global Response (Day 1 of 1)
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Bob: Pastor Eddie Byun from South Korea is deeply concerned about the plight of orphans around the world. The reason for his concern is because he read his Bible.

Eddie: Throughout, especially, the Old Testament, when God would say, “Make sure that you care for the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, the alien, the sojourner,” it’s about vulnerability. What that reveals to us—God just convicted my heart one day when I was just praying through Scriptures—is that—you know what? —the more vulnerable people are, in our communities, the more deeply valuable they are to the heart of God. So, if they are vulnerable, they are valuable to God.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Friday, August 30th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife[®], Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. The need of orphans—around the world—is a global crisis. That demands, from Christians, a global response. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We’re going to get an opportunity to hear today about how Christians, in other parts of the world—particularly, in one part of the world—are rallying together with the Church in other parts of the world to care for the needs of orphans.

Dennis: We’ve said, many times, here on *FamilyLife Today*, that family is an international language.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: Certainly, the orphan, adoption, and, in some countries, foster care are also international languages. Joining us is our field general for Hope for Orphans[®], a converted Longhorn to an Aggie church in Austin, Texas, Paul Pennington. Paul, welcome to the broadcast. You’re turning red because—

Paul: I am.

Dennis: —I identified you as an attendee of an Aggie church.

Paul: In my whole life, I’ve never been associated with an Aggie church until today! You just told a million people. [Laughter]

Dennis: But Paul's a good friend. He does give leadership to Hope for Orphans, and he's a champion for orphans around the world. Also, joining us is Eddie Byun. Eddie is from Seoul, Korea, now; right?

Eddie: Currently, yes.

Dennis: You grew up in Chicago.

Eddie: That's right.

Dennis: But you head up a little church both—in fact, it's the largest English-speaking church in South Korea.

Eddie: Yes.

Dennis: Share with our listeners a little about that church, including how many people attend it.

Eddie: Sure. The church at large, including our Korean and other ministries—we have about 60,000 members. Our international community—we have a couple thousand members from all over the world—from South America to South Africa. It's a pretty unique diversity of groups that are congregating there.

Bob: Paul, tell our listeners how you met Eddie and how the two of you started partnering together in ministry.

Paul: Absolutely. You know, a few years ago, we began to realize that about 40 million orphans in the world are among unreached people groups. Korea, as a Christian country, is situated in a wonderful place to be an influence for that—much less for kids in South Korea. Through mutual partners, I got introduced to Pastor Eddie and really grew to love him; and he invited us.

As we began, for the first time, to reach out to pastors in South Korea, I had the privilege to actually speak on Sunday morning at his church. We did the first international, *If You Were Mine*[®] adoption workshop—which we have done, here in the United States, for many years—in Eddie's church in Seoul, South Korea—and have gone on, now, to do a lot of other things involved in working with them in orphan care and developing on-ramps that they can model for churches throughout South Korea.

Bob: Is adoption something in South Korea that has a long history? Is it something people think about much?

Eddie: You know—well, it started, probably, since the war in Korea ended—with a lot of the orphans that were the result of the Korean War. But culturally, there are a lot of

hurdles. It's not warmly embraced by the Korean community—both, unfortunately, in the Church and outside of the Church because of the cultural stigma.

One example I could give you is like when a Korean couple gets married. In the Korean culture, the wife will *never* take on the family name. She will forever be seen kind of as an outsider to the family. So, if the wife can't even have really full-family ownership, the thought of bringing in another child to invest so much of your life and money into—that's a very difficult concept for the Korean people to embrace warmly.

Bob: If a child is an adopted child, is he treated as a second-class part of the culture?

Eddie: Yes. If the children do not have parents—if they've been orphaned—if they've been adopted—unfortunately, there is a lot of bias against them.

Dennis: It must have been interesting for you to give leadership to such a large church to bring the concept of adoption—that really does have spiritual roots—

Eddie: Yes.

Dennis: —in terms of our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Eddie: Yes. Yes. You know I was surprised, actually, because I was raised in the U.S. So, my understanding of adoption has always been *positive*, in light of the Gospel, especially. So, when I started to really challenge the church in Korea and the other congregations—you know, there are so many mega churches in Korea—I mean, so many churches around our block. Even though we have 60,000, they would have 20,000. Another would have 800,000.

I challenged—I mean, like if, literally, just one church—one of these churches embraced this call for adoption, there would, literally, be no more orphanages or need for orphan care ever again; but as I challenged the Korean Church with that, I was surprised at how much resistance I was getting from pastors—from these church leaders, who would say: “You know what? We're not into that. We don't believe it.”

When I would challenge them, especially about the spiritual element—“Hey, we were adopted by Christ. You know—through Christ, He made adoption possible for us to be adopted by the Father in Heaven.” They would respond by saying, “No, that's just a very symbolic, spiritual term.” They did not see it as a real reality—that if it was not for adoption, which God created, none of us could be believers.

Dennis: One of the reasons why I asked that question was to understand your country a little better; but, also, just to take a step back and say, “Here, in America, adoption is really viewed very positively.”

Eddie: Yes.

Dennis: Within the Christian community, the concept of adoption is embraced; but the actions of: stepping into the lives of orphans, and foster care, and adopting children is not.

Eddie: Yes.

Dennis: So, it's fascinating, to me, that such a profoundly spiritual concept can lack the shoe leather—the actual life application—for Christians, followers of Christ, to truly engage in going near the orphan.

Bob: You're going to have to help me—and I think help a lot of our listeners—just get our minds around the idea of a church that has 60,000 or 800,000 members. I mean, what does that look like, and where do you meet, and what do you do?

Eddie: Every single day of the week, seven days a week, we have services in our sanctuaries. On Sundays, they gather in very large buildings. I mean, all these churches—and we do have multiple campuses, as well—but for a lot of these mega churches, there is one central campus—a main campus. For example, we'll have, maybe, like 13 services on a Sunday; you know?

Bob: Wow!

Eddie: So, it's literally—

Dennis: And how many of them will you preach at?

Eddie: I preach to two of them. For a lot of these other campuses, too, we do—some of the campuses will do a video-feed. Also, we do have campus pastors that also shepherd those different campuses, as well. So, they'll provide live preaching at times, too.

Bob: So, church would not be that different, in South Korea, as what I experienced in the United States?

Eddie: Correct. So, if you go to, maybe, a larger church in the U.S., it would also be very similar—except, maybe, the time between services might be a little bit shorter in Korea. It really is boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

Bob: Because, "We've got to get you out of here and get the next group in"?

Eddie: Yes. Yes.

Bob: Wow!

Eddie: Yes. So, it is difficult to maneuver through the hallways after a service.
[Laughter]

Dennis: Let's talk about your church and where its heart for the orphan came from. Obviously, you must have first caught the disease yourself.

Eddie: Sure.

Dennis: How did that happen?

Eddie: Yes, you know, I always had a heart for orphan care—for adoption. I had a very positive view, just through my upbringing—through the discipleship and the worship that I've been a part of through my churches. But when I went to Korea, the thing that kind of ignited this into a more passionate pursuit for me is when I did find out that there are hundreds of thousands of orphans in Korea; and yet, we also have millions of believers.

There are some churches that have, just within that one church, more believers than orphans—just in Korea. When I started to hear about the lack and, basically, the non-existence of orphan care within the Korean churches—I could count on one hand how many churches, in Korea, have an active, orphan care ministry. That's shocking for how many mission movements and prayer movements—

Dennis: Yes.

Eddie: —Korea's known for.

Dennis: Because Korea—South Koreans have sent missionaries all over the world—

Eddie: Yes.

Dennis: —even to America.

Eddie: Yes, that's right. Yes, and so—I think, currently, we're still top three or top four of mission-sending countries in the world. For me, I saw there was a great contradiction in that. So, that's when I started preaching on it—challenging the other Korean pastors and ministries. You know, it is like, "We need to embrace this." That's when I started to feel the resistance.

But in light of that, too, one thing that your listeners may not be aware of is that, because of the shame factor in Korea culture—one, they do not embrace orphans, in general; but they really do not like the fact that so many Koreans have been adopted, internationally. They see it as exporting our people, which is also irony because they won't care for them. They also are bothered by the fact that other countries would. As a result, they've created a quota limit as to how many Koreans can be adopted, internationally, every year. They've been reducing that number by 10 percent every

year, with the hopes that, within a few years, they will no longer even have international adoptions because of the whole saving-face—shame-factor issue.

Bob: So, since you've started addressing this at the church, and stepped up, and said, "You know, this is not just an analogy—this is the Gospel on display," are your people hearing that? Is anything changing?

Eddie: Yes, so, as a result—I was looking at the scenario. I realized, initially, I need to challenge the Korean citizens to really embrace this. I felt a lot of resistance. So, then, the next option for me was the international community—the ex-pat community, which I mainly work with. They are a lot more open to this.

But there was no law in existence, in Korea, at the time—that would allow non-Koreans to adopt while living in Korea. They would say: "Go back to your home country. Then, go through the international route." But if you have a job in one country, you're not going to make the effort to go back to your home country just to try this adoption process. So, that's when we started lobbying with the Korean lawyers—that we have and other influential people within our community—and we've lobbied successfully. As of last year, August, new laws were created that open up more opportunities for Koreans to be able to adopt while living in Korea.

One was to allow a Korean, who is married to an international—they would be able to adopt through the domestic route—what that means is, basically, for free. So, that's been *huge* for the international marriages—for them to be able to adopt through the domestic route. Also, those adoptions will not count toward the annual quota. So, that opens up more opportunities.

The other thing that we've been able to successfully lobby for—is for ex-pats, who live in Korea, to also go through the international adoption process, but while still residing in Korea. Several of our church members have been able to be blessed with adopting children as a result of these new laws, as well.

Paul: You know, Eddie, it's really interesting, to me, that—here, we have a country that, per capita, is sending more missionaries around the world than any other group of Christians—I mean, Koreans are planting churches in Chechnya—but yet, the same population, because of bloodlines, does not see the relationship between orphans and the Gospel.

I understand that some months, now, 2,000 babies a month are going into orphanages in South Korea. They can't come to America, and the South Korean church isn't adopting them. You, on the other hand, have been a courageous leader to stand up and say that there is a relationship between the Gospel and these children. How does the sanctity-of-life piece fit into all of this for you and your church? And why is that important for the Gospel?

Eddie: Sure. You know—a big premise of this orphan movement—that God, obviously, is leading, globally, in this generation, right now—you know—a common verse that you will hear is James 1:27. You know, that true religion—true, undefiled religion—would be the care for orphans but also for widows. When I’ve been biblically wrestling with, “How do I present this to our Korean counterparts?” and, “How can I have them understand the biblical premise of why this is central to the Gospel?”—

When I started looking at the whole concept of orphans, widows, fatherless—throughout Scripture—it’s about vulnerability. What God just convicted my heart, one day—when I was just praying through Scriptures—is that—you know what?—the more vulnerable people are, in our communities, the more deeply valuable they are to the heart of God. If they are vulnerable, they are valuable to God. So, we, as a church—we started to ask, “Who are the vulnerable people in our communities?”

Paul: I think you made a really important point, just a minute ago. You know, we come to a lot of meetings where we talk about orphan ministry in the church and kids that need a family—but what rarely gets talked about, that bothers me—and you and I have talked about this—is we kind of leave out the widows. You mentioned, a while ago, that it’s about the vulnerable and about the widows. How is your church being intentional about loving widows?

Eddie: Sure. Yes. So, our church—we actually started our own nursing home. In the past, the Korean culture was very respectful towards the older community. Unfortunately, within this one generation, that has greatly deteriorated and eroded, where they are not as respected anymore. Suicide rates, among the elderly, have skyrocketed. Divorces, amongst the elderly, have skyrocketed. As a result, a lot of times their children would no longer visit; or they’d be abandoned.

We realized that—also, the elderly community—that’s also obviously growing—is vulnerable and needs care. So, our church started this nursing home, several years ago. We care for several hundred—to love them and to spend time with them.

Dennis: You were saying, earlier, in a conversation we had, that there are as many as one million South Korean women who are currently in the sex—

Eddie: That’s right.

Dennis: —slave trade. They are indentured servants.

Eddie: That’s right. One thing that the American audience may not know—that they should be aware of—is that, as of a few years ago, the TIP Report—the Trafficking in Persons Report—that the U.S. government publishes, giving grades of how countries are responding to the trafficking issue. As of a few years ago, South Korean women were found to have been the number one trafficked people group into the United States.

Recently, that has changed—at least, for the United States demographics—but South Korean women are still the number one trafficked group into Japan, currently, and Australia.

Just in Korea alone, there are more than one million South Korean women who are forced into sexual slavery in the form of Karaoke bars, massage parlors, nail salons—all of these pseudo services—that on the outside, it looks like a business—but in reality, these women have been either coerced, forced, deceived, or through debt-bondage—forced to pay off their illegal debts through, basically, sex slavery and prostitution.

Bob: You know, Eddie, when we hear you describe what’s going on in your country, the question that keeps coming back to my mind is, “What’s the condition of the family?” because, at the core of a civilization, is a healthy family. As you describe this unraveling, I have to think families are unraveling in South Korea.

Eddie: You are exactly right. It is a reflection of the breakdown of the family. Education has become an idol in Korean culture, unfortunately. From the time that they are born, there are long waiting—you know, lines for their children to get into these after-school programs that will tutor them to give them the advantage. So, with that, you have a very unhealthy upbringing towards the view and value of education. Of course, we see it as important; but it’s become an idol, within the country.

Also, within the family breakdown, too, there is a strong workaholic culture, within Korean society, as well—where the husbands, usually, will work until 10 / 11 pm—but unfortunately, in the corporate work culture, as well—after their work hours, 10 pm, they have what’s called the next rounds. In Korea culture, if the boss wants you to go, you have to go! Unfortunately, these next rounds—of going to bars and karaoke bars—that overlaps with what we found with a lot of the sexually slavery we’re talking about earlier.

Bob: Sure.

Dennis: I want you to just kind of wrap things up by sharing with our listeners just a good story of how your church—maybe, a family in your church—has responded to the orphan in South Korea because, ultimately, what is a church but a group of families?—

Eddie: Yes.

Dennis: —and when they begin to assume their responsibility, they can make a difference.

Eddie: Yes. Sure. So, there is one family, who is a military family. He was stationed by the U.S. Army in South Korea He’s married to a South Korean wife. They had two children already—biological children—a son and a daughter. Adoption was never even on their radar; but as of a few years ago, as we’ve been preaching on this and sharing

that this is a part of the Gospel, they felt it's time for them to at least pray about it. Their children were, I believe, like 10 and 12, at the time.

They were praying about it—and also, again, the whole foundation of what we're sharing is that this is really about God's heart for the vulnerable—that they are so deeply valuable to God's heart. They were praying about it, and they felt led—you know: “Let's take a step of faith. Let's visit an adoption agency and some of these orphanages”—that our church volunteers at—“and find out who are some of the least-likely children to be adopted.”

Dennis: Yes.

Eddie: They wanted to see who were *the* most vulnerable. They saw two girls. They were not sisters. They were not related, at all; but they were about, also, 10 and 12. The older you get, out of the infant/toddler stage, the less likely you'll be adopted, as well.

Bob: Right.

Eddie: So, they also—one was also mixed—not fully-Korean. You get that prejudice that would make it very unlikely that she would be adopted, as well. They found two daughters who, basically, they saw as being probably the least likely to be cared for through adoption. Then, they took a step of faith, and said, “We want them.” They went through the process. It took about a year or so. They just received their new daughters, as of a few months ago.

Then, they got re-stationed. The Army duties re-stationed them back to the U.S. They were able to look back and see God's sovereignty in the whole timing of things. God sent them, right before we started these initiatives, and right after God gave them their two new daughters, God took them out. So, they realized this was part of God's plan.

Dennis: Well, I sure appreciate you being an international champion on behalf of the orphan. I pray that God's favor rests upon you and the other pastors of such a large church—an influential church—pray that you'll be able to turn the culture's values—about the orphan and about adopting—back to more of a biblical view and esteeming it. Thanks for joining us.

Eddie: Thank you. It was a pleasure.

Bob: Well, and let's hope that Christians, who listen to this radio program, will respond to what God may be calling them to do. For different people, that's a different response. Some are called to adopt. Some are called to go near. Some are called to start an orphan ministry in your church. There are all different kinds of responses; but the question is, “What is God calling you to do?”

If you go to FamilyLifeToday.com and you click the link we have for our Hope for Orphans ministry, here at FamilyLife, there are all kinds of resources available to help you engage around this issue and to care for the needs of the most vulnerable people in our world. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link you see there for Hope for Orphans to find out more about how you can get engaged. Once again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com; or call, toll-free, at 1-800- “F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY”.

Now, we just want to say a quick “Thank you,” to those of you who get in touch with us and let us know how God is using the ministry of *FamilyLife Today* in your family’s life. In fact, we got an email this week that said:

Thank you for everything you do. I appreciate your boldness for Christ during this time—wanted to send you encouragement. I hope you continue doing what you do.

My wife listens to your podcasts during her work commute. It helps her keep a strong daily relationship with God and our Savior Jesus. I download past episodes from your website for her to listen to.

We’ve attended an *Art of Marriage*[®] conference in the past. We hosted a powerful and productive small group, using the *Art of Marriage* small group series in our home this year. During our small group discussions, we realized that one reason my wife was coming home more stressed recently was because her podcasts had run out. They really do help every day.

Well, it’s great to get encouraging notes like that. We appreciate those of you who get in touch with us and share how God is using this ministry in your life. We also appreciate it when you are able to help support the ministry. We are listener-supported. Your donations make this daily radio program possible.

And today, if you are able to make a donation to help support the ministry, we’d like to say, “Thank you,” by sending you a two-CD set—conversation we had with Steve Farrar about how a dad can anchor his family in Christ for generations to come. We’ll send you a copy of those two CDs when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the button that says, “I CARE”, and make an online donation; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY—make a donation over the phone. When you do, ask for the CDs with Steve Farrar. You can also request the CDs when you write to us and make a donation at *FamilyLife Today*. Our mailing address is: Box 7111—Box 7-1-1-1—Little Rock, Arkansas. Arkansas is “A-R”. And the zip code is 72223.

And with that, we’re going to wrap things up for today. Hope you have a great weekend. Hope you and your family are able to worship together this weekend, and I hope you can join us on Monday. We’ll introduce you to a couple who faced a real challenge—a

real turning point in their marriage. We'll hear how God did a remarkable transforming work in their lives. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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