

Yo-han

Multicultural Family

On what we see first — and how quietly that first glance shapes everything after

In June 2012, our first grandson, Yo-han, celebrated his first birthday. His family was visiting Korea, and my wife and I spent a short time with them in Seoul before making our way back to Daejeon.

Yo-han's parents wanted to see Namsan and the surrounding area. As his grandparents, we offered to look after Yo-han at Seoul Station while they went. I was pushing the stroller back and forth in the food court area, waiting.

At Seoul Train Station

An elderly woman looked down at Yo-han in the stroller and asked me:

"Is that child a twi-gi?"

(The word twi-gi is a pejorative — literally "mixed breed," used for children of mixed racial heritage.)

I paused briefly before answering:

"Yes. But this baby is my grandson."

The woman disappeared without another word.

Two Ways of Seeing

Pushing the stroller, I thought:

To her, Yo-han was a "mixed breed."

To me, Yo-han was Yo-han — my precious grandchild.

We were looking at the same child. We were seeing completely different things.

She was not a bad person. A perspective formed over a lifetime in a mono-ethnic society had simply taken root in her — naturally, without her choosing it. I might not have been any different. If Yo-han had not been my grandson, what would I have seen first?

What Do We See First?

When we encounter someone different from ourselves — a different appearance, a different language, a different background — what do we see first? Before their name, before their story, what enters our eyes?

And how quietly does that first glance determine the entire course of our relationship afterward?

Small Group Discussion Guide — Church Community

This is a very short story — just three lines of dialogue. But inside it is a question that reaches all of us. Read it aloud together, sit in silence for thirty seconds, and then begin.

Young Adults (20s–35)

Opening (5 min)

This story is brief, but something in it probably stayed with you after you read it.

- **Have you ever had a thought cross your mind — quickly, before you could stop it — when you first encountered someone who looked or sounded different from you? Can you share honestly what that was like?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **What did you feel when you read the word *twi-gi*? What does it mean that a word like that exists and is used?**
- **The elderly woman disappeared without another word. What do you think was happening inside her in that moment?**
- **Dr. Park asks: "If Yo-han had not been my grandson, what would I have seen first?" How does that question apply to you personally?**
- **Multicultural families are becoming more common in Korean and Korean-American communities. How is the church receiving that change?**
- **What is the difference between a church that serves multicultural families as a ministry target, and one that welcomes them as full members of the community?**

Scripture (10 min)

Galatians 3:28 — "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

How does this verse connect to the way we first see someone? Note that "oneness" does not mean sameness — what does unity in diversity actually look like in practice?

Application (5 min)

- **Is there someone in your neighborhood, workplace, or church you have been keeping at a quiet distance — even subtly — because of how they look or where they are from?**
- **This week: instead of leading with what you see, try leading with a name. Ask someone's name before anything else.**

Adults (36–60)

Opening (5 min)

The elderly woman in this story is probably from the same generation as many in this room. Rather than judging her quickly, let's ask whether her response might reflect something in all of us.

- **How were you taught — growing up — to think about Korean ethnic identity and about people who were "different"? Do you feel that shaping is still with you?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **The woman's question likely came without bad intent. Why can that still cause harm?**

- **Where do our unconscious biases come from? Who or what shaped how you automatically see people who are different from you?**
- **If a child or grandchild of yours were to marry someone of a different racial or cultural background, what feelings come up honestly when you imagine that?**
- **What is the difference between a church that treats multicultural families as recipients of ministry, and one that fully includes them as equals in community life?**

Scripture (10 min)

Ruth 1:16 — "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Ruth was a foreigner who became part of the community of Israel — and appears in the genealogy of Jesus.

What did it take for Ruth to be received? What does her story say to a faith community today about who belongs?

Application (5 min)

- **Is there someone in your daily life you have been keeping at a subtle distance? Could you start by learning their name?**
- **What is one concrete thing your faith community could do — not as outreach, but as genuine inclusion — for multicultural families?**

Seniors (60+)

Opening (5 min)

The woman in this story likely lived through the same era as many in this room. Let's not focus on judging her — let's bring this story close to our own experience.

- **Growing up, how did you learn to distinguish between "us" and "those who are different"? Where did that come from?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **The word *twi-gi* — in what contexts did you hear it used in the past? How does it feel to hear it now?**
- **Have you had the experience of meeting someone from a very different background who eventually became a real neighbor or friend? What changed things?**
- **If a grandchild of yours were to marry across racial or cultural lines, what would your honest first reaction be?**
- **"To her it was a category. To me it was Yo-han." When we know someone's name, our gaze changes. Has that been true in your own life?**

Scripture (10 min)

Leviticus 19:34 — "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself."

This was written thousands of years ago and speaks directly to today. How does it land for you now — after this story?

Application (5 min)

- **Is there a neighbor from a different background whose name you do not know? Could learning it be the first step?**
- **What is the one thing from today's story that stays with you most?**

Small Group Discussion Guide — Community Groups

This guide requires no faith background. The story's question — what do we see first when we encounter someone different, and what does that first glance quietly determine? — belongs to all of us. It touches race, identity, immigration, and the workings of unconscious bias.

Young Adults (20s–35)

Getting In (5 min)

Three lines of dialogue. "Is that child a twi-gi?" — "Yes, but this is my grandson." — Then silence. What does this small scene ask of us?

- **When you first encounter someone whose appearance or background is noticeably different from yours, what honestly crosses your mind? Can you name it without judgment?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **What does language like twi-gi ("mixed breed") do to a person — especially a child — over time?**
- **What is unconscious bias? Do we all carry it — even people who consider themselves open-minded or who have lived in diverse environments?**
- **Korean identity has historically been tied to ethnic homogeneity. How is that legacy showing up today — in Korea, and in Korean-American communities?**
- **Do you know someone who grew up in a multicultural family, or who is biracial? Have you heard their experience directly?**
- **Dr. Park asks himself: "If Yo-han had not been my grandson, what would I have seen first?" What is the honest answer for you?**

Going Further (10 min)

- **Compared to societies with longer histories of immigration, where is Korean society on the spectrum of accepting diversity? Where are Korean-American communities?**
- **"Seeing someone as a category first" versus "seeing someone as an individual first" — why is the second so hard, and what actually makes it possible?**

One Step (5 min)

- **If there is someone in your neighborhood, school, or workplace from a multicultural background, try learning their name and one thing about their story this week.**
- **In one sentence: what from today's conversation stays with you?**

Adults (36–60)

Getting In (5 min)

Dr. Park spent decades living and working in cultures very different from his own. And yet he still asks himself: "If Yo-han had not been my grandson, what would I have seen first?" Even long exposure to difference does not automatically remove our first-glance categories.

- **In your professional or personal life, what has tended to shape the direction of a cross-cultural relationship most — the first impression, or something that came later?**

Discussion (20 min)

- Why is it a problem to see someone as a category — by race, nationality, or appearance — before seeing them as a person?
- Children from multicultural families in Korea and Korean-American communities face particular pressures. What do you know about those experiences? What responsibility does the broader community have?
- Even within immigrant communities, an "us and them" dynamic can emerge toward newer arrivals or those from different ethnic backgrounds. Why does that happen?
- "When I know someone's name, my gaze changes" — have you experienced this? What does it actually take to move from category to person?

Going Further (10 min)

- What would it take for a workplace, school, or community organization to become genuinely inclusive — not just diverse on paper?
- What can adults of this generation model for younger people about encountering difference?

One Step (5 min)

- Is there someone you have been keeping at a quiet distance, without quite acknowledging it? Could you take one step toward them this week?
- What was the most striking thing from today's discussion?

Seniors (60+)

Getting In (5 min)

The elderly woman in this story likely meant no harm. And yet a single word can become a memory someone carries for life. That is worth sitting with.

- Growing up, how were you taught — explicitly or implicitly — to think about people who were racially or culturally "different"?

Discussion (20 min)

- Korean society has changed enormously over the past few decades. What feelings come up honestly when you think about the growth of multicultural families and foreign residents?
- "To her it was a category. To me it was Yo-han." Do you believe that knowing someone's name and story genuinely changes how you see them?
- Has there been someone you were distant from at first — because they seemed foreign or different — who later became a genuine neighbor or friend? What changed?
- What do you see in younger generations' approach to diversity? What gives you hope — and what concerns you?

Going Further (10 min)

- What would you want to pass on to the next generation about how to encounter people who are different from themselves?

- **What can older adults do — practically, in daily life — to help build communities where multicultural families feel genuinely at home?**

One Step (5 min)

- **Is there a neighbor from a different background whose name you do not yet know?
Learning it is the beginning.**
- **Share the one thing from today's story that stays with you.**

Leader's Guide

For Church Groups and Community Groups

How to Begin

Read the story aloud together. Then hold thirty seconds of silence before anyone speaks. The story is short enough that analysis can rush in too fast — the silence gives the scene time to land.

In Dr. Park's Own Words

"I cannot answer that question honestly. Even someone who has spent decades living in other cultures finds it hard to know what first touches them when they encounter an unfamiliar child. What I know is that knowing the name changes things. So I try to ask the name first."

Reflection questions from Dr. Park:

- **Why does the grandfather's response — "This baby is my grandson" — stay with us?**
- **"If Yo-han had not been my grandson" — if you ask yourself this honestly, what is your answer?**
- **Why do we tend to see category before person? What can we actually do about that?**
- **Has knowing someone's name or story ever genuinely changed the way you saw them?**

What This Story Is Really About

The story does not ask us to judge the elderly woman. Dr. Park himself does not judge her — he turns the same question on himself. That movement — from observing another to examining oneself — is the heart of how to facilitate this story. Keep bringing the group back from analysis of the woman to honest inquiry about themselves.

The Opening Posture

Read aloud together. Then thirty seconds of silence. Then open with one of these:

"Before we discuss — does anything in this story make you uncomfortable? Why might that be?"

Or, for groups less comfortable with direct introspection:

"What do you think the elderly woman was feeling after she walked away?"

Watch for These Four Risks

Risk 1: The elderly woman becomes the villain

What it looks like: Younger participants condemn her quickly; the group agrees she was wrong and moves on without going deeper.

Why it matters: The story's power is in self-examination, not in judging another. Dr. Park does not judge her — he asks himself the same question.

Redirect: "Dr. Park doesn't call her a bad person. He turns the question on himself. Can we stay with that?"

Risk 2: The older generation defensively protects her

What it looks like: Older participants explain that she meant no harm, that it was a different era, that the word was simply normal then.

Why it matters: Those things may all be true — and good intentions do not eliminate impact. Both can be true at the same time.

Redirect: "No one is saying she was malicious. Dr. Park asks himself the same question she triggered. What does that tell us?"

Risk 3: The discussion drifts to social analysis and stays there

What it looks like: The group moves to discussing Korean homogeneity, immigration policy, or generational change — and the personal question disappears.

Why it matters: Social analysis has real value, but the story asks a personal question. Keep both in view.

Redirect: "Those are real and important questions. The story also asks something closer in — what do I personally see first?"

Risk 4: A multicultural participant becomes the subject rather than a full participant

What it looks like: Eyes turn toward someone who is biracial, foreign-born, or from a multicultural family — implicitly asking them to represent or explain their experience.

Why it matters: This reproduces the exact dynamic the story is examining — seeing someone as a category before seeing them as a person.

Prevent it: Name it explicitly before the session: "Everyone here is a full participant. No one is here to educate the rest of us about their experience."

Notes for Specific Groups

- **Korean-American groups:** Many in the room know what it is to be seen as a category before being seen as a person — in both Korean and American contexts. Make space for that experience without letting it become the only story.
- **Church groups:** The scripture options (Galatians 3:28, Ruth, Leviticus 19:34) are each substantial — choose one that fits your group rather than trying to cover all three.
- **Community groups:** "Unconscious bias" is a well-established, accessible framework that makes this discussion work without faith language. The personal practice — learning one name — is concrete and low-stakes enough for any group.
- **Intergenerational groups:** The generational difference here is genuine and worth surfacing directly. Invite it rather than smoothing it over.
- **Groups with multicultural members:** Follow the guidance above on Risk 4 carefully. The story works best when no one feels they are there to represent a type.

Closing the Session

- **Personal commitment:** Ask each person to name one neighbor — someone they recognize by face but not by name — and to commit to learning that name before the next gathering.
- **Self-observation practice:** For one day this week, simply notice — without judgment — what you see first when you encounter someone noticeably different from you. Just notice. Come back and share.

"To her it was a category. To me it was Yo-han."

When we know someone's name, our gaze changes. Start with the name.