

The Power of Humility

On weakness, witness, and the questions we don't expect to answer

In the late 1980s, I hosted weekly Bible studies at our home in New Jersey — fellow professional couples, university professors, Bell Labs researchers, bankers. Serious people who understood the Bible and sought to live by it.

In 1989, our family decided to move to Singapore. The gatherings would have to end. I encouraged everyone to continue at their local churches.

Dr. Lee's Challenge

At that point, Dr. Lee — who had graduated at the top of his class from Seoul National University's Department of Physics and earned his Ph.D. from Lehigh — smiled and said:

"Mr. Park, if you sing solo just one hymn for us, I'll attend church and continue Bible study as you suggested."

Everyone in the room knew I had absolutely no musical talent. They were enjoying the good natured needling.

I played my last card. "Then this will be your last Bible study, and you won't have another chance to understand the truth."

My wife Haejung stepped in immediately.

"How can you refuse just because you're embarrassed? I'll sing with you."

We began. We made it halfway through the first verse before stopping. I was completely off-key. The room burst out laughing.

A Dozen Years Later

We moved to Singapore, then later to Denver. Over the years, I heard that Dr. Lee had become a devout Christian — that he had even become a pastor, serving Chinese visiting researchers at Bell Labs.

After returning from our Congo assignment, he reached out. He wanted to see us before we went back out into the field. We met. After a hug, he asked:

"Do you know how I came to accept Jesus as my Savior?"

I joked: "It must be that the truth I shared during Bible study finally sank in."

He shook his head.

"I could still argue against your reasoning today. I accepted the Lord when you sang the hymn before leaving for Singapore — enduring the shame of publicly revealing your weakness. At that moment, I thought: *Who is this Jesus, that he values him more than the shame he endures?* A true scientist must explore that question. I explored it, and I finally found the truth."

He added: "I'm sharing this story with all my Chinese colleagues at the Lab."

I said: "Oh dear — now even in China I am known as tone-deaf."

Lord, however You choose to use me, I am Yours.

Share your thoughts.

Small Group Discussion Guide — Church Community

This story shows how it was not knowledge or argument that opened a person's heart — but weakness. And not even weakness chosen deliberately, but weakness that was pushed into being by a wife who refused to let her husband hide.

Young Adults (20s–35)

Opening (5 min)

Think for a moment about one of the most embarrassing moments of your life. Has that moment ever — in some unexpected way — opened a door in a relationship?

- **What makes it so hard to show our weaknesses to others? What are we afraid of?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **Why did Dr. Park initially refuse to sing? Can you understand that impulse?**
- **Dr. Lee was not moved by theological argument — he was moved by seeing someone endure humiliation for something he believed in. Why was that more powerful than logic?**
- **How can showing weakness create trust? Have you experienced that?**
- **The gap between the self we present on social media and the self we actually are — how does this story speak to that gap?**
- **Hyejeong's intervention was quiet and brief, but it changed everything. Have you ever had someone push you into a moment of honest vulnerability that you were glad for later?**

Scripture (10 min)

2 Corinthians 12:9–10 — "My power is made perfect in weakness... For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul's paradox is not a poetic formula — it is something he discovered through suffering. How does this story embody that same paradox? Where have you experienced it?

Application (5 min)

- **Is there a weakness you are currently hiding — even from people close to you? What might happen if you shared it with one trusted person?**

Adults (36–60)

Opening (5 min)

For a generation that has built professional credibility and carries real responsibility, showing weakness can feel like a serious risk.

- **In your workplace or your faith community, how easy — or hard — is it to acknowledge your limitations?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **Dr. Park spent decades teaching through knowledge and expertise. The thing that actually changed someone was not any of that — it was a single humiliating moment. What does that say about the nature of genuine influence?**

- If Haejung had not stepped in, the story would have ended differently. In your community, what does it mean for people to be each other's "Haejung" — the one who pushes us past our self-protection?
- "Truth is transmitted through life, not through argument" — where have you experienced this yourself?
- As a parent, a leader, a teacher — what does the pressure to appear capable and together cost the people around you?

Scripture (10 min)

Philippians 2:7–8 — Jesus "made himself nothing... he humbled himself." The incarnation itself is the act of God choosing weakness over self-protection.

How does Jesus' own kenosis — his self-emptying — connect to what happened in that New Jersey living room?

Application (5 min)

- As a leader or parent, what would it look like to let go of one part of the "competent and together" image you maintain — and what might that make possible?

Seniors (60+)

Opening (5 min)

- Over a long life, has there been a moment where a weakness of yours — something you were ashamed of — turned out to be a gift to someone else?

Discussion (20 min)

- Dr. Lee remembered that moment decades later. When do we become most deeply memorable to the people around us — when we are most polished, or when we are most real?
- "Lord, however You choose to use me, I am Yours." How does that prayer land for you at this stage of life?
- Why is it important for older generations to share their failures and weaknesses honestly with younger people — not just their achievements?

Scripture (10 min)

Psalm 34:18 — "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." How does brokenness become a channel rather than an obstacle? What does this psalm say about where God tends to work?

Application (5 min)

- 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 central question — why does showing our weaknesses sometimes open people more than our strengths do? — is universal. It touches authenticity, trust, leadership, and what it means to actually influence another person.

Young Adults (20s–35)

Getting In (5 min)

- Has showing a weakness or vulnerability ever deepened a relationship for you — unexpectedly? What happened?

Discussion (20 min)

- Dr. Lee was not persuaded by logic or argument. He was moved by watching someone expose their weakness for something they believed in. What does that tell us about how people actually change their minds?
- Which would you trust more: someone who presents themselves as completely competent and polished, or someone who admits what they don't know or can't do? Why?
- In a culture of personal branding and curated social media presence, is showing genuine weakness possible? Is it wise?
- The intervention that made everything possible came from Haejung — not from Dr. Park himself. What does it mean to have people in your life who push you past your own self-protection?

Going Further (10 min)

- Research on vulnerability — Brené Brown's work, for example — suggests that it is a foundation of genuine connection. Does that match your experience?
- Is there a difference between authentic vulnerability and performed vulnerability? How can you tell them apart?

One Step (5 min)

- Is there one person in your life you trust enough to share something you normally keep hidden? What would it take to try that this week?

Adults (36–60)

Getting In (5 min)

- Have you seen a leader — at work or in the community — admit a mistake or limitation, and watched that admission increase rather than decrease their credibility? What happened?

Discussion (20 min)

- The pressure to appear expert and capable is enormous in professional life. How does that pressure prevent genuine relationships and genuine influence?
- Dr. Park's wife was the decisive actor in this story. What does it mean to have people in your community who push you past your own defenses — and to be that person for others?

- This story describes a change that came through an unplanned, uncontrolled moment — not through argument or persuasion. Have you experienced that kind of change in yourself or watched it happen in someone else?
- "Vulnerable leadership" is increasingly discussed in organizational contexts. What does it look like in practice — and what are its real limits?

Going Further (10 min)

- What would it change in your workplace or community if leaders regularly admitted what they didn't know or couldn't do?
- Is there a difference between strategic vulnerability (admitting weakness to build trust as a technique) and genuine vulnerability? Does the distinction matter?

One Step (5 min)

- Try saying "I don't know" or "I was wrong" once this week — in a situation where you would normally protect your authority. Come back and share what happened.

Seniors (60+)

Getting In (5 min)

- Has there been a time in your life when a failure or weakness of yours turned out — sometimes much later — to be something that helped or opened another person?

Discussion (20 min)

- After decades of accumulated experience and knowledge, what does it feel like to admit a weakness or limitation? Has that changed over the years?
- Dr. Lee remembered a single moment across decades. When do we become most lastingly memorable to the people around us?
- What is the value of sharing failures and limitations honestly with younger generations — rather than presenting only the polished version of a life well lived?

One Step (5 min)

- Is there a story of failure or weakness from your own life that a younger person in your life might genuinely need to hear? Could you tell it?
- Share the one thing from today's story that stays with you.

Leader's Guide

For Church Groups and Community Groups

In Dr. Park's Own Words

"I was not trying to sing well that day. Haejung pushed me, and I simply collapsed. It still surprises me that what made the difference was not my arguments but that humiliating moment. That was the first of many times to experience what it means to be used in ways you cannot control."

Reflection questions from Dr. Park:

- **Why did Dr. Lee respond to the scene rather than to the theology? What does that tell us?**
- **Has showing vulnerability ever opened a relationship for you in a way you didn't expect?**
- **If Hyejeong had not been there, how would this story have ended? Who in your life plays that role?**
- **Between a polished presentation and an honest one — which tends to open people more? Why?**

What This Story Is Really About

This story has five layers:

- **The paradox of weakness — it is not strength but vulnerability that opens people**
- **Authenticity vs. expertise — completeness and truth are not the same thing**
- **Unintended influence — being used in ways we cannot control or predict**
- **The role of community — Haejung's intervention was the pivot; the individual did not get there alone**
- **The universality of vulnerability — this dynamic operates in all human relationships, not only in faith contexts**

How to Open the Session

This story has humor in it — use that. Begin with:

"Think of one of the most embarrassing moments of your life. Has that moment — in any way — ever ended up opening something?"

The lightness of the opening keeps the story from feeling heavy before participants have entered it. The deeper questions come once the room is already laughing together.

Watch for These Five Risks

Risk 1: "Humility leads to good outcomes" becomes a formula

What it looks like: Participants conclude that being vulnerable is a reliable strategy for getting good results.

Why it matters: Dr. Park did not choose to be vulnerable — he was pushed into it by his wife, and he hated it. The outcome was completely outside his control.

Redirect: "Was Dr. Park expecting a good result when he started singing? What was he actually feeling?"

Risk 2: The story becomes a church evangelism technique

What it looks like: Church group participants conclude that showing weakness is an effective method for converting people.

Why it matters: The moment it becomes a technique, it loses the quality that made it work — unmanaged, unstrategic honesty.

Redirect: "If Dr. Park had decided in advance to reveal his weakness as a conversion strategy, would Dr. Lee have been moved in the same way?"

Risk 3: Hyejeong's role disappears

What it looks like: The story gets told entirely as Dr. Park's story — his humility, his willingness to be vulnerable.

Why it matters: Dr. Park did not choose vulnerability. Hyejeong created the moment. Without her, the story ends with a self-protective threat and everyone goes home.

Redirect: "If Hyejeong had not intervened, how does this story end? Who in your life plays that role — and who do you play it for?"

Risk 4: Faith content alienates community group participants

What it looks like: Non-faith participants disengage when the story turns to Dr. Lee accepting Jesus.

Why it matters: The human core of the story — weakness opening what argument cannot — is universal.

Redirect: "Setting the religious dimension aside for a moment — the story shows that logic didn't move Dr. Lee, but a moment of genuine human exposure did. Has that been true in your own experience?"

Risk 5: "Just act weak" — the lesson gets flattened

What it looks like: Participants conclude that displaying weakness is a skill to be practiced.

Why it matters: Calculated vulnerability is not vulnerability. People can sense the difference.

Redirect: "What is the difference between genuine vulnerability and performed vulnerability? Can you feel the difference when someone else does it? How?"

Notes for Specific Groups

- **Korean-American groups:** The cultural pressure to maintain face (체면) is strong and worth naming directly. The story's comedy lands differently for those who feel this pressure acutely — let that recognition surface.
- **Professional groups:** The gap between "expert identity" and genuine human messiness is a live tension for most people in this room. The question of what professional competence costs us in real relationships is worth extended time.
- **Church groups:** The temptation to read this as an evangelism technique is real — address it early. The story is about what God does with moments we do not control, not about methods we can deploy.
- **Community groups:** Lead with Brené Brown's research on vulnerability and connection if the group needs a secular frame. The story then becomes a vivid illustration of something they may already believe intellectually.
- **Intergenerational groups:** Invite seniors to tell stories of their own "tone-deaf singing moments" before analyzing this one. The younger generation often needs to see that people they respect have genuinely failed — not as a lesson, but as a fact.

Closing the Session

- **Personal practice:** Invite each person to think of one weakness they normally hide — and to consider sharing it with one trusted person this week. Not to produce a result, but simply to practice honesty.
- **Gratitude practice:** Ask each person to name their "Hyejeong" — someone who has pushed them past their self-protection into something real. Consider writing that person a note of thanks.

- **Church groups: Close by reading together: "Lord, however You choose to use me, I am Yours." Sit in silence for a moment before any prayer.**
- **Community groups: Close with the commitment to say "I don't know" or "I was wrong" at least once this week — in a situation where they would normally protect their authority or image.**

"I could still argue against Dr. Park's reasoning today."

What opened him was not the argument. It was the moment argument stopped.