

*I hope that LGBTQ Christians will show their love to those who hate us, because God's love can move the hearts of our opponents through our prayers.'*

This is the story of gay pastor in Eastern Asia, who advocates for social justice. He founded an inclusive church, which now has three branches.

I found Jesus when I was 15. My family would scold me for going to church. This upset me and I'd walk silently to the bus-stop to go to church at weekends. But I found comfort and warmth as I got to know more of God, and discovered the peace and strength to worship Him. I even joined the choir despite not being a good singer!

At 16, I attended the International World Conference of Southern Baptist Churches. For three days, I had a feeling I can't describe; like a whisper to my ears, God was calling me. I felt really uneasy, and it wouldn't stop. On the fourth day, the pastor asked people to come to the stage to be blessed in Jesus' name and I stood up with tears running down my face. I felt like I'd been set free from my own prison and I stopped rejecting God's calling.

When I finished school and started thinking about work, that same Baptist pastor contacted me and said: 'Do you remember what happened a year ago?' He asked if I still wanted to be a pastor. I was worried it would be too difficult and that I wouldn't have enough money. But then one day, I was walking alone and a group of birds flew past. I thought of Matthew's Gospel: 'Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?' I went home and opened my Bible. The words 'Do not be afraid' kept striking me and I asked God: 'Do you really want me to be a pastor? My parents will say no.' But when I asked my parents, they said yes! I was overjoyed and worked as the pastor's assistant, until I was old enough to join the seminary.

During my training to become a Baptist pastor, I researched LGBTQ issues and Christianity, but the texts were homophobic and I couldn't find anything to help me think positively about LGBTQ people. Because of the teaching I'd received in church, I thought homosexuality was wrong anyway. I felt sinful and guilty, and started giving up on becoming a pastor. Then I heard about a minister from my country, who was part of an inclusive church in America. I knew I had to speak to him as my last chance to decide if I could be a pastor if I was gay. I was so confused and there was no-one else I could talk to. I needed advice from outside my church.

Meeting him was so affirming. He offered to help set up an LGBT Christian group when he returned home in a few years' time – but I couldn't wait, there were too many people struggling like me. With his support, I started a small fellowship group of my own. Our first gathering was at a fast-food restaurant. Following that, we met at my office after the pastors had gone home, and then at a member's house. Later, the American church helped us rent a place to meet, we were given contact numbers for other LGBTQ Christians in my country, and we grew.

In 2008, my senior pastor asked me if I was gay. It was the second time he'd asked; the first was when I went to America. Back then, I told him I wasn't, but this time I admitted I was. He told me to resign from the Baptist Church immediately and ordered me to say it was due to 'personal reasons'.

He later found out about the LGBTQ Christian group. He frightened me and said if I didn't stop it he would tell my former congregation that I was gay. I refused to stop, and he actually did it. There were so many rumours about me, it was awful. But the LGBTQ group supported me, and having left the Baptist Church I started an LGBT-inclusive church. God had closed one door and opened another.

Establishing an inclusive church was tough. I had so much to learn about the diversity of love and different minority groups. I cannot fully understand everything, but I patiently listen to everyone's voices to improve my knowledge of our differences. Today we have three branches and I hope one day we'll have them all across the country. It was hard to raise money, as many funders don't support LGBTQ religious movements, and mainline churches have condemned me for ministering to LGBTQ Christians. I lived in danger that the churches and the authorities would have me arrested.

However, I put aside my fears and their criticisms. I would never give up doing this ministry, because there are still many LGBTQ Christians struggling in life. Churches and society condemn their faith and their true self. I've counselled people who want to give up on life and commit suicide. Their self-esteem weakens by the day and LGBTQ Christians from all over the country contact me for help. This is a difficult mission, but I hope other churches see our example and come to accept us.

I encourage my church members to support orphanages, older people, sex workers and single parents. I've seen how the LGBTQ Christian community is so full of love for our society and nation – whenever I'm involved in social justice activities, I see many LGBTQ Christians involved too. The Bible isn't the only source of faith and our experience is equally important. My experience is that God blesses us as much as He blesses straight people. God gives us choices, but He will never leave us, no matter what choice we make. God is always here with us, no matter where we are with Him.

I hope that LGBTQ Christians will show their love to those who hate us, because God's love can move the hearts of our opponents through our prayers. I am proud of what our inclusive church has become, and I thank God for the encouragements and blessings that have accompanied me on my journey. Every church has its problems, but these problems can strengthen and unite us. God will never give up on His precious children, whoever we are.