



Still being Beautifully Shaped Today

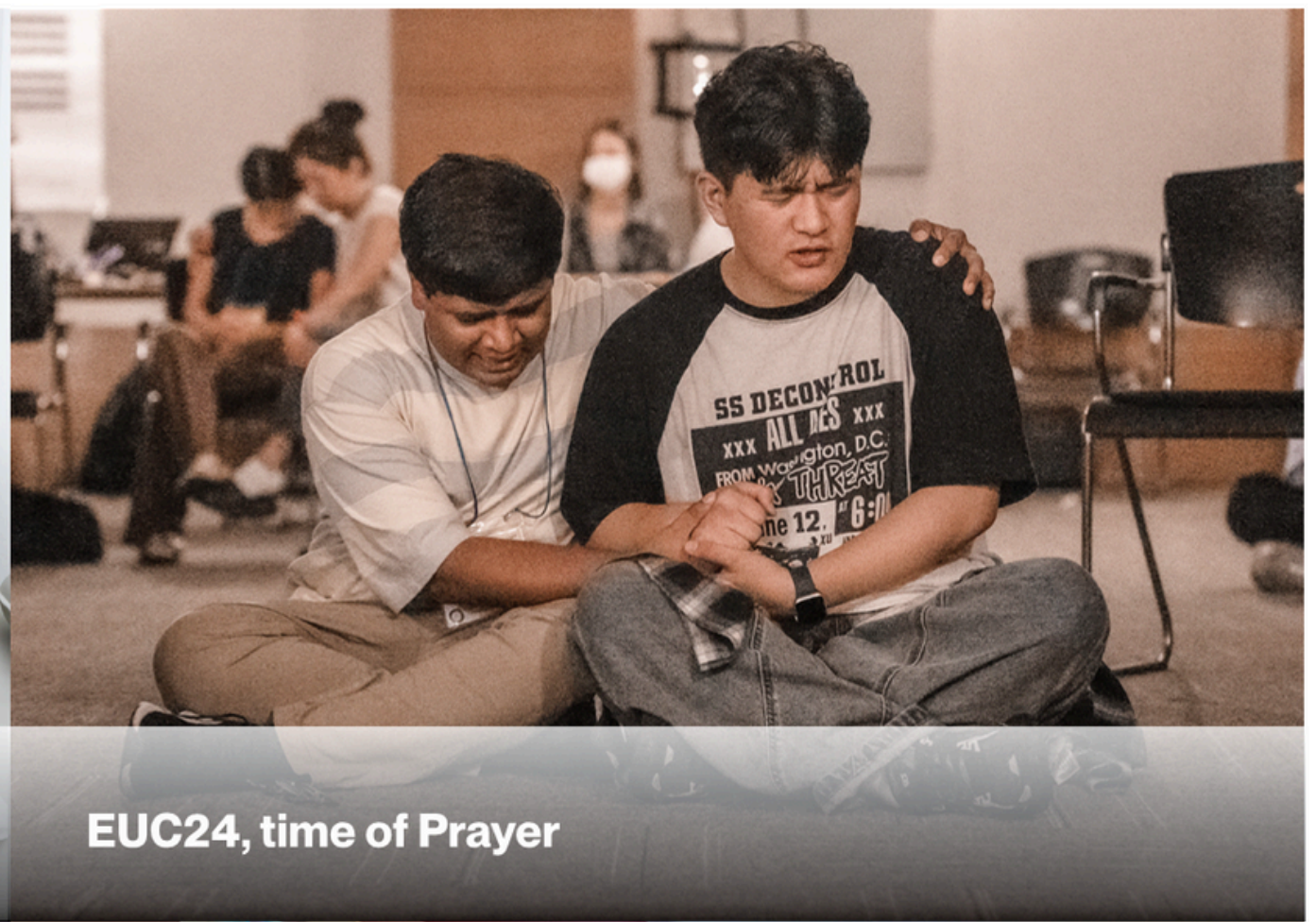
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in North Korea I was just an ordinary child. Every morning, I went to school, and at lunchtime, I played with my friends on the playground. Sitting at a desk for long hours was difficult, but running, playing soccer, and laughing until I was out of breath were my greatest joys. Back then, I was too young to know what the world beyond the border was like — how wide, how different it could be. I simply accepted the rules and patterns of life given to me in North Korea, believing that was all there was to the world. One day, I sensed even with my young heart, that something serious was happening from the heavy expressions on my parents' faces. When

I was thirteen years old, my younger sibling and I followed our parents on an escape from North Korea, without any explanation. I still remember my father's words vividly as we reached the Amnok River (Yalu River): "No matter how cold the water is, you must not make a sound." The moment my feet touched the icy water, my body flinched, but I clenched my teeth and endured in silence. After a long journey through China, Vietnam, and Laos, we finally boarded a plane bound for South Korea. Instead of fear, my heart was filled with excitement and hope. Looking out the window, the white clouds and the blue sky felt like a door opening into a new world.



Graduation Photos



EUC24, time of Prayer



Seoul Trip with Seomun Church



Graduate-Mentee, Cultural life with a student

in South Korea Contrary to my expectations, life in South Korea was a continual process of challenge and perseverance. After entering elementary school, I faced many difficulties adjusting to the unfamiliar environment. Because I was from North Korea, I was sometimes teased, and in the curious yet cold gazes directed at me, I felt deep wounds forming in my heart. I was filled with the thought that everyone must hate me.

But when I entered Heavenly Dream School as a middle school student, things began to change. There were many other students who had also come from North Korea, and that helped me adjust with a sense of stability and belonging. I attended school diligently for six years — from my first year of middle school through my senior year of high school. One memory that stands out is the English Unification Camp (EUC). Though I was excited about the camp, I was also anxious — “Will I be able to get along with others?” — and felt the burden

of having to communicate in English. As I feared, the camp ended without me having had a proper conversation with my teammates. That experience became the starting point of my English journey. I signed up for after-school tutoring, began learning basic vocabulary, and gradually gained confidence through steady effort. Before long, I was even able to have simple conversations with foreign volunteers who came to the school.

In 2023, I returned to the camp as a Heavenly Dream School graduate. My English wasn't perfect, but this time, I could speak comfortably with the international participants. Heavenly Dream School had always provided an environment that helped me grow. The teachers saw my drawings and encouraged me, and even chose my design for a school postcard. And even when I acted out at times, they embraced me with love and patience. Through these experiences, the wounds I carried from my past slowly began to heal.



in New Zealand I was selected as one of the third group of Heavenly Dream School students to study abroad in New Zealand, and I began my life in Auckland this past August. I'm studying English diligently at a language institute and continuing to grow in faith within a healthy church community. Once, I couldn't even freely leave my own neighborhood — but now, I find myself in a much wider world, meeting new people, communicating in English, and experiencing many different cultures. I am deeply grateful for this precious opportunity to broaden my horizons through the New Zealand language program. God's plan for my life is closely bound to the school's mission. The school sees us as future leaders of the unified Korea and helps us grow into that calling. When that day comes, I hope to return to North Korea and use design as a tool to introduce South Korean society to its people and help them enjoy the same freedom I have experienced. Through my artwork, I want to capture the freedom, growth, and possibility I've found here — breaking down prejudices about South Korea and planting in their hearts a dream for change. I believe that sometimes, the visual language of art can speak more deeply than words. Until that day arrives, I will keep learning, growing, and striving to become a person of depth. I sincerely hope that the path I have walked — and the one I will continue to walk — will become a source of courage and hope for others.



You can check out Eokchol's story on YouTube. Search for "Heavenly Dream School", or scan the QR Code.

Lastly, I ask for your prayers that I may live safely and healthily here in New Zealand, and that in the stillness, I may draw closer to God.