

Prophetic Korean Pastor Saves Lives With Baby Drop Box

A ringing bell can be heard in the late watches of the night through a tiny three-bedroom house in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Seoul, South Korea. Pastor Lee Jong-rak awakes from his sleep as the alarm bell goes off.

Within moments, he and his wife jump out of bed and make their way to a part of their house where a square metal door is built into a wall. He opens the latch to find a tiny baby boy inside, swaddled carefully with a note lying beside him. Lee takes the baby into his arms and rocks him gently, feeling the rush of relief that always comes: This little one will have a life.

Lee, 60, is the creator of the Baby Box, the first and only box in Korea designed to receive abandoned babies who are physically or mentally disabled or just unwanted by their mothers. In Seoul, the largest city in South Korea with a population of more than 10 million, it is not uncommon for such babies to be abandoned on the streets, left to die of hypothermia within hours. Hundreds of unwanted babies are abandoned in just this way in South Korea each year.

Lee's own son was born with cerebral palsy 27 years ago and forever changed the pastor's life—he and his wife named their son Eun-man, meaning “full of God's grace.” Compelled to provide a life-giving alternative for Korean mothers facing a crossroads, Lee built a drop box on the side of his home with a humble sign that reads, “Place to leave babies.” A thick towel covers the bottom of the box, and lights and heating keep the baby comfortable once he or she is placed inside. When that happens, a bell rings, alerting Lee or his wife or their staff associates to move the baby inside the house.

A Crisis Point

Lee admits he didn't really expect the babies to come in. But come they did. They came in the middle of the night. They came in the middle of the day. Some came with notes. Some came without a word. Only a few mothers spoke to Lee face to face.

Lee shares about one such mother, saying, "She had poison to kill both herself and her baby."

He responded, "Don't do that. Come here with your baby."

Another desperate mother left a heart-wrenching note alongside her infant that read: "My baby! Mom is so sorry. I am so sorry to make this decision. My son! I hope you to meet great parents, and I am very, very sorry. I don't deserve to say a word. Sorry, sorry, and I love you, my son. Mom loves you more than anything else. I leave you here because I don't know who your father is. I used to think about something bad, but I guess this box is safer for you. That's why I decided to leave you here. My son, please forgive me."

The Baby Box provides a safer solution than the plans that haunt these mothers' minds. Because the box offers an alternative, they choose life. And Lee, who runs the country's only orphanage for disabled children out of his home, is content to play his part in the rescue.

A Light Shed Abroad

Now the story of this man and his Baby Box is reaching the world through a 72-minute documentary produced by 22-year-old director Brian Ivie. The documentary, called *The Drop Box*, won the Best of Festival Jubilee Award and the Sanctity of Life Award at the eighth annual San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival in February.

Ivie, a student filmmaker at USC who had never before produced a full-length documentary, was stirred to create the film

after reading a *Los Angeles Times* article about Pastor Lee's mission. After getting in touch with Lee and receiving what he felt was a command by God to tell the pastor's story, Ivie decided to go to South Korea. What he didn't know was that the decision to make this film would change his life and transform his faith.

Ivie recalls walking into Lee's house for the first time. After Lee fed the film crew, he sat them down and said to Ivie, "I don't want this movie to be about me."

As a filmmaker, Ivie's first thought was, "I lost my protagonist!"

But he also understood. "Pastor Lee just wanted to help these kids," he says.

When asked about the moment that most impacted his life while making the film, Ivie says, "When [Pastor Lee] told me that his heart for adoption sprouted from the truth, 'God adopted me.' This is what changed everything."

Ivie told the story of his personal transformation during his award acceptance speech at the San Antonio festival.

"I became a Christian while making this movie," he said. "When I started to make it, and I saw all these kids come through the drop box—it was like a flash from heaven. Just like these kids with disabilities had crooked bodies, I have a crooked soul. And God loves me still."

He went on to say, "When it comes to this sanctity of life issue, we must realize that faith in God is the only refuge for people who are deemed unnecessary. This world is so much about self-reliance, self-worth and self-esteem. It's a total illusion that we can be self-sufficient. Christ is the only thing that enables us."

Making the film plucked a deeper chord in Ivie than he could

have ever imagined. Though he viewed himself as a Christian before making the film, seeing the true gospel played out in the destitute and humble surroundings of Pastor Lee's home, Ivie heard the voice of a Savior he had not yet known.

"Most people believe in some sort of God," he said in one interview. "That's easy to do. Or at least they believe that everything happens for a reason. So as one of those people, I assumed that I had a pretty divine reason for going to Korea. I assumed that my reason for making this documentary was simply to pass the mic to Pastor Lee. I assumed that God wanted to use my gifts as a storyteller to shine a light on the plight of these disabled babies that Pastor Lee was saving.

"I had no idea God was going to call me out on my own spiritual disabilities. More than that, I had no idea God was going to save, well, me. When I tell people that I became a Christian a year and half ago, they usually say, 'I thought you were a Christian.' To which I carefully reply, 'You know what? So did I.'"

Today, Ivie's production company, Arbella Studios, is in discussions with a couple studios about a distribution plan for the film. The crew is now preparing for a fourth and final trip to South Korea, where they will grab a few remaining interviews and then finish the film.

Audiences can view a trailer for the documentary at [.](#)

A Future Hope

With the \$101,000 grand-prize winnings from the film festival, Ivie's team donated \$50,000 to Lee—and then used the remaining funds to start a nonprofit organization whose mission is to "support the vision and legacy of Pastor Lee Jong-rak and his flock," serving as a conduit for financial aid from the U.S. to South Korea, as well as supporting others with similar initiatives.

In Seoul, Lee and his staff are raising money to build a new home for their big family—which now includes more than 30 children—next year with the help of Ivie’s team. Currently, Lee is still operating the ministry from his humble three-bedroom house.

A simple man with a huge purpose, Lee saw a devastating problem. He thought of a way he could change it, and he became a prophetic voice to his culture. His story is one every nation can grab hold of, as South Korea is not the only place dealing with child abandonment or hindering governmental policies or cultural stigmas that contest the sanctity of life. Globally, millions of children die from these issues.

But as Pastor Lee says of these children, “They’re not the unnecessary ones in the world. God sent them to the earth to use them.”

With willing people like Lee, the world is seeing how life can open up for these babies when we take them in, when we become a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. He is showing the world these children are wonderfully made, that their lives have a purpose, that they are worthy and that they are loved just the way they are.

Natalie Brumfield has been the chapter leader of Bound4LIFE in Birmingham, Ala., since 2008 and serves as a weekly counselor for Sav-A-Life, a local pregnancy test center. She longs to teach and provoke the hearts of the next generation for Jesus’ righteousness, intercession and justice.

Go behind the scenes with Pastor Lee Jong-rak as he picks up unwanted newborns from the Baby Box at .