

UBF Sogam and Its Spiritual and Social Implications

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Abstract

In Korea, the term "sogam" refers to what one feels in one's mind, and sogam sharing is often understood in the Christian community as a faith testimony. While oral testimonies can be impactful, expressing those thoughts in written form can help to improve clarity. Therefore many churches have recommended Christians to write down their thoughts on topics of faith for sharing orally with an audience. In this work, we will analyze the sogam sharing practice of University Bible Fellowship (UBF), one of the influential Christian communities in South Korea. By thoroughly exploring the spiritual and social implications of the UBF sogam, we will argue that, practiced properly, sogam writing and sharing can be fruitfully used as an important spiritual discipline.

Keywords: Healing, lost and found, sogam, South Korea, therapeutic, UBF

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Introduction

The Chinese characters of *sogam* (所感) mean “to feel.” Its approximate English translation is “confession of faith, or testimony” (Chung, 2003). In this paper, *sogam* will be discussed as a concept referring to an autobiographical record shared within a Christian community that helps people find who they are in God. Human beings worldwide are constantly searching for answers to the fundamental question of who they truly are (Chung, 2003). In the *New Testament* of the Bible, Jesus gives a clear and profound answer to this search for the self. According to Jesus, human beings have been cut off from God. However, this severed relationship can be restored as a result of repentance leading to salvation. Jesus illustrates this clearly in the parable of the prodigal son, which tells of a man who initially left his father for a life of wild living but returned home after recognizing his depraved state (Luke 15). As people listen to this story they are able to see themselves in the figure of the lost son and are spiritually moved as God's love touches their hearts. Through symbolic but simple stories such as this, Jesus conveyed profound truths that continue to make humans aware of their spiritually lost condition (Kim, 2021). Jesus' use of storytelling using common objects such as the birds in the sky, weeds on the roadside, and lost coins as metaphors (Seok & Chung, 2021) has great power to touch the heart. And as one reflects, writes, and shares personal stories on how God has worked in his or her life, a deeper awareness and joy can be found in God's redemptive love for the edification of the speaker as well as the listener.

In order to achieve this study more efficiently, we first examine the political and social background in which UBF *sogam* has been used. After that, we will trace the literary meaning of *sogam* precisely. After completing this work, we will investigate the spiritual and social implications of *sogam* as the core issues of this paper. In connection to these arguments, we will analyze the benefits of *sogam* sharing at both the individual and collective level and conclude with an assessment of the discipline's benefits and potential trouble areas.

Discussions

The Background of UBF Sogam

UBF was founded in South Korea in 1961 by Samuel (Seok, Jeong, Seon, & Chung, 2021) a graduate of a conservative Korean Presbyterian theological seminary, and Sarah Barry (1930-), a missionary sent to South Korea from the American Southern Presbyterian Church (Chung, 2003; Kim, 2021; Seok & Chung, 2021; Seok et al., 2021). The goal of UBF was to reach college students, a group for which the pair felt deep compassion (Geisler, Willard, & Ovalle, 2011; Seok et al., 2021; Yalom & Crouch, 1990). At the time they began the ministry, many students were wandering as a result of the Student Revolution in 1960 and military coup in 1961. They set the direction of their ministry to nurturing spiritual leaders through discipleship training centered on small groups of college students. In the mid-1960s they expanded the scope of their ministry to Seoul as well as all universities in South Korea. By the 1970s, the UBF ministry had expanded around the world, particularly to the United States and Germany (Chung, 2003; Seok et al., 2021).

Lee and Barry bore fruit in their small-group discipleship training. They learned that over a three-year time period Jesus demonstrated their importance by establishing close relationships with his twelve disciples. The example of the early, often house-centered church (Acts 2: 42-47) further shows that small group communities are an effective way to form an organic church community (Seok et al., 2021; Zeisberger, 1885). Small group activities can increase both the efficiency of production and the satisfaction of intimate relationships which may not be met by the modern mass society. Nowadays people live a busy life amidst a flood of information that cannot be compared with any other era in the past and the multitude of people who come into contact with them in a complex social network. The more that happens, the stronger the inner desire of modern people to seek inner intimacy and to be accepted and loved unconditionally. In the past, in the extended family society centered on kinship, there was a social safety network based on blood ties that provided various human relationships and intimacy to support individuals. However, today, when the nuclear family is firmly established, even the most basic unit, the family, is dismantled due to frequent divorce and emotional separation (Kim, 2021; Seok et al., 2021). Individuals seek to find a small group that can provide warm love, emotional stability, and support

like family. It is in this context that small groups are gaining prominence in our time. Since its inception, UBF has developed the Christian small group movement aiming for a small church within the church as a pioneering dream and vision. Today, this kind of ministry has become a fashion in the field of ministry.

Within UBF, *sogam* sharing is one of the driving forces in the functioning of the ministry. *Sogam* is the part that a new believer is most moved by, and most sympathizes with, when they first come to UBF, and as they listen to and write *sogam*, they change from a new believer to a member of the community. Therefore, *sogam* sharing plays an important role in becoming a Christian believer in UBF. Through this spiritual training that one unknowingly accumulates by writing *sogam* every day or every week, inner changes are made and a deeper understanding of the words of the Bible becomes possible. Also, *sogams* are not only the stories of the leader or core members of UBF community, but the vivid stories of every individual member of UBF. Through their stories, one can get to know the current situation within the community, and one can be deeply moved by the living and unheard stories of the outskirts.

The Concept of Sogam Within UBF

Sogam as a practice is unique to UBF and can be traced to Lee and Barry's inductive Bible study. Although it incorporates elements of each, *sogam* is distinct from a book review, reflection essay, or diary. It is best described as a multi-step discipline that helps people form themselves from a biblical perspective based on the observation, interpretation, and application of Scripture. In short, *sogam* is an autobiographical story in that it is written in the past tense by a real person in order to communicate his or her own life history (Seok et al., 2021). Every story has a plot, and *sogam* is no different. Since recognizing how and where one went wrong and subsequent regeneration are so important, plots like "Lost and Found," and "My Life Before and After meeting Jesus" appear frequently. Usually these plots demonstrate that sin begins when humans turn away from God. Sin is showcased through wrongful attitudes and actions, such as selfishness and lust, and the result is a state of depravity. The parable of the prodigal son provides a biblical example of such a series of events. However, as in the parable, repentance made in the inescapable pit of corruption enables humans to be born again and regenerate. They are then restored as children of God, participating in the glory of God and gaining a new direction in life.

Writing *sogam*, an important step in preparing to share the testimonial with others, involves putting to paper what one has realized through contemplating the message of the Bible. However, a good *sogam* involves not only reflection but also repentance motivated by the Words of the Bible and determination to act according to them. When writing *sogam* people often follow a general, five-step process. The first step is earnest prayer to understand the Word. Following this, the biblical text is read slowly several times according to the inductive Bible study method. The next step is meditation on the text, paying particular attention to its meaning. Then the *sogam* is written. Finally, a one-word conclusion to the *sogam* is identified to help apply what has been learned to daily life. Types of UBF *sogam* include *life sogam*, written as a person looks back to his or her past; *Sunday sogam*, written every week based on the Sunday worship message; and *daily sogam*, written during personal quiet time.

Although it is mainly presented in small groups, it is clear that the preparation of good *sogam* requires a high degree of personal devotional training. As stated, good *sogam* results only when prayer and meditation are well-practiced—like the Bible says, "Blessed is the one who delights in the law of the Lord, and meditates on it day and night" (NIV, Psalm 1:1-2). *Sogam* written without deep meditation before God is simply a compilation of sentiments about life, not an honest confession. Besides fostering a sense of community, then, why does UBF encourage its members to share *sogam* publicly? UBF's support for open testimonial stems from Jesus himself. One day a woman who had suffered from chronic bleeding for twelve years quietly touched the hem of Jesus' robe. Her body was immediately cleansed (Luke 8:43-48). After being cured, this woman quietly tried to retreat. She would not have wanted to tell others about her shameful past—but Jesus made her present her testimony in front of many people (Luke 8:47). After Jesus healed the demon-possessed man Jesus also commanded him to share his testimony.

These examples show that the ultimate purpose of the testimony is to reveal the glory of God and to instill faith in Him. The book of James also emphasizes the importance of public confession; in its fifth chapter the early church members were exhorted to confess their sins to each other (James 5:16). Confession leads to a greater realization of sin, which is necessary because it is very difficult for humans to recognize themselves as sinners before meeting and experiencing God for

themselves. Realization of sin is made possible only through the Holy Spirit, including the understanding that human existence apart from God is sin in itself regardless of high moral and mental health. However, the work of the Holy Spirit is not purely supernatural. Confession of sin before God and others, as seen in the practice of *sogam* sharing, provides the basic soil in which the Holy Spirit can work to bear fruit in individual hearts. Those who were not aware of their sinfulness look at themselves with new eyes when they see others grieving over their own sins. Because humans have the ability to look at themselves using others as a mirror, listeners may recall forgotten memories and hidden problems buried deep in their hearts as they hear the stories of others. Confession also brings about greater self-openness that enables inner healing. People become convinced that humans are all sinners but also that they are not the only ones struggling. This can build an atmosphere of deep love and understanding within the community.

In addition to biblical tradition, St. Augustine's *Confessions* and David Brainerd's *Diary* provide a historical basis for the practice of confession. Augustine (354-430) wrote *Confessions* as an autobiographical record that demonstrates his own corruption and wickedness. Outwardly he had risen to a successful position as an intelligent and talented rhetorical teacher (Go et al., 2021; Jeong, Seo, Seon, Kang, & Chung, 2021; Kim, 2021). However, his inner self was filled with pride, vanity, and lust, which he justified by living a life of status-elevating lies. He confessed that he did things that disappointed God even after having the thrilling experience of meeting him at the age of thirty-two (Seok et al., 2021; Yalom & Crouch, 1990). He also stated that he had avoided spiritual battle in a crucial moment of grappling with sin. As readers of *Confessions* learn of his mistakes and weakness they are moved by a man who repented with tears while examining himself before God.

The *Diary*, written with tears and prayers by missionary David Brainerd (1718-1747), the eighteenth-century American kneeling saint, is another autobiography that contains deep insight into both the human and God (Geisler et al., 2011). Brainerd despaired of his inner ugliness, but when he turned to God's saving mercy and grace he found comfort and joy. This is the kind of candid self-examination that can be found in UBF *sogam*.

Research Experimental Processes and Implications of UBF SOGAM Healing ministry

One of the most significant spiritual-social contributions of UBF *sogam* is the healing it enables through small-group sharing. Some small groups are one-on-one while others are comprised of a group of people. Small-group studies between a Bible teacher or spiritual mentor and a new Christian are especially important. When a new believer participates in a one-on-one Bible study with a mentor he or she will naturally be included in the mentor's larger group, called a *fellowship*. Usually there are between five and twenty members in a fellowship. The fellowship leader holds regular Bible studies (at least once a week) for all group members and encourages participation in the "Sunday *sogam*" or "Daily Bread *sogam*" sharing that takes place at each meeting.

Sogam sharing in small groups can contain multiple therapeutic elements. A theory of Irvin Yalom, a professor of psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine and an authority in the field of group therapy, helps define some of these. All therapeutic factors should be viewed as synergistic effects through complex interrelationships rather than as independent factors that can be separated from each other. The first element is inspiration-based hope. Within small groups, the spiritually young and the spiritually mature—and all those in between—interact. Witnessing the growth already experienced by the spiritually mature can give members great hope. As Yalom points out, high expectations before receiving treatment are significantly associated with positive treatment outcomes (Yalom & Crouch, 1990). In UBF small groups, *sogam* is an effective way to inspire high expectations for spiritual growth. When people who have had similar life experiences or inner problems testify vividly of how they have changed, those who have fallen into despair have hope that they can change, too. They are able to become optimistic and gain confidence in their ability to do what is necessary to heal.

Secondly, *sogam* sharing facilitates a sense of universality. People tend to think that they are uniquely miserable and have unacceptable issues. However, as they listen to *sogam* that exposes the sharer's personal problems, they realize that they are not alone in their difficulties (Chung, 2003). Through this sense of shared suffering they are freed from perceived isolation and can feel increasingly spiritually and psychologically stable. The resulting general sense of companionship

not only frees members from psychological isolation but can also bring about a greater sense of personal security.

Thirdly, *sogam* sharing also contains the therapeutic element of fostering group cohesion that reduces personal feelings of isolation. Group cohesion, which builds on a sense of universality, is the result of members accepting and understanding each other. This in turn further facilitates self-opening. When listening to and writing *sogam* that causes them to experience vulnerability and acceptance, members show high cohesion towards the group. They feel a sense of belonging, they are more present, and they leave the group less often. In addition, the more people follow the guidance given by the group, the more effective the group is. *Sogam* therefore provides solidarity within the UBF community.

The fourth therapeutic element found in *sogam* sharing is interpersonal learning. Even though *sogam* is first of all a confession in front of God, social factors stemming from sharing the confession with others cannot be ignored. Along with enabling psychological stability through self-opening, small groups provide opportunities to learn interpersonal relationship skills (Chung, 2003). Learning takes place as members recognize and correct their behavior through feedback from, and observation of, other members. For example, if narcissism, self-deprecation, or a crushing feeling of inferiority are revealed through *sogam* sharing members can give feedback regarding the issue. The sharer then has the opportunity to see him- or herself more objectively. Furthermore, members can learn how to approach and solve problems—including interpersonal challenges—from listening to others' *sogam* testimonials.

Finally, small groups facilitate the therapeutic element of imitative behavior. Learning from and copying someone's actions defines imitative behavior. Members of a group may imitate behaviors or characteristics of the leader as well as those of other members. Since small groups enable individuals to see each other's lives up close, each member can imitate another's example. As stated, watching how someone who has had a similar problem overcame the issue can be highly therapeutic because it inspires hope in a life beyond the struggle. When these listeners then write their own *sogam* regarding the issue at hand they begin a similar journey of overcoming. Through this process members discover themselves more deeply and their faith grows.

Lost and Found

In addition to psychological healing, *sogam* sharing enables a significant spiritual restoration ministry. One of its most frequent structures, "Lost and Found," clearly highlights this potential renewal. In the case of UBF "Life *Sogam*," this structure tends to consist of two parts. The first deals with being "lost," (life before meeting Jesus) and the second testifies of being "found" (life after meeting Him). Within the testimonial the two parts are starkly contrasted so that listeners examine their own lives and desire to return to God themselves.

Below is an example one of UBF's actual *sogam*:

Dead in Adam, but alive in Christ [1 Cor.15:22]

Part 1: How they all die in Adam

At the beginning of my grammar school . . . in Germany I lived a life obedient to my parents and experienced early the blessing of a good relationship with my own sister. But as is the case with growing up, the time came when the temptations of a sinful world exerted too much influence on me and my friends and the philosophy of fun, alcohol, drug debauchery, comfort and rebellion became everyday life. . . . My desire and eagerness to study disappeared more and more . . . I could hide my addiction from my parents for many years by moving into a shared apartment with my friends and spending the money that my grandmother had given me to study on drugs and parties. But it all ended in chaos. It was during this chaotic time of my life that God introduced me to Bible study through [a UBF missionary] Maria Park. It was in 2004. God wanted to save me from my dead life [in which] I stayed in Adam [the father of sinful humanity in Genesis story] This was the first time in my life that I cried to Jesus on my knees. In the deepest and most desperate moment of my life, Jesus, whom I didn't know at all, was the one I first turned to out of hope, faith, repentance and humility. I was led by God to my parents of faith and revealed my sins to them first . . . I became free of drug addiction in the summer of 2010 with the help of therapy and prayer support. It was God's mercy on me that He brought me out of the darkness of drug addiction.

Part 2: How they will all be made alive in Christ

God slowly restored me by reading and memorizing His Word. But my unsolved sin problem of wanting to have control over my own life led me to seek guidance for my future life to depend

on myself, instead of thanking God for what he had done for me and following his guidance. . . . My lust in the flesh and pride . . . nailed Jesus to the cross. His blood runs on and on, for my sins demand death. I held on to old Alex for a long time . . . The Alex who had squandered his grandma's hard-earned money for fun and drugs. [Yet] God did not give up the cross to save me. He shed his innocent blood and died for me. I would like to claim that I came to this knowledge by myself, but the truth is that without the Bible study with my shepherds and their challenge to bring my sins to light, I would have remained further in my self-deception. The Holy Spirit who spoke through them made me let go and face the truth. The encouragement to write a testimony [sogam] led me to finally look at what I feared the most and what I had avoided doing until then. It felt like scales fell from my eyes when I realized - who I am, what I did, and who the owner of my life is Old Alex has died. He was crucified with Jesus and came to life again in Jesus Over the years I lived with doubts and unbelief in my heart, not willing to give up the control over my life. But the Lord would not destroy Alex for his words in 1 Cor. 15:22: "For as they all die in Adam, so shall they all be made alive in Christ." God is faithful and full of grace and mercy. He could have given me up years ago because of my hardened heart, but instead he let his Holy Spirit work in his children, showing through them that he is true love. My decision to give my life to this God of love, the Almighty Creator God, came from the testimony of their lives and dedication to God's work.

One word: I was dead in Adam, but I came to life

Based on the story of Jesus' crucifixion, this *sogam* testifies of the grace of God who forgave and granted inner peace to a man who had been sick with drug addiction. The writer does not emphasize worldly achievements but rather the importance of his inner relationship with God. In his sinful life, he hid his true self. As a result, his inner emptiness, anxiety, and fear grew. However, in the above *sogam* he shows his naked self without additions or subtractions, confessing that he was originally a heartless, ruthless, hateful, and cynical person. When he personally accepted Jesus, he was able to overcome his unfortunate past to build a beautiful, loving, and trusting relationship with God. Convinced of God's forgiveness, his relationships with other humans also changed for the better. This *sogam* shows both the existence of a lost soul before encountering God and the restoration made possible through Jesus, the one who came to the cross to find the lost. There is a clear shift from a person who had been in turmoil to a person at peace. Through *sogam* such as this people discover that they, too, are inherently lost--but they can find a happier life when found by God's grace.

The following is another example of a "Lost and Found" *sogam*:

I was born in Seoul as an only girl . . . My father was usually quiet and caring, but when he got angry, he became violent and savage . . . My father was regarded as a dual personality with no self-control, and my mother always instilled a sense of crisis and made endless demands in order to protect me and raise me to the best in the midst of an unstable family. She said, "If you don't succeed, you and I will drown in the Han River." I couldn't help but hate my mother, who tried to dominate my life . . . My heart ached because of my parents' distorted and limited love, and I ended up thinking of them as people who had nothing to do with me . . . If there was someone who could understand and love me, and who would respect and love me . . . I thought I would be able to find the meaning of life. But in reality, such a existence could not be found, and I became more and more sick of loneliness . . . While I was thirsty for something to love, I fell in love with the King of Pop Michael Jackson's frenzied live performance. From that moment on, I loved Michael the most in the world . . . When I was in high school, I met a girlfriend who liked Michael like me, and I loved her the most in the world just as I loved Michael. We promised each other, "Let's be together forever." But my friend left me saying, "Your love is so deep that you have bound me." I deeply realized the futility of emotions . . . Filled with emptiness, I studied without distraction in life and entered Seoul National University in 1998 . . . I didn't want to meet people who would be forgotten anyway, and I didn't have the passion to learn something. I took classes by myself, ate by myself, and went to the movies by myself . . . I spent my days hating, despising myself. Then one day, I heard the words of the prodigal son . . . through the UBF Bible message. That night, as I meditated on this message, I accepted God as my Father. No one in the world loved me just the way I was. Everyone asked me this and that, and they looked at me and evaluated me. But Heavenly Father saw from a distance a man who was sick with vainness, helplessness, and lust, and whose clothes were torn and became a beggar, and had compassion on him, and ran, took his neck, and kissed him. Moved by this love, I shed uncontrollable tears and offered a prayer of thanks. When I repented before the Lord for the sin of suppressing, the shame

of being choked to death, enjoying lust, and even dreaming of homosexuality with my girlfriend, Jesus Christ did not even turn away from [me] . . . Jesus was crucified for my sins, insulted in my place, and bled for me. I shed tears again in front of this love and thanked Him. In the great love of Heavenly Father and the love of Jesus Christ on the cross, I have found the true love I have been so searching for in the world (Chung, 2003).

In this *sogam*, there is a dramatic reversal and introspection on the self, based on the words of the parable of the prodigal son. She frankly confesses the serious family problems her parents have had, and reveals the wounds and loneliness she suffered as a child. She worshiped pop singers like her idol, and wandered looking for true love from her girlfriend. But she could not find either peace or love from them, confessing that she has finally found in God the true love and whole-personal acceptance that she cannot find anywhere else in this world. There are many people who secretly worry and suffer because of family problems in the modern situation where love has grown cold and complicated. The wounds and pains that arise when an individual experiences conflicts and crises rather than absolute support and acceptance from their family, which are the basis for forming and growing a personality, are destructive. Behind today's serious social pathology, the dysfunction caused by the dissolution of these families provides a significant cause. By exposing personal pain that cannot be confided in other ways, the *sogam* can have a significant healing effect in itself. In addition, when God's love becomes a concrete story in the life of the *sogam* writer, the spiritual desire of "I want to know the spiritual world" arises in the hearts of those who listen to the testimonial *sogam*. In the stark contrast between "the lost" and "the found," people look back on their own existence and desire to return to their Father. The reason why we hear and write articles such as autobiographical stories of faith, namely, *sogam*, is probably because of this ministry of restoration.

A good *sogam* is to burn one's heart in the presence of God's Word and rediscover the meaning of one's existence (Martin, 2001). The important thing here is before God. Not defending or making excuses for oneself, but as one standing naked before God, facing one's miserable existence as a prodigal son and crying out. Such awareness of loss naturally leads to the process of finding. Where there is sorrow for lost souls, God's grace from above comes. The reason to cherish the Words of the Bible, and do various spiritual exercises, is ultimately because of such a longing for restoration. By experiencing the process of recovery from the lost to the one found through *sogam*, that experience may be a manifestation of deep Christian spirituality.

Research Results

Positive Aspects

In the individual level, writing *sogam* is a great way to discover and cultivate the abilities God has given to humans. Through writing *sogam*, one of the basic skills necessary for human life, logical thinking, can be cultivated. The core of logical thinking lies in the cultivation of a thinking system according to the six-fold principle. Through the thinking system of who, what, when, where, how, and why, we can carry out our stewardship duties that God has given us. The question of why is particularly important. One of the big problems in education in modern society is to prevent the question of why. However, the question of why is the way for the human to realize himself before God. As we write our *sogam*, we ask the question of why, which is difficult to raise in the category of social education, before God. The most important question in our *sogam* before God is the question of why, and God gives the answer to that question in God's time. Writing *sogam* also helps us discover the often overlooked roots of our human thinking system.

Human thinking is made through several processes, and the link between those processes--formed through various environments and backgrounds--is difficult to find in detail. However, by writing *sogam*, we can analyze the thought formation processes one by one and discover the problems that permeate the thought process. In the process of thinking, we may discover our true self. We can discover our authentic self in the category of thoughts that have been overlooked like the unconscious mind, and furthermore, we can find the sinful nature engraved in that image. Discovering ourselves, especially discovering our existence before God, the Creator, can be said to be one of the most important things one can do through *sogam*. We think the reason for writing *sogam* is that we have personal encounters and exchanges with God, and that we have a relationship with God in the midst of asking who God is and who we are, and that we will be led by God's Holy Spirit through this relationship. The purpose of *sogam* is to have a relationship with God. Encounters with God leads us to a new world. We will be guided from the visible world to the invisible world, and we will be guided from the lacking and broken world to a world full of thanks

and praise. Writing *sogam* brings true satisfaction to our souls and a great help to our mental healing because listening to, writing, and presenting *sogam* can be highly therapeutic. The meaning of “healing” in this context is more than breaking free from problematic behaviors to become a functioning member of society; rather, it is about movement from being spiritually lost to spiritually found. Through listening to the experiences of other sharers, *sogam* enables people to discover and reinterpret the meaning of their own lives so that they recognize their existence as a “lost person” before God. Healing then occurs when people turn to God and are “found,” rescued from a life of destruction.

A second aspect of the personal level of *sogam* is that it gives us the power to live on the basis of our spiritual ideals. In other words, an individual who has been healed internally can continue to experience the spiritual world practically through *sogam*. Even if we are found in God once, we will not remain as a “perfect” spiritual person until the moment we die. In a finite and tempting world, individuals are constantly challenged to return to the path of the lost. *Sogam* may give strength to fight that temptation by helping us accept God's Word as a real here-and-now rather than past events. Unlike the limited and finite world, individuals make decisions through *sogam* that deal with the infinite love of God and spiritual reality. This decision through *sogam* is not made by force, but allows individuals who have realized spiritual reality to voluntarily empty themselves and commit themselves. The difference between a *sogam* and a simple story or sentiment is that it has a decision or determination to act. What the lost prodigal son in Luke's gospel did when he realized his miserable existence, which was worse than that of a pig, was to go back home and ask his father for forgiveness: “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (NIV, Luke 15:18). Just as this determination helped him to be restored into his father's arms, so, through the use of *sogam*, each individual can draw closer to God. As a result of this strength of determination and God's endless grace, the *sogam* writer will mature enough to be more familiar with the found ones than the lost ones.

Third, *sogam* may make possible an altruistic life where one risks one's life for the insignificant others living in a sinful world beyond one's dimension. In a selfish and ruthless world, who would sacrifice themselves for the worthless sinners? (Seok et al., 2021). But Jesus came to this world for insignificant sinners and sacrificed even his own life. In a selfish and materialistic world, people live in pain and suffer, but the reality is that they also harm others unwittingly, because of the wounds they have received. However, believers who accept the sacrificial story of Jesus as their own story will hope not only for their own redemption, but also for the redemption of the entire human race. Due to the nature of sin, one cannot be completely altruistic. However, in the Christian perspective, the driving force to live a life for others comes from Christ, and the *sogam* is a good tool to help with this introspection and change.

In the collective level, *sogams* carry influential aspects that impact the larger community of believers. *Sogams* help maintain the community of faith through upholding the tradition of faith-filled interpretation of the Bible. A *sogam* is a story about an individual's life, but it does not end with a simple story, but has a surprising impact. First, *sogam* writing maintains the community of faith in Jesus by allowing the interpretation of Jesus' story through faith. It is through the story of Jesus that the Christian community can have a continuous self-identity despite the constant repetition of the process of birth and death of individuals constituting the Christian community. The core concepts of abstract Christianity, such as sin, repentance, regeneration, salvation, and the kingdom of God, are reduced to our story through the process of interpreting the story of Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. When the story of Jesus is applied not as a story of 2000 years ago, but as a real story that is relevant to us here and now, the story of our life is structured based on Christian truth and we have an identity as a member of the Christian community. For example, the experience of the Triune God, the mystery of Christianity, never happens by chance. In order to understand, realize, and experience the language of the mystery, it must be assimilated to the environment (community, church) that speaks the “mystery” to some extent. The mystery of the bread and wine, symbolizing the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and the symbolic mystery of the cross are also possible when assimilated into the faith community that speaks the language of the mystery. This process of assimilation is possible when the mystery language is continuously explained and told. Also when the mystery story is read or heard, the viewer or listener can see that bread or wine has a spiritual meaning beyond the physical bread or wine dimension. When we hear the story of a person's spiritual experience through *sogam*, we may first realize the spiritual reality through our feelings and intuitions. After that experience, we may use our mental logic and analysis to be aware of the spiritual mystery. The *sogam*, as one of the ways to interpret the story

of Jesus as a current story, plays an important role in the maintenance of the community of faith in Jesus.

Second, *sogam* writing provide a strong cohesion to the UBF community. In this organic small group, individuals increase their loyalty to the group through self-disclosure and gain a strong sense of belonging and solidarity. When the loyalty of the members of each small group gathers, the solidarity of the whole community becomes very strong in the end. UBF members take pride in the goals, direction, and identity of the community and solidify their identity as members of the UBF community. It is a natural result that such a highly cohesive community actively pursues goals and is functionally very effective.

Third, *sogam* writing lead people to make decisions. People are often deeply moved by hearing others express their changed lives through their *sogams*. The experiences of other people reveals how vain the power, wealth, and outward values seen in this world are, and how precious the kingdom of Jesus is, though an invisible spiritual reality. The confession of a person like Moses, who abandoned the Egyptian princship in order to obtain a spiritual reward, gives a great impression to us who live obsessed with the things of a finite world. However, it does not end with these emotions; we also add to our desire to know the spiritual world. Inspirations that we would not have known or had been hidden if we had not heard them, insights that accompany the imagination, realizations, and spiritual powers to sublimate everyday experiences are awakened through *sogam*. Thus, *sogam* writing allows many readers and hearers to make faith decisions similar to the *sogam* sharers. When autobiographical faith stories are continuously written and told in this way, each of us not only enjoys a rich spiritual life in the present, but also the abundant spirituality that is reborn every day horizontally for our contemporaries and vertically for our posterity. It will continue to spread beautifully.

Fourth, *sogam* writing plays the role of education and training for nurturing UBF Christian leaders. This function may perhaps be the strongest advantage of the UBF *sogam*. UBF lay members are trained to write sermons every week at the level of a pastor of a general church. In particular, UBF's "Sunday sermon *sogam*" is very impressive. "Daily bread *sogam*" writing is used to check each UBF member's sanctification process every day; "Life *sogam*" are shared at summer retreats or public gatherings, giving many members more emphasis on instilling hope, such as encouragement and comfort. However, the "Sunday sermon *sogam*" examines each member's faith by carefully studying the text of the sermon heard on Sunday from beginning to end with the attitude of the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether this was the case or not (Acts 17:11). This *sogam* is similar to a UBF pastor's sermon manuscript. It is different only to say that each person's life is explicitly applied to the Bible text. Those who have written "Sunday sermon *sogam*" for more than five years at UBF have almost the same understanding of the Bible and intellectual ability to write sermons as those who have received a Master of Divinity education at a seminary. A UBF leader has aptly pointed out this function in his doctoral dissertation:

The Sunday sermon *sogam* content used in [UBF] is not just a short story that applies to [all UBF members]. One writes one's message in one's own words through the entire text as if one had become a messenger. It is a task that requires almost the same amount of time and energy as a pastor to write a sermon. However, the difference from the Sunday message is that there are additional points to make a new decision and live according to the point of repentance, learning, correction . . . When one writes one's Sunday sermon *sogam* . . . he will experience the subtlety and freshness of the Word that one has never felt before. And one [is ready] to stay up all night writing one's message *sogam* (Ahn, 2008).

Negative Aspects

Although there are many beneficial aspects of *sogam* for establishing personal and community identity and growing faith, there are certain areas in which caution should be exercised. First of all, there is the danger of insincerity and dishonesty. *Sogam* moves listeners' hearts because of the honesty and sincerity of its sharers—it takes courage to be truthful. No one wants to reveal in detail their shameful past and errors. Conversely, everyone wants to show that they are valuable and worthy of respect. There can be a temptation to embellish, hide or alter the truth to make the speaker look better than he or she is. However, this is like a mask, and the more they try to hide

their true self, the more hypocrisy and false duality arises, thus producing greater inner tension and conflict—the opposite of the regeneration and healing made possible through sincere *sogam*. In addition, when writing *sogam* people must avoid the desire to please people over God. The reason Brainard's *Diary* is so impressive is that it is a personal confession written in secret before God. *Sogam* should not be artificial and manipulative but rather natural and from the heart. If it is written and shared to please people, it becomes a kind of show rather than a true confession, and its vitality decreases.

Sogam writers also must be wary of false heroism and the attractive results it can bring. Humans like stories of success and victory. Such stories can easily inspire people to join a group, but the idolization of heroic stories means that the uneducated, disabled, poor, crippled, and those who think that they do not have much to offer (the “non-heroes”) cannot participate freely. Choosing tangible fruits rather than sound processes or intentions inevitably results when stories of false or exaggerated heroism are disproportionately emphasized (Jeong, et al., 2021). Individual human beings then easily disappear. From the beginning UBF has tried to avoid this pitfall by emphasizing the role of one-on-one Bible study and small groups that focus on helping and building one person at a time rather than impressive and large-scale ministries.

Finally, care must be taken so that the vulnerability of *sogam* is not abused. Power should not be exercised over others through the faults they confess in *sogam*. Neither should personal stories be spread to other places so that personal privacy is ignored. It is easy for a spiritually weaker person to stumble when such things occur. Furthermore, mistrust and discord takes root within the group and create a turbulent atmosphere. Just as God completely forgives the faults of sinners, listeners should accept others' faults with an attitude of prayerful respect and love rather than judgmentalism. Love covers many faults and enables a community to do beautiful works (Kim, 2021; Seok et al., 2021).

There are certain prerequisites in creating a good *sogam* that avoids the traps described above, but none is more important than deep meditation on the Word over an extended period of time. The time to write *sogam* should be a time of holistic happiness, love, freedom, joy, and communion with God that stems from this careful reflection. *Sogam* without in-depth meditation, reflection, and understanding of the Words carries the risk of rigidity and formalization. It then becomes like a weekly assignment—superficial and perhaps intellectually satisfying but without the emotion and grace of meeting God. Deep contemplation of the Bible several times throughout the day, week, or month, however, results in an autobiographical story of faith that conveys deep emotions and grace that moves listeners and encourages spiritual growth.

When he looked back on his life twelve years after his baptism, Augustine began to write the *Confessions*, a record of human agony, longing for the truth, and human shame and despair. Having reached maturity as a Christian, he wanted to make a sincere confession of faith in God through telling his life's story. Although the *Confessions* explores the abyss of human nature closely, its purpose was not to impress others or expose human sinfulness but rather to glorify God through confession. The ultimate goal of *sogam* should be the same.

Conclusion

A *sogam* is a personal, ordinary, everyday autobiographical faith story written by UBF members. It is a truly personal and confessional record of self-reflection before God, and describes an intimate conversation between oneself and God. In many ways, *sogam* can reveal a very special and eternal truth concretely. Rather than the difficult writings of any philosopher or theologian, *sogam* writing makes UBF people feel, imagine, and experience the invisible God tangibly. Through *sogam*, the story of Jesus in the Bible is incorporated and reinterpreted as a personal story of the here-and-now rather than a past event. The power of the amazing story of Jesus applies to our lives just as it was when the Bible was written in the past.

The UBF *sogam* is mainly used in small groups, and healing elements such as inspiration of hope, universality, group cohesion, interpersonal learning, and imitation behavior are found. In these healing elements, the theological structure of “lost and found” are clearly understood among the UBF members. The fruits of UBF *sogam* are diverse, but personally, people not only receive inner healing but strength to live according to their convictions. Thus, they not only take care of themselves, but also help others to live an altruistic life. If we look at the influence of writings such as *sogam* on the community, it helps to maintain and inherit the Christian faith, strengthens the

solidarity of the UBF community, and encourages and inspires another *sogam* to be written. For a good *sogam*, it is necessary to meditate deeply for a long time, and the prerequisite is that it should be written honestly before God. Otherwise, there is a risk that the *sogam* can become formalized, rigid, and artificial. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that false heroism or commercialism is not pursued through *sogam* sharing.

The UBF *sogam* is a mirror of the self in that individuals discover who they are and then form and establish themselves in the spiritual community. As they listen to and write *sogam*, they discover that they are like the lost prodigal son and experience being "found" and restored as a child of God. *Sogam* has been shared vitally in UBF small groups, producing spiritual integrity in the UBF movement. No doubt it has been a strong bond that has united diverse UBF members into one strong community. It appears to be a healthy discipline and a good tool for maintaining Christian spirituality.

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