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South Korea Doubles Pastor Son Hyun-bo Sentence Over Sermon Election Campaigning

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"On 11 November 2026, the Busan High Court sentenced Pastor Son Hyun-bo, senior pastor of Segyero Church in Busan, to one year in prison, suspended for three years, for election-related statements made during church services and religious gatherings"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

On 11 November 2026, the Busan High Court sentenced Pastor Son Hyun-bo, senior pastor of Segyero Church in Busan, to one year in prison, suspended for three years, for election-related statements made during church services and religious gatherings. The appeals court doubled his first-trial sentence of six months in prison, suspended for one year, agreeing with prosecutors that the original punishment was too lenient. Son says he will appeal to the Supreme Court.

A pastor stood in his own pulpit, spoke about the candidates on the ballot, and told his congregation how to think about them. In South Korea, that can be a crime. The question now facing the country's churches is a sharp one: where does preaching end and campaigning begin - and who gets to draw that line?

Son was indicted in September 2025 on charges of violating the Public Official Election Act and the Local Education Autonomy Act. Prosecutors said he endorsed Jeong Seung-yoon, a conservative candidate for Busan superintendent of education, during Segyero Church services ahead of the by-election on 2 April 2025, and made remarks aimed at defeating a specific candidate. The court also identified several instances of illegal campaigning during the presidential election period in May and June 2025.

The appeals court rejected almost all of Son's arguments. It dismissed his claims of factual error, legal misunderstanding and unfair sentencing. It also rejected his request to refer the election law to the Constitutional Court for review, turning down his argument that the law violates freedom of religion and expression.

Son's defence was simple, and it is the argument many pastors will recognise: his sermons and prayers were acts of religious practice, not politics. The court disagreed. It found that his remarks amounted to electioneering aimed at helping specific candidates win or lose, and that he had used his influence as a senior pastor to campaign among hundreds to thousands of congregants.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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