

2018 Founder's Day Celebration

Have Faith in God

Paul Choi

Hello, my name is Paul Choi from St. Louis UBF. It was like yesterday when I left for St. Louis from here in Chicago, but now it has been almost 15 years. I believe that most of us here know me, but for the sake of those who don't, I will introduce myself briefly. I was born in Kyung Ju Korea two years before UBF started. From childhood I liked drawing and painting and I was known as one of the most talented students. I also enjoyed playing soccer, so my friends called me 'Pele' because of my dark skin. Before I thought about my life seriously I was a happy-go-lucky boy under responsible and hardworking parents. But when I was 18, I had to make a decision for my future career. At that time, my father's business went bankrupt and I had to give up my dream to go to college. I applied for a position at LG and began work as a salary man. Working at a big company with regular income, it seemed to me that life might go well. But my desire for college and for a more meaningful life than that of a salary man, drove me to seek a new life direction. After reading the English novel "The Moon and Sixpence" I decided to enter an art college because the artist life seemed to be the most meaningful and valuable one to my eyes. So I worked hard and entered a prestigious art college in Korea. I thought that I achieved my goal to be an artist expecting a meaningful and better life. I was proud of myself, so I decorated myself with a company badge on one side and a college badge on the other. Wearing badges was a trend of those days.

However, my life did not go as well as I had expected. Emptiness and meaninglessness loomed over my heart like dark clouds. I was not happy even though I achieved my goal as an art student and had plenty of drinking buddies. One day I witnessed the death of my friend, who had died at the mountain and had been carried into his rental house. While I was watching over his dead body, I thought about the meaning of life more seriously. Why do people work hard in this world if death is the end of everything? Why do I have to struggle to survive by competing with my classmates, if death destroys all my efforts? If I die right now like my friend, where am I supposed to go?" At his burial site, I cried with many tears, not only for my friend but also for myself. It was a rainy day, but I did not know if it was rain or my tears which were flowing down my cheeks.

I decided to know the truth and to find the way of salvation for my life. I went to church with my friends to know more about God. I went up to a prayer mountain by

myself to find something truthful and to gain spiritual enlightenment. Despite my bone-crushing effort, there was nothing clear in my mind. I despaired. I made a conclusion that I couldn't know anything by myself and that life was just eating and drinking for today without any awareness about tomorrow. In 1984, when I was sophomore in the art college, I was diagnosed with Tuberculosis because of my reckless life. Heavy soju drinking and smoking cigarettes without eating regular meals brought on this sickness. I had to quit my school and went down to my hometown for medical treatment. I was desperate for my salvation and answers to life's questions.

It was the spring of 1985, the season of warm sunlight and blossoming flowers, but my heart was still dark and heavy. I felt like I would be suffocated if I would go back to my old wild life. As someone has said, the darkest night is the night for stars to twinkle brightest. God began to illuminate my dark heart with a great light. At that time my girl friend who studied the Bible with missionary Joan Kim invited me to the Summer Bible Conference. At that conference Jesus came to me personally with Mark 8:29, "*What about you? Paul... Who do you say I am*" I confessed that Jesus is the Christ, my Lord and Savior, who died for my sins and rose again for my eternal life. Through this conference I learned that my life problem was the separation from God who is the source of life and that it resulted in my meaninglessness, emptiness, and slavery under the power of death. Since I accepted Jesus as my Christ and Lord, the joy of salvation and hope for eternal life in God's kingdom filled my soul and body. My thirst was quenched and my wandering was over. I decided to live a shepherd life based on Jesus' command from John 21:15.

Now Jesus became my breath and my sunshine. He is the meaning and purpose of my life. My sudden and dramatic change shocked all my classmates, drinking friends, and family members. In the past I was a sorrowful and fatalistic art student who lamented the meaninglessness of life. But now I became a joyful fisher of men and Bible teacher in my art college. From that time, God used me as an Abraham of faith in my art college for five years until he sent me to USA as a missionary, after I married Missionary Mary Choi in 1989.

From 1989 to 1994 God used my family to pioneer Pierce College in Northridge LA California. Then he sent us to Chicago UBF where God's servant Dr. Samuel Lee and many precious heroes of faith were serving the Lord. It was not my first encounter with Dr. Samuel Lee in Chicago. I met him before, hearing his John's gospel message when I was in Korea. At that time I was struggling because of my improper relationship with my girl friend. I despaired whenever I fell back to the same mistakes again and again. I was like Simon Peter who disowned Jesus and went back to his former life as a

fisherman, but didn't catch any fish. I despaired of my weakness and cried out with a deep sense of failure. At that time I had a chance to read Dr. Lee's message about the Risen Jesus who visited Simon Peter to reinstate him. In his message Dr. Lee said, "There is no despair and failure in Jesus Christ." This word touched my heart with new hope and new strength. Indeed there is no despair and failure in Jesus Christ because he died for my sins and rose again from the dead. In all things God works for my good in spite of my mistakes and weakness. This message became my life motto and the philosophy of my ministry.

One young missionary who visited Chicago UBF asked Dr. James Kim about who Dr. Samuel Lee was. Dr. James Kim paused in seconds and answered him, "It is difficult to describe who he is with a single sentence." Once when I visited Dr. Samuel Lee's house on an errand, Grace A. Lee told me, "Even though I have lived with him for 40 years, I still don't know who he is." So, I have limitations when I testify about Dr. Samuel Lee, but I will share what I learned from him after I working with him as an intern shepherd and a young missionary for my last 10 years in Chicago

Above all, Dr. Lee helped me to challenge impossible situations by faith so that I might experience the power of God. When my family moved from LA to Chicago, Dr. Lee welcomed me greatly saying, "A great servant of God came to Chicago." At that time I did not know what he meant. I was fearful instead of joyful upon hearing his words. I asked him, "I came to you to receive spiritual training. Please train me." In fact, at that time I was ambitious and passionate as a young missionary, but I was not prepared and disciplined. Dr. Lee answered, "No one can train anyone. Each one receives training from God himself." Then God began to train me through Dr. Lee starting with making Bible study notes, co-working with Dr. Joseph Chung, fishing, mowing, painting, nailing, and even tuck-pointing. I have never experienced hammering before I moved to Chicago. But Dr. Samuel Lee called me not long after I came to Chicago and asked me to fix his drawer in his desk in his office. He asked me to enlarge the drawers. I had never been asked, or even seen how, to enlarge drawers. But I couldn't say "I can't" because I knew what he meant. So, I collected all the drawers from his desk and put them in the boiler room. I didn't know what to do. I only looked up to heaven and sighed. I held one of the drawers and prayed. "Lord, please save me!" God answered my prayer. I asked advice from the experienced senior missionaries and asked employees in Home Depot. When I finished the work, Dr. Lee rejoiced saying, "God released me from my agony of 20 years." But at that time, I did not know his compliment was but a prelude for the training to come, with much bigger tasks.

In the summer of 1998 Chicago UBF purchased a four-unit apartment building across the street. Since the former owner died without leaving an heir, the tenants didn't take care of the building. The inside of the building was like a haunted house. Dr. Samuel Lee called me one day and asked me to fix it all by myself. How can I fix a four unit apartment all by myself? I got mad and wanted to run away to Niagara Falls like Jonah. What Dr. Lee meant was hiring some professionals and working together with them. He taught me how to manage workers and the building. But half with an angry spirit and half with a reluctant mind, I began to work all by myself, starting from grinding the hard wood floor, then patching holes in the wall, installing new kitchen cabinets and floor tiles, and so on. At the same time, I had to have 12 weekly one to one Bible studies as an intern shepherd and bring a certain number of students to worship service as a vice fellowship leader. When I took a shower, I found many hairs on the floor of the bathtub. I was afraid of losing all my hair like missionary Moody Kim and missionary Paul Chung. When I saw missionary Paul Chung's wedding picture, he had a lot of hair, but when I met him in Chicago, he was like the prophet Elisha. When I finished remodeling the building, Dr. Lee invited me to lunch at his house, and said, "Well done. But it is not enough for you. You must learn how to build a house."

Missionary Mary and I had married in 1989, but we didn't have any children. In the 1990's in Chicago UBF we often had chicken parties to celebrate the birth of new babies and newly-wed couples. At that time some younger missionaries gave birth to many children. Elder Young Lee once said that he just held his wife's hand and had five children. Whenever chicken parties were held, I wanted to hide myself behind the balcony. Dr. Samuel Lee always showed his compassion on my barren situation. In fact, missionary Mary miscarried a few times, so I thought that it was impossible for me to have children. One day Dr. Lee asked me about my age. "How old are you?" I answered like an invalid man in John 5. "I am 38 years old." He shouted, "What? 38 years old? What have you done thus far? You are so lazy that you can't have a child. Tomorrow go and adopt a child." I wanted to talk back like Jacob, "Am I in the place of God?" But, I repented of my laziness and began to work harder than before. Once my wife missionary Mary was passing by in the basement, Dr. Lee shouted at her in a loud voice, "Have faith in God!" Later she confessed me that it was like thunder that woke her up spiritually. By God's grace with the prayers of Dr. Lee and all the coworkers in Chicago UBF and around the world, my family had twin children, one boy and one girl on Feb 8th, 1998. People said that they were miracle babies. Right after my babies were discharged from the hospital, I brought them to Dr. Lee for his blessing. Dr. Lee put his hands on them and prayed saying, "God, now I am released from the burden of my heart." I deeply felt how God's servant Dr. Lee had compassion on me and my family. Now my daughter

Grace Choi is a junior in Washington University in St. Louis, studying pre-med with a full-ride scholarship, and my son Sam studies computer science at St. Louis University with a scholarship. Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Dr. Lee, for your prayer for me and my family.

Secondly, Dr. Lee always wanted to give his best to God. One day he told me, “Paul Choi, I am willing to do whatever if it pleases God.” Not long after I came to Chicago, Dr. Lee asked me to make a wooden cross for the podium. So, I made an oak wood cross and glossed it with varnish. A week later he called me and asked me to paint the cross with red paint saying, “The red cross is the symbol of Jesus Christ.” So I painted it with crimson red. A week later he called me again and said, “Peel out the red paint and bring it back to original color. During the worship service people didn’t listen to my message, but only looked at the cross.” I was speechless at his unpredictability. I thought about why God’s servant wanted to change the cross week by week. Dr. Lee wanted to give his best to God as God’s servant. For him mediocrity did not work. He taught me how to give my best to God and how to provide the best environment for God’s ministry. The cross on the podium was upgraded and finally replaced with a bigger cross on the sanctuary. At the same time, the cross of my assistant work with Dr. Lee also grew bigger and heavier.

As we know, Dr. Lee loved the word of God. He often fixed his Bible by wrapping its hard cover with leather. He taught me how to wrap it with leather. I made numerous mistakes and repeated trials and errors until he was satisfied with my work. One day I was proud of myself after wrapping a Bible successfully. But the next morning my Bible disappeared. Dr. Lee tore it and began to wrap it again with leather. He didn’t say anything to me, but I knew what he meant. He always wanted me to do my best and to give my best not something mediocre to God.

Third, Dr. Lee was a gentle shepherd. Unlike the previous two points, I spent a considerable amount of time deciding on this part because I wanted to testify about Dr. Lee’s influence on my ministry in St. Louis as well as my personal relationship with God. I still remember his mindfulness and responsibility as God’s servant and shepherd especially for an undisciplined person like me. For the last 10 years of my life with him, I remember how he humbly served each person according to their own situation and personal needs with compassion and gentleness. Many sick and wounded overseas missionaries and shepherds were invited to his office for rest and spiritual recovery. His office was like a recovery room in the hospital. Missionary Sarah B. Choi was the charge nurse. Those who rested in his office were healed, and recovered both spiritually and physically. In 1997 Chicago UBF was busy with preparing for the MSU International

Conference by expanding the space under the balcony to accommodate more worshipers. Our young missionaries worked until late at night and I collapsed due to dehydration. I was hospitalized in his office until I fully recovered. He cared for me like a gentle mother who took care of her sick child.

Now I have run an independent ministry in St. Louis for almost 15 years. His tender care and gentle mindfulness helped me know how to take care of co-workers and God's flock of sheep in St. Louis. Patience for the sick and forbearance for the weak has become my ministry direction. When I decided to move to Chicago from LA, someone said that I was going into the den of a tiger. He meant that Dr. Lee was a tiger. But, Dr. Lee was sometimes like a meek lamb, who became a man of sorrow and familiar with suffering. He was an ordinary man, but a man with the heart of God, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and strong gospel faith in Jesus Christ. He once said to me, "People say that I am an able man. But I am not. I am a responsible man." He taught me and showed me who a responsible servant of God is through his life. I also remember what he said. "A servant of God should have three Ss: He should be a good shepherd, a good Bible scholar, and a good steward." Indeed, Dr. Lee lived as a good shepherd, a good Bible Scholar, and a good Steward for God's ministry.

Two days before he was called to heaven, he suddenly called me to his home and said, "I want to bless you and pray for you." Then, he prayed for me, my children, my family, and my future ministry. At that time I didn't know why he had prayed for me like this. But now I know that it was his farewell blessing for me. Now he is in heaven, where there is no persecution, no injury, no pain, but the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. I miss him a lot. He often appears in my dreams, at least twice a year, doing the same things he did before when he was alive. Thank you, Dr. Lee, my spiritual father and shepherd. I look forward to seeing you not in a dream, but in heaven!