

My Life, My Faith

"Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." (2Ti 2:7)

I'd like to testify to God's grace through three great turning points in my life in Korea, and share my tent-making missionary life in America since November 25, 1980.

I. My birth and childhood

I was born in 1951 during Korean War after my father's death. I have two older brothers, the oldest of whom passed away, and two older sisters and one younger sister. Growing up with my widowed mother, I had a bad memory of a temporary father, who broke peace in my home whenever he came. I was self-conscious, being ashamed of my mother's "wine house" (tavern) business though I drank sweet rice wine to quench my thirst and did shameful bad boy stuff. School and church were my only escape and comfort. One day I refused to run an errand for mother because of my idea of "dirty money" and stopped eating which broke her heart into tears. I hated to see the temporary father's coming because of their violent fighting about money. One day when I came home from my elementary school, I saw him lying down and quarreling with mother sitting near at his feet. When I saw him kicking mother on the chest, I could no longer control myself and ran into the kitchen, picked up a big kitchen knife and ran back toward him. He stood up and came toward me. We were standing against each other for a while, and then I dropped the knife and burst into loud crying, running outside with bare feet. After this event, I rarely saw him coming or fighting with mother. The only good memory I had about him was once when I suffered from some kind of oppression or nightmare, he was there. I began to learn Karate and got a black belt when I was 8th grade. Ping-Pong and Baduk (Go) were my favorite recreation. My only goal in life was to study hard to be successful to make my mother happy, freeing her from the job sufferings. She was my only love and idol in my heart for a long time. I was her pride because of my good son image and school reputation. I remember struggling against my sleepiness during study as my new enemy, and went outside looking up to starry sky, making a new determination to be successful when I was only a little boy. I remember living with my grand-parents and later with my late oldest brother for a while to find a better study environment.

II. Beginning of my faith journey and life of mission

At the end of my 4th grade, one snowy night, God sent an angel of a lady to my humble house to lead me to Guang-Chun Baptist church, and her brother, who was a teacher and private tutor of groups, helped me get into a private middle school with scholarship. My two sisters and I began to go to church regularly. The church life led me into a conflict between my hatred against my enemy father and Jesus' teaching about loving enemies. I became more serious about the gospel but couldn't accept the message of Jesus' love on the cross from my heart even though I became youth group leader and accepted the pastor's calling to go to Baptist seminary in Daejeon after college and was baptized to live a new life. On August 8, 1968, I was freshman in Hong-Sung high school and was helping with Sunday school. I was wondering about my future direction. It was my first time experience with a decisive moment. Until then my ambition was to become

successful like a lawyer, diplomat or prime-minister with honor and power. But gradually I compromised my ambition to more practical level to live an easy and comfortable life by entering SNU to study engineering to make money. During Sunday school break time, I happened to read John 14:6 and got stuck with the word—"the way". How can Jesus be the way? The road? I was thinking literally. Then I saw Pastor Shin coming nearby and asked him. Pastor explained to me about the way, the truth, and the life. And then he called me to go to seminary to become Lord's servant. That very moment I felt a strong pillar of wind coming into my heart and I was set to follow the direction and did not envy even being the President. One month later, I confessed my weak faith before the congregation and was baptized by the pastor in a river. I felt a new life and new world. One year later my pastor sent me with three others including my younger sister to national Baptist youth conference. It was during August 4-5, 1969 at Maepoe retreat center near Daejeon city. I was unwilling to go at first because I was busy-minded with my school study for college exam preparation but I could not refuse because of sense of responsibility and respect for him, and anyway I was playing chess when I heard the news. With many books to study, I set out for the conference place by train. *A small surrender began to make a miracle in my heart.* (1Jn 2:15-17) When I got on the train I felt a heavenly peace and began to sing and pray by myself almost unceasingly. The train was very crowded, so I felt awkward to stand among pressing people, struggling to overcome my impure thoughts. By the time we got to the place I felt my heart pure and realized that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all (1Jn 1:5, Mt 5:8). The bell was ringing for opening service and I felt strong faith to *worship the living God* for the first time. My faith was based on Jesus' promise that he would be among two or three gathered in his name (Mt 18:20). And the place was filled with hundred times of the number. I felt assurance that the Holy Spirit would work among the meeting (Heb 11:6). After a gospel sermon by Pastor Ahn, we were singing a hymn about Jesus' cross. Suddenly I felt (saw) heaven open and heard the voice saying, "*I died for you. It is an unchangeable FACT. Why are you slow to believe it ? (Why don't you believe it?)*" When I heard the broken hearted voice, I could not but weep because of my unbelief and his one sided love for me (Jn 16:8). My heart became heaven itself! O, what a blessed eye-opening moment it was! The hatred against my enemy father melted away and the love of God was poured into my heart (Rom 5:4). Next day I sang all day long and knelt down and prayed, "Lord, If you want, I am willing to go to Africa as a missionary." I kissed the Bible and began to read it more. And later I found the voice written in Lk 24:25, which led me wonder who could have written the Bible this way unless they had experienced God's revelation. This was my first great turning point because my heart have been captivated by Jesus' love. For next two years I rang the church bell for early morning prayer meeting, and started to read the Bible 10 chapters daily before going to school according to the pastor's advice, and tried to memorize a key verse each day. But my faith was not rooted in the word of God until I made an eternal choice in 1973 when I was junior in college. And this gospel faith was again confirmed through my utter sinful failure in 1980 and God's amazing grace of forgiveness.

The second great turning point was when I made an eternal choice to believe the Bible (Jn 1:4; 1Co 1:21). I entered the Soong-Jeon University (now Han-Nam) with top-prize scholarship with a goal to enter Baptist Seminary after graduation according to the direction of my legendary late pastor Shin, who being denomination president several times arranged my scholarship with Dean of the Seminary. My roommate told me about UBF and I went there by myself as a freshman. I began to study the Bible one-to-one with my sophomore shepherd, a new Christian (now Elder Abraham Kim in all nations church). Through his patient love I attended Genesis Bible school lectured by Pastor Peter Suh. Through Gn 12:3 sense of history, I could overcome my spiritual pride and began to participate in God's history, serving Daily Bread Department and came to change my seminary direction to tent-making missionary vision, which I shared with my pastor who blessed me though he wanted to make me his successor. It was June 4, 1973 when s. Peter Suh delivered life symposium message based on Jn 1:4. After listening to the message, I felt all my house of faith based on sand was falling apart. I began to struggle to answer the challenge. "IN HIM was life." Do you really believe this? I never gave one verse such a long time thought. Almost for that whole month even in a bus I couldn't help thinking about life seriously for the first time in my life. I lost desire to continue school, let alone pursuing a career as a diplomat or lawyer. I felt everything was meaningless. I was walking through the valley of despair, not finding any exit. In short I became an existential philosopher on my own with a Christian background. When I saw the solemn reality of death, even the beautiful scene of a couple on the green grass with smiling faces looked very sorrowful to me. I became sarcastic to them, saying to myself, "How can anyone be really happy and laugh in the face of men's despairing destiny?" I cried out in despair, "O, man, where are you going? Could you tell me?" Of course I didn't expect any positive answer. I only wanted to share my despair and maybe gain their sympathy. This was the result of my search for meaning of life outside the Bible. One day God led me to open the big Bible in my university library and my eyes happened to fall on the book of Ecclesiastes. It starts with the sense of problem I was experiencing at that point: "*Meaningless, meaningless, everything is utterly meaningless under the sun...It is like chasing after the wind.*" I couldn't help reading through until I read its conclusion, which was to remember my Creator and fear him and obey his commands in the light of his judgment. This is the duty of man. My question was if there was God. I was in Doubting Castle at this point of my Christian life, captured by Giant DESPAIR. With this sense of unbelief God led me to read another book about "faith and wisdom of life" (Our Faith) written by Emil Brunner. In the book one sentence struck me. The author defines faith as decision-making rather than changeable feelings as I used to think. He says that Christian faith is an *eternal choice*. That's it. I was getting ready to make that eternal choice without which I felt I could not live any longer. I needed to be hot or cold (Rev 3:15). Based on God's grace I had experienced during my Christian life, I could come to make positive decision to believe the Bible as the absolute Word of God and live by it. This had been God's calling through many occasions whenever I fell into doubts. But I strongly held on to my own understanding and reason and feelings rather than God's word. I saw the contradiction of my sand-based faith and came to wholeheartedly accept the call to believe the Bible as the only way of life and meaning. Alternate choice was only sin and death without meaning of life. Through writing testimony sentence by sentence with my

whole heart I surrendered my will, intellect and feeling to the authority of the Bible, praying and hoping that God would help me to understand the truth of the Bible better, even without which I would not regret my eternal choice. By the time I finished the decision-making testimony, I felt light shining into my mind and couldn't understand why I had to struggle so hard to believe. It seemed natural to believe. I was overwhelmed with absolute conviction. The first thing I did was that I ran to one of my Bible students, asking, "Can you tell me why you can not believe the Bible?" Since this event on, the Bible has become my solid rock on which my faith is being built. New power and meaning and sense of world mission began to rule my heart and I knew this was life itself. It had seemed impossible for me to overcome my unbelief and doubts that made me powerless and apathetic. But by the grace of God and his servants' intercessions, I found this glorious freedom to believe and began positive Christian life to serve world mission vision. Embracing the world, I began to follow the Lord Jesus. It was this experience of eternal choice that I feel indebted to campus young people no matter how old I would be. God began to refine my faith through Mk 8:34 and Mt 6:33, but I fell into temptation at the height of my faith journey after my marriage.

The third great turning point was when I saw Jesus on the cross after my utter sinful failure in 1980 (Jn3:14-16; Num.25; 2Sa 12:7). At the beginning of 1974, I received Jn 12:24 as the key verse to my "holy year". We prayed earnestly for the 1st international conference in Switzerland, where m.Grace who later became my wife met Jesus personally through Jn 4:26, "I am he." Her testimony was published on a newsletter through which I came to write a letter to her as world mission coworker, especially, for Africa. After my military service and graduation, I got married to m.Grace on May 5, 1979. My honeymoon was like the garden of Eden. One month later she returned to America and I became a missionary candidate. At the peak of God's blessing, testing time came. Triggered by self-support missionary training, I got mad at money and planned a way to conquer it. After writing to my wife not to wait for me to come to America soon, I left the church to pursue my own way to achieve my dreams. But when I found myself in a prostitute house, grieving the Holy Spirit in me, I was disgusted over myself and all my good-sounding plan. I hit the rock bottom of my life. I felt like fleeing to an island and kill myself in the end because of my shame and guilt. How could I look at my brothers and sisters and even my wife in America? Sometimes I complained to God why he let me fall into such blame in my life. My self-righteousness was broken but I tried to save it. Sin is real. As Jesus says, whoever commits sins, he is a slave to sin, I could not change my sin-poisoned heart. I felt stronger temptation to go to a prostitute and live a life of hedonism. I was trapped in the power of sin. I felt like a man hit on my head by club. I couldn't think clearly and my conscience became numb. Coming back to my hiding place, I knelt down before God and prayed, admitting that I committed adultery against God's absolute word and made up my mind not to follow temptation, remembering my eternal decision to live by the Bible. The 3rd day was Sunday worship which I attended after 5 months of running away from the church. I couldn't look at anyone, let alone talking. I was sitting at the back seat with my head down pretending to pray or so. I was listening to the message. It was Jn 8 about the woman caught in adultery. When Jesus said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Leave your life of sin," I felt Jesus' presence right in

front of me and that voice gave me hope for new life. I ran to the mountain park to meditate on the word and could continue to come back to each Sunday worship. The 3rd Sunday (9/21/80) I heard a message about Jesus the good shepherd and I realized I was a hired hand. After worship m.Joan Lee invited me to talk with her at the coffee shop near the center. She said that my wife prayed with her and asked her to meet me as the top priority when she was visiting Korea . She encouraged me to come to America without worrying about my human situations. Then she prayed for me. My fear of unknown gave way to peace. After meeting with her I didn't feel like going back to my lodging house to eat, so I went to a nearby church that evening. The pastor was the same pastor Ahn who preached the gospel sermon when I first heard the voice, "I died for you. It is an unchangeable fact. Why don't you believe it?" That night he was reading Ephesus ch.1 and seemed to be overwhelmed with God's amazing grace. But it didn't touch my heart at all. He said what more could be said but sing praises to God. We sang several hymns. While we were singing a hymn about the love of God's forgiveness, God opened my eyes to look to Jesus on the cross and that moment my heart was touched into quiet tears. By the time I came out of the church, I could hardly walk any longer because of overwhelming love of God's forgiveness. I stopped on the street, holding the big tree in front of the church, there I prayed and surrendered my life to the Lord Jesus my Savior saying, "Lord, I do not deserve to live any longer. I want you to live my life instead." The healing happened at that moment. *My poisoned heart with physical desire and worldly ambition was purified into **one and only desire** to testify to the reality of the gospel of God's grace. I could dare to say that I died on that day to this world. My life belongs to Jesus.* Since then on God restored my mission vision and spiritual health rapidly. The work of God in Daejeon CMI was restored and new revival began after long attacks of Satan through my sin. I heard s.Peter Suh fasted a week because of me. Through this event, I could realize that I am hell-deserving sinner like Zimri in Num.25. That year many young college students in Korea were killed in demonstration and I was sinning greatly against God and brothers and young people in the nation. I was wondering why I was still alive unlike Zimri. I realized it is because Jesus took my place. The cross of Jesus is the power to transform me into a gospel missionary. I couldn't change my sin-sick heart. I needed power from outside, knowing powerlessness of myself in sin. This happened when I saw Jesus on the cross through the eye of faith by the help of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:14,15). When I hit the rock bottom of my life, God revealed his redeeming love through the cross of Jesus. This gave me the absolute conviction of God's unfailing love for repentant sinners. Even though I am far from pleasing God and bearing his grace, I know his unchangeable love for his children. I also know the seed of burning heart of Apostle Paul is deeply planted also in my heart (Acts 20:24). I can be only happy when I please my God and Savior. I pray that God may lead me to live a life worthy of the gospel. God changed this foolish and wicked sinner to a gospel missionary.

III. My tent-making missionary life in America

My lay missionary life in US can be divided into three stages of church ministry: first 12 years in Columbus UBF under m. Peter Chang's leadership, next 8 years of eldership in Living Hope Fellowship with Pastor Jerry King's leadership, and finally establishing Young Timothy Christian Fellowship since 2000. After my messages on Hebrew 11 to

congregation, God sent me to Chicago as a gospel missionary on Nov 25, 1980. It was a snowy day. After spending two months doing the Bible factual study, I was sent to Columbus, Ohio on Feb 4, 1981 to learn a pioneering spirit from m. Peter Chang. The ministry in Columbus UBF was growing, and I was in my spiritual honeymoon, full of new wine in the Spirit. One night I prayed in the attic of the church, saying, "Lord, I want to comfort you. What shall I do?" After a long silence, I heard the small still voice: "Preach the gospel!" That night I could not sleep. From the next day on for several months, I was on the fire, sharing the gospel boldly whomever I met. Three months later, God answered prayers for my job and granted me my heart desire—the very campus job at OSU hospital. While working at night shift as a janitor, my heart was dancing and praying. God's love overwhelmed me and several American students just followed me to study the Bible in spite of my short broken Konglish. I saw God's glory as our church grew rapidly from 20 to 100 in a few years. Our church became the flower of UBF in America. I lived my first 12 years of missionary life very busy, going to full time work and part-time school while devoting myself to ministry, especially seeking lost souls on campus day after day. During this time period God has given me my four precious daughters and one duplex house, and my wife silently took care of them without one complaint while working hard as a RN. I still wonder how she did it. M. Peter resigned in 1992 and went to seminary. Then our church changed its name to Living Hope Fellowship and I was serving as an elder for next eight years. We severed our relationship with Chicago UBF and changed ministry direction toward neighborhood under Pastor Jerry King. Some members left the church and our congregation shrank to about 60 including children. During this second period of my missionary life, I stopped going out to campus but managed internal church affairs. God allowed me to use this time period for self-examination while spending more time with my children and taking them to summer vacations. After much struggle in my heart how to live a good Christian life, God gave me 2 Timothy 2:7 to imitate Apostle Paul's missionary life. After long period of waiting and inner struggling, one Sunday evening in 1999 I was compelled to go to OSU campus and met Joe Walton. The word of God worked powerfully in his heart. A year later when my daughter Joy began OSU, we started a new church with m. Timothy and Hope family after the baptism of Joe and Joy. This was the beginning of Young Timothy Christian Fellowship in the Fall of 2000. Our first worship service was at my new house and then we rented an apartment near campus. Later we decided to save rent for future church building and started to use campus buildings as our worship place until God gave us our church building in 2010 after a time of my great discouragement. Many people came and went (1Cor 15:58). Our church remained small about 30 except some special occasions. God have brought my two sons-in-law Joe and Harrison to join our church to serve the Lord together while Joy serves worship and Mary Sunday school. Last June of 2015 my youngest daughter Ruthie got married to Ben and the historic Southern Baptist Convention happened in Columbus. God has renewed my vision for God's glory. I thank God for my faithful missionary co-workers: m. Timothy and Hope and my wife. I pray that Pastor Harrison and Joe may cowork well and with our missionaries to serve the Lord. My prayer is to honor God through faith to obey the Spirit's guidance with young Timothy vision given by Paul (2Ti 2:7). I pray that Christ may be formed in my unmarried daughter Josephine as well as all CMI 2.0 generation (Gal 4:19).

P. S. Josephine graduated from OSU and got married to Sean during June of 2017, giving my wife such a laugh (Gen 21:6). God has heard our prayers for her. Also the year 2017 is a memorable year since two grand children were born (James and Lily) and I retired from OSU as of Nov. 30 after 36.5 years of work at OSU.

P.S. Josie had her first child – a son Noah in March, 2020 during the Covid restriction.

P.S. Two more grand daughters this year [Ben and Ruthie has 1st baby girl (Margot Jan, 2022) and Josie 2nd baby girl (Sara June, 2022)], total of 8 grandkids (3 boys, 5 girls)

Joseph Lee,

614-306-9918 lee.98@osu.edu

Sr. Pastor Missionary

Retired as Sr. DBA, Ohio State OCIO

IS, MBA, Fisher College of Business

CISA, OSU Internal Audit

ytcf.org

@ytcfColumbus

Jesus: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)