

You will be a blessing

Key Verse: Gen 12:2

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”

Hello! My name is John Seo. Many of you know me as Juan Seo. I was born in Busan, the second largest city in South Korea in 1970. I was a cute boy—this is a photo when I was a child. I grew up in a poor family because my father failed repeatedly in his business. I was a good student, but skeptical about the existence of God because I could not believe that God had created this unjust world. I had a lot of debates with my Christian friends arguing that humans had invented God who does not exist. I wanted to be successful with power and money in the world; hence I applied Law School and got admission from Korea University in Seoul. I was very excited expecting that my dream would come true soon. However, my university was closed during my first semester due to the violent protests of students against Korean military government. I got confused and frustrated from the unexpected college life. Furthermore, I felt very lonely and empty for living alone away from my home.

In those days, a UBF shepherd approached me and invited me to a Bible study with him. I told him that I was not interested in studying the Bible, but he was persistent. Thus, I wrote a contentious essay of two pages titled: “Why I am an atheist,” and delivered it to him saying, “Don’t bother me anymore!” However, he had more compassion on me after reading my essay and did not stop inviting me to the Bible study. Moreover, he invited me to eat Ramyeon (Korean instant noodle) and drink instant coffee. He was gentle and patient, so I accepted to study the Bible with him finally even though I did nothing but debate during the Bible study.

Nevertheless, God had mercy on me and began to work in my heart with the words of God. One day, I joined a Group Bible Study and a word of God struck me saying, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn. 13:34). I hated the unjust world, but Jesus ordered me to love one another. That night when I was alone in my room, I prayed for the first time in my life: “God, if you are love, I want to meet you now.” A few months later I joined Summer Bible Conference where the Holy Spirit worked powerfully in me with the word of God. I could realize that I was a terrible sinner for selfishness, hypocrisy, lustful desire, arrogance, and others. I knelt down before the cross of Jesus and repented with tears.

Then, Jesus forgave my sins saying, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (Jn. 8:11). With this word of God, I could have confidence that Jesus removed all my sins and gave me eternal life with the presence of the Holy Spirit in me. My heart became full of joy and peace and my wounds got healed before the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. A shepherdess who was next to me told me that my face was shining, which was for the grace of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

After then, the direction of my life was changed radically. I refused to be successful in the world as a judge or lawyer and made a decision to be a shepherd of college students. Furthermore, when I heard a mission report from a missionary in Russia, I desired to be a missionary and prayed to be used for world mission. One day after I completed my military service, I was asked if I could go to Venezuela as a missionary. Venezuela was a very unfamiliar country with me; even I did not know that it was in Latin America. But I answered: “Let me pray,” and in the midst of prayer God opened my heart and eyes with Genesis 12:2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” I answered to God saying, “Lord, I will go. Please send me.”

Venezuela is a very beautiful Caribbean country with Angel Falls—the highest waterfall in the world, Caribbean beaches, Miss Universes, the world’s largest oil reserves, and other natural resources. However, most of Venezuelans are suffering for poverty and diseases due to the corruption and socio-economic failure of their socialist government. I arrived in Venezuela as a missionary in 1996 when I was 25 years old. My wife and I are very different in characters: she is happy while I am serious; she is artistic while I am logical; she is relationship oriented while I am goal oriented, and so on. Thus, we had a lot of marriage problems in the beginning. However, God helped us overcome our differences and complement one another. My wife is good at fishing and I am good at caring. When our Bible students got tired of my complexity, they got rest from her simplicity. When we had a conference, my wife made an excellent environment with music, decoration, dancing, and so on while I worked with messages, testimonies, drama, and others. When we became one in God, God blessed us to be fruitful in doing God’s work of salvation in Venezuela. Also God blessed us with two children: Samuel who is studying Pharmacy Doctor program at Northeastern University in Boston and Ana who is studying Nursing program at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

My wife and I invited our Bible students to live together with us in our rented apartment. For a certain period of time, I had to live with five women – my wife and four girl students – in a small apartment. We invited more college students to have dinner together almost every night. We enjoyed Korean and Venezuelan foods, watched TV, and

played games. Sometimes they stayed at my home until midnight because they did not want to go back to their homes. We felt that we were one family.

During the Summer Bible Conference of 1998, the Holy Spirit worked powerfully by the sincere repentance of a girl student Norelkis Rodriguez for her sexual immorality and all the participants repented of their sins. Every year we experienced the work of the Holy Spirit by the repentance of our sins and God raised his faithful disciples. The ministry grew up to have more than 200 Sunday Worship Services in 5 Chapters of Venezuela – Caracas, Valles del Tuy, Merida, Maracaibo and Margarita. Also God sent many missionaries from Venezuela to other countries such as Panama, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Canada, and the US.

On the other hand, I struggled a lot to set up a stable business as a self-supporting missionary. But I did not have any experience in the business world and failed repeatedly for seven years. When I got a contract to supply security systems to a bank, the systems had a serious technical problem and I lost the business. When I ran a business to sell answering machines to a telecom company, the container arrived wet, and many machines were broken. I opened an auto parts shop, but that business failed in six months. I complained to God, “Why you don’t help me? Why did you call me as a self-supporting missionary?” My college ministry was growing, whereas I failed in businesses repeatedly spending money and time. I thought that self-supporting mission was not my calling. But, one day when I was driving with much trouble in my mind, I saw a symbol of Jesus affixed to a car in front of me. Suddenly, I burst out into tears and asked God saying, “Please, help me set a good example of self-supporting mission for my Bible students!”

God heard my prayer and showed me His grace. A chance for a new business was given to me unexpectedly. My business grew fast and I could make a good profit in a few years. My wife quit her job and joined more actively to evangelism and discipleship ministry. I could provide financial support to my church and help some Venezuelans in economic difficulties. Most of all, I could give a testimony to my church members and others about God’s grace in my life. Our Lord Jesus is faithful to those who live by faith putting their trust in his words of promise!

In 2011, I bought a beautiful house with five stories for my family. And then, I felt self-satisfied with my life in Venezuela. When everything seemed to be going well, I lost the direction of my missionary life. Not many days after moving into the new home, I was kidnapped. Four men with guns trapped me in my car and threatened me to kill. I felt that my life would finish there in an instant. I prayed to God with repentance, saying in my mind, “Please save my life, and I will live for you.” God gave me peace in my heart

and protected me from the kidnappers. They did not harm me but released me in two and a half hour.

I tried to find God's message to me and realized that it was the time to transfer church leadership to local leaders. Additionally, I decided to leave the country in order to prepare myself for the second stage of my mission life. I prayed to raise a local leader as my successor. Gustavo Prato was a young man, but faithful to God. He prayed and was convinced of the calling of God to serve Venezuelan college students. In 2013, my church members sent my family to Los Angeles, USA as Venezuelan missionaries.

The last 7 years in Los Angeles was a time of preparation for me. Sometimes my wife and I felt alone in America and missed a lot our brothers and sisters in Venezuela. Meanwhile, I completed master of divinity program and am pursuing Ph.D. in practical theology at Fuller Seminary. Also I have been learning American society, culture, and life. We prayed for a new direction of our life of mission believing in God who has perfect plans for us and guides our lives. One day P. Ron called me and invited me to work together at Chicago UBF. It was an unexpected proposal and we prayed for it asking God's guidance in our lives. In the midst of prayer, God gave us peace and conviction to accept the proposal with Acts 16:10, "After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." During the process of moving from LA to Chicago in this time of the pandemic, we experienced the guidance of God and became more convinced that God called us to co-work with Chicago UBF members, especially NEIU and True Vine members for disciple making ministry. Thank God for guiding us to this beautiful ministry! Thank you all for receiving us as co-workers of this precious ministry!

Our prayer topics are:

First, to adjust ourselves well to Chicago UBF learning from our members and pastors Ron, Kevin, and others.

Second, to be good co-workers for NEIU and True Vine ministry.

Third, to do a disciple-making ministry among college students.

One word: God's perfect guidance