Ph. D. is not the End, but the Beginning

By Dr. Elijah Park, PhD

On June 17, I obtained a Ph. D in ‘Doctor of Leadership’ at Midwest University.

I thank God who helped me to complete my studies and writing my dissertation over the last six years, including three years for my master’s degree. I thank God for Pastor Ron’s prayers during those years. I cannot miss mentioning my wife Missionary Mary to thank her for her support for me to study. I also am grateful for Sh. Dennis Miller, who has been my book buddy and precious prayer partner for the last 10 years.

There is saying that school study is not just for knowledge but for personal change. Likewise, God has changed me through studying.

First of all, he changed me to work hard. One of my life-long personal prayer topics was to be a hard- working man. Because of my easy-going mentality, I was disappointed so many times, but through trusting God, I did not give up. Then, the late Dr. Lee became my role model in working hard. Since I have been a full-time missionary, I tried hard to manage my studies so that it might not hinder my serving life. So, I had to divide my life hour by hour, or minute by minute. How much I concentrated! After I finished everything, I didn’t know what to do next for a while. God made me working hard and God changed me into a hard-working man.

Second, God changed me into an academic person. I was not a book-warm at all. Rather than study, it was better for me to master carpentry and work with my hands. Through my labor, I tried to be recognized by the people. Once I received English training with other young missionaries. At that time, I didn’t study on my own and didn’t learn English well. But God changed me to be friends with books to read, to summarize and to analyze, rather than work only. Then six years ago, I began to study for a master’s degree through e-learning to use my time fruitfully. I mean, not to waste time, I began to study. Then when I finished my Ph.D., I had a kind of self-confidence. So Ph.D. is not end but it is just beginning, the beginning of my new serving, new missionary life.

Third, God changed me from a janitor to a role model. As you all know well, my position in Chicago UBF is building and grounds manager – or, simply, janitor. I have been a servant, the one who cannot complain to others but serve only. I never dreamed to be a janitor. But I remembered Psalm 84:10, which says, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousands elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.” Also, I remembered what Jesus told his disciples that anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all (Mark 9:35). So God has proved that at least the serving life is the blessed life. Jesus has helped me to learn from him through serving him to build up his character in me. The other day, my son gave me a Father’s Day card, saying, “You have been a great role model and example of a father. Now that I am going to be one, I hope I can even be half the father you have been.” When I served and studied, God changed me from a not-so-good father to a man of encouragement. Now, I am sure that I can leave a spiritual inheritance to my children and to others.

Fourth, God made me to know the importance of raising spiritual leadership. My dissertation title is: “A Study of Missionary Samuel Lee’s Leadership by his Influence in World Mission Ministry through UBF.” When campus ministry started in the 1960s, the situation of Korea was very dark politically, economically and mentally. At that time, the late Dr. Lee learned that the national problem was a leadership problem and dedicated himself to raise spiritual leaders through studying the Bible. Then the leaders went out to every campus in Korea and changed the mentality of young Korean students with hope and a challenging spirit. Then they went out to the whole world to pioneer all the campuses of the world. So raising spiritual leadership was the method of doing world mission ministry. The late Dr. Lee had a personal calling from God. He was a visionary person with great zeal. His leadership was charismatic, not just charismatic, but one of love and servant-ship, and he served others. Now the situation around us is not easy at all. Especially, we are strongly challenged by this Post-modern environment with pluralistic religion. We need men with God’s calling with God’s vision and passion. We need many servant leaders for next 50 years of our campus ministry and world mission. Bill Clinton made success for his second term presidency of America through his inverted campaign slogan, “It’s economy. Stupid.” These days, no company can survive without innovation, saying, “It’s innovation. Stupid.” Now we need this for spiritual revival. “It’s spiritual leadership. Stupid.” One Word: It’s spiritual leadership