

BACK TO THE BIBLE

Key Verse: Ezra 7:10 “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Our God is the creator who created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. How did God create the heavens and the earth? It is by his word. Are we sure of this? Yes, it is because Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” In creating men in his own image, God wants men to be happy in his paradise. Then, are we happy now always? Or do we feel empty? We us to be able to are not happy because men lost paradise. In short, men failed to keep his happiness in God’s paradise. What is the cause of men’s failure of keeping his happiness?

Genesis 2:16-17 say, “And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Here we learn that God himself guarantees Adam to live the happiest life in all his life in the paradise. The first man Adam could have been happiest in all his life by listening to one word of God’s command. However, he failed to listen to God. When he failed to listen to God and his one word, he lost his happiness. He lost God and he lost his meaningful relationship with his wife.

Why does the listening to God guarantee our happiness? This sounds against what we believe or what we hear, “Are you stupid to listen to God. Rather, listen to your feelings”. Regardless of what our feelings talking to us, there is a sound foundation of guaranteeing our happiness. It is the relationship that has been established since the creation of the world between God and men and the relationship between men and materials. It is “Creation Order” that see God as creator, and men as stewards who manage all materials in the world for glorifying God as Creator. As the universe runs in harmony, the creation order is the success key of guaranteeing our happiness. However, this foundation of guaranteeing our happiness destroyed when Adam did not listen to God. When Adam failed to listen to God, men became slaves to sin. Men lost the image of God’s stewards. Since then, it has been God’s deepest agony of how to restore men to be his stewards while living in this world. What is your agony? Have you understood the deepest agony of God? Understanding God’s deepest agony, what can we do? What should we do?

Human History shows God’s endless love story of restoring men as his stewards to live happy and meaningful life in his environment, thanking and glorifying God in each generation. In the time of Ezra, God decided to restore his people from Babylon captivity to live as his chosen people in Jerusalem. In the work of restoring of Jerusalem after Babylon captivity, there are three key leaders who served God’s restoration work.

Who are three key leaders? They are Zerubbabel who reconstructed the temple (Ezra 3:8), Nehemiah who rebuilt the walls (Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2), and Ezra who restored the worship. Then, how did Ezra restore the worship?

We are introduced to Ezra at chapter 7. Ezra came from a long line of priests, going all the way back to Aaron, the first high priest. Ezra was living among the exiles in Babylon. However, he “was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6) Ezra like our next generations in GLEF is skilled in the word of God and he is both called and equipped to serve as God’s spiritual leader with the understanding of God’s agony in his generation.

Ezra was a great man – one of the all-time heroes of the faith. He had the understanding of God’s agony in his generation for his people. He did not live a selfish life for his own stomach. His understanding of God’s agony led him to have the strong will to lead his people. Moreover, he had a heart for God’s holiness. He also studied the Bible very diligently, seeking God’s truth. What made Ezra so great? What was the secret of Ezra’s spiritual success?

First, it is the grace of God that Ezra became so great and successful. And the Bible points this out. Ezra 7:6 says, “The hand of the Lord his God was on him.” This is the reason that Ezra found favor in the eyes of the king. Ezra found his courage to lead his people because of God’s grace. He testifies in 7:28, saying “the hand of the Lord my God was on me.” Ezra was a man under the grace of God. It is only the grace of God that enables us to fulfill our calling in our generation. I pray that all our next generations who are attending GLEF today may live under God’s grace.

But there is another side to his spiritual success. It was possible because Ezra had been very faithful to God’s calling upon him. Ezra was not a marionette, dangling uselessly until God pulled his strings. He was a human being like us, with a mind, a heart and a will that was made to glorify God and made to live the happiest life in this world. Therefore, he needed to be faithful to God’s calling that God had given him. He needed to train his gifts for saving many lives.

Ezra did that. Ezra trained his gifts. How did he do that? Let us read Ezra 7:10 which says, “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.” This verse shows us what it means “Back to the Bible.” Ezra decided to devote himself to the study the word of God. Ezra decided to devote himself to obey the word of God and to teach the word of God for spiritual awakening.

Dr. Peter Chang called to help me to understand the meaning of “BACK TO THE BIBLE” by giving me Ezra 7. He points out three things to consider. First, understanding what we have as our spiritual assets. Second, studying the Bible. Third, how to serve spiritual awakening in our next generations.

First, what is our spiritual assets? Do you know what the asset of Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, is? It is 192.4 billion Dollars. But is his asset ours? No. it is nothing to do with us. However, we learn from those who succeed in their lives, something valuable. It is that they laid out their foundation with what they have – their own assets, not with what others have. We build up nothing based on what do not belong to us. Then, what are our assets which we have now? UBF ministry has been used by God in saving many lives for the last 60 years since UBF has developed its spiritual assets as followings.

1. Spiritual identity as a kingdom of priests based on Exodus 19:5,6 which says, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

For 60 years of UBF history, our ministry has taught young college students not to seek God’s material blessings, rather to establish his or her own spiritual identity as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The spiritual identity is the most valuable asset in our ministry.

2. Daily spiritual relationship with God by doing daily bread based on our Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:11. It says, “Give us today our daily bread” It is our spiritual asset which teaches us to live a life of depending on God daily without greedy and anxiety.
3. Practicing the spirit of giving “You give them something to eat” based on Mark 6:37. Jesus wants his disciples to live with the spirit of giving, not with the spirit of bagging like a bagger. The spirit of giving is our spiritual asset established in our ministry in many ways.
4. Participating in God’s agony by carrying out campus mission as self-supporting lay missionaries. World campuses is our spiritual asset which God has prepared for us. World campuses are our field. Shall we shout together? World campuses are our field. Rutgers is our field. Bonn University is our field. Istanbul Universities are our field. Moscow is our field.
5. Working with what we have – 5 loaves 2 fish based on John 6:9. Here is a boy with small barely loaves and two small fish. How far will they go among so many? The spirit of 5 loaves 2 fish always challenges to make something impossible to possible.
6. Spiritual community by establishing house churches based on Romans 16:3. The house church of Priscilla and Aquilla has been used so preciously to build up the early Christian community.
7. One-soul loving spirit. Jesus came to the world to save one soul -- me! To save me from my sins. So I am ready to sacrifice my life to save one more soul thru 1-to-1 bible study. Our coworkers have been carrying out one to one Bible study via zoom link during covid. I am thankful for Grace who has been carrying out one to one during her covid very faithfully with Reb Shin and Abraham Kim. Now God allows her to study the Bible with Chris Hue.

These are our spiritual assets which God has established in our ministry for the last 60 years. These are our spiritual assets which we need to develop more until we can raise up 100,000 missionaries and bible teachers by 2041.

Second, studying the word of God. Before we can do what God wants us to do, or teach the word of God, we need to know what God wants us to do, and that means studying God’s word. Ezra had committed himself to doing that. Ezra was skilled in the Law of Moses. His “delight was in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night” (Ps 1:2) Following the example of Ezra, through practicing Inductive Bible Study (IBS) in GLEF, our

next generation leaders may grow as spiritual generals like Late Dr. Samuel Lee. Once Dr. Lee was asked by people “How could you cook so well?” since Dr. Lee was a very good cook. He said to them, “Study the Bible.”

Third, how to serve the spiritual awakening in the next generation. In Ezra 9, 10, Ezra confronts a major sin in the life of Israel. It is the intermarriage with women who practiced pagan idolatry. Ezra dealt with this issue by teaching them the bible in public. When Ezra found out that God’s people had been unfaithful in matters of worship and marriage, he tore his clothes, pulled his own hair, and sat in mourning for an entire day. Then at the time of the evening sacrifice he bowed down before God and offered a prayer of confession: “O my God, I am ashamed... for our iniquities have raised higher than our heads... Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this” (Ezra 9:15) The effect of Ezra’s public bible teaching was dramatic. The people followed their bible teacher’s example by making their own confession;” While Ezra prayed... a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him, for the people wept bitterly” (Ezra 10:1).

For spiritual awakening, Ezra encouraged his next generation to establish their house churches by faith in obedience to God’s word so that each family can be the spiritual community to teach God’s words for saving many lives. Likewise, the spiritual awakening in each generation can happen when young men and women have the spiritual desires for spiritual community by their marriages with God’s purpose.

In opening GLEF 2021, God encourages us to go back to the Bible so that our next generation spiritual leaders may understand God’s agony and serve God’s purpose of saving many lives in their generation. We are not majority at all. We are absolutely minority, living in this world – God’s remnant! Isaiah 6:13 says “And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.” As William Tyndale lived as the stump in the land for England for his generation, our next generation leaders who are attending GLEF today may grow to be the holy seed for their own generation by going “BACK TO THE BIBLE.” I pray that our next generation leaders may live the happiest lives in their generation in God’s paradise as God’s stewards.