

This I Know For Sure: Faith Is a Journey
Based on Romans 12:1-2
Given by Pastor Jon Visitacion

Highlighted areas are in reference to images below.

I feel like I need to introduce myself in many ways shapes, and forms, but let me first off say that my full name is Jonathan Dana Kenji Visitacion, and many people ask me how do I pronounce my last name, but I also just go by Jon. Or any of the other names listed on your screen.

This is my wife, Mika. We've been together for about 8 years, finally tying the knot on July 3rd, 2015. She is a Kindergarten teacher for the Campbell School district, and we will be having our first child in September.

Some of the hobbies you already know from the welcoming dinner is that I like to fish. But I also want to tell you that I also like to cook and yes, that is bacon fried rice with a heart made of spam. And the reason I love to cook is because I love eating.

I think the first two things you will get to know about me very quickly is that I have a distinctive laugh, and I am a little on the goofy side. More than often you will see both happening at the same time. When Pastor Kathi told me her plans for her first sermon series here at Los Altos, and the things we know for sure, my immediate thought was that the thing I know for sure is that our faith is a journey.

(LONG PAUSE)

The End.

Lets go home and celebrate one of the shortest worship services you ever attended.

Obviously, this is not the end of my sermon, but the point I'm trying to make has nothing to do with knowing the end or the answer, but going through the journey of our faith from beginning to beginning. So to explain how I came to this understanding at the wise old age of 33, I thought it would be fitting to explain a little bit of my own journey, and what exactly got me here to Los Altos. And if I were to have written my life in a book, the first chapter of my life: my family.

Let me introduce you to my family starting with my mom: Carol Mori Visitacion. She grew up in Fresno, CA and is a retired resource specialist teacher and currently helps teaching severely disabled children. She's third generation Japanese-American. My dad's name is Jaime Visitacion, a second generation Filipino-American who grew up in Hawaii. He moved to California in 1967, became a police officer and served for 33 years before retiring in 2005. Both met in college, and settled down on my grandparents vineyard that my mom grew up on.

I have one sister, Chari, who is married to a good man named Dante and has 2 children named Dominic and Derek. I grew up on the same 90 acres of vineyards in Fresno as my Grandfather and Mother did. To give you an idea of the amount of land 90 acres, Los Altos sits on 6.5 acres of land if you take into account the buildings and the parking lot areas, and is the equivalent of ¹⁵that little yellow square.

This is where I grew up. For the most part, I had a normal childhood, and I did well in high school, played sports, was a member of various clubs, and played in the marching band. I graduated high school in

2002 and then **attended Fresno State University** for my undergrad and graduated in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering.

It was in undergrad where I began to **grow in my faith**.

Now, I had attended church my entire life, but did not really understand the role of God in my life until I left the high-school youth group and was in college, where there was no ministry group for me. I began to help out with my youth group and attended summer camps for the **first time** and it began to play a huge role in my faith. I also experienced the passing of both of my grandmothers, Elena Visitacion, and Fumie Mori. It was really hard to deal with **the passing of Grandma Fumie** because she lived with us and took care of me for most of my childhood. She was one of the most influential persons in my life and exemplified the gospel for me. She passed away in 2005.

In 2006, I moved to Los Angeles to attend UCLA's electrical engineering graduate program. It was a conflicting experience because I struggled with **the culture clash of** living in farmland areas where stores closed at nine to a city that practically never went to sleep. I struggled with the graduate program because it was so fast paced and demanding. What made it so conflicting was that I did so well in my high-school and undergrad. I kept asking God why was this happening, and if it wasn't for the church friends I had who lived down there, I would have left for Fresno back in 2007. But I was miserable, frustrated, conflicted, and lost.

It was after my first year at UCLA that my senior pastor, Rev. Keith Inouye, asked me if I considered going into ministry. I was open to the idea, but wasn't ready to leave engineering just yet. Rev. Keith offered me a position as a summer pastoral intern where I shadowed him on various pastoral items.

So that summer, **I came back home to my home church**, the United Japanese Christian Church, and for 10 weeks, I helped out with communion, participated in funeral services and church meetings, and just tried to immerse myself into the life of being a pastor. You would think it would scare a person off so easily, and if you knew me in another life, I was the kind of guy who didn't like public speaking, didn't like to be touched and didn't like to touch anyone. It showed me that I had the potential to do something more, and that idea transformed my life.

That summer, I began to understand that this potential...this transformation, was part of my calling into the ministry, and I realized that God was calling me to do something different.

But I still had at least one more year to finish the engineering program at UCLA. I wanted to make my family proud because there are so many engineers in the family. I wanted to make myself proud, as I have always wanted to attend UCLA since I was in high school. So I tried to finish at UCLA but struggled even more.

By this time, I was meeting regularly with pastors of the church I was attending in southern California whom I now consider life mentors, and in that year, I **came to understand 3 major epiphanies**.

First, our callings towards God are always intentional, and our past prepares us for this specific moment in our lives. Always intentional. Always purposeful. Second, parents want the best for their children, but most of all, they want their children to be happy and to live meaningful lives. Third, my own personal goals and visions may not be what God has in store for me. I wrestled with this last epiphany for a long

time, and after 8 months of discerning and talking with some life mentors I wrestled with the idea that God may be calling me towards something outside of my own personal dreams and goals in life.

And By the following spring of 2008, I withdrew my enrollment at UCLA. It was one of the hardest decisions I have made, and not the easiest conversation I had with my family, but they understood that I was being pulled towards a different goal. But where it might seem that I was jumping off a cliff into the unknown, I found myself caught in the good graces of Christ through the hands of those around me.

Within a month of dropping out of UCLA, I was working at Faith United Methodist Church as the High School Youth Leader. And in that same month, I applied and was enrolled at Claremont School of Theology with a scholarship. I took that as an affirmation from God that I was heading in the right direction.

Over the next 5 years, I continued to work at Faith UMC while attending seminary and eventually was a full-time staff member at the church. Taking a summer chaplaincy internship in Virginia in 2011, and graduated from Claremont in 2012. I was still working in southern California but by then I was overseeing the junior-high, high-school, and college age ministries. I co-led mission teams all over the US, and towards the end of my service at Faith UMC, I began to help streamline the efficiency of the office staff administration by creating outlets for online technology and social media. I even started to lead workshops for the seniors about how to use an iPad.

In 2013, I moved up to San Jose to be closer to Mika, and I was able to propose to her three months later. I was able to move closer because there was a job opening at her home church, with the senior pastor who was my former senior pastor in Fresno. I became the minister of emerging ministries and technology pastor, eventually becoming the pastor of emerging ministries and congregational care over the 4 years I served there.

When I look back at that moment in 2008 when I dropped out of UCLA, I don't have any regrets. It has been a complete blessing and an incredible journey. But I would have never known that my faith would have taken me there. I never could have imagined that a scrawny introverted kid like me would be used by God in this way, and the little amount of faith I had would bring me on this incredible journey to understand the amazing power and beauty of following Christ.

It was not until much later in my own faith journey I came across this passage from Paul:

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.

Paul continues:

Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

If I were to have read this scripture in high-school, I wouldn't have understood what Paul meant to give yourself as a living sacrifice. And no way would I want to live a priestly life. I wouldn't understand what it meant to not conform to this world. But as I look back on where I came from, reading this passage gives me excitement towards the future, because everything made sense after reading this passage.

Paul is trying to tell the people of Rome to let go of trying to be in control of the things we may seek in this world and rather be willing to be moved by the spirit, by God's will. Knowing those moments on my

faith journey when I have given myself to God as a living sacrifice and allowing God to use me in a particular situation or moment, I have been renewed over and over.

And so I keep trying in my faith.

To continue and let go of the things that makes me feel too afraid to try harder, to let go of the things that makes me feel too proud to try new things or to try something different, and to let go of the things in life that makes me feel unworthy.

Through that, I have been able to grow and renew my mind through the love of Christ that always astounds me through and through. And so when I was asked to serve here at Los Altos, I went back to remember these words from Paul and my own faith journey, and holding onto the fact that this next chapter of my life in ministry will be an exciting one. Because as much as God has challenged me, I have felt truly blessed and it's not that I walk hesitantly in this world, but I run towards the opportunities that God has put before me.

But its not just my faith journey, it's all of ours. We all have our stories of faith of what brought us here to be a part of this church, and...

Friends, we all find ourselves in a place where we will be writing a new chapter in our faith journey together. It is a moment of transition that has brought all of us in our faith journey to be here in this church. And as we move as a renewed body of Christ, I ask that you remember these words from Paul. To be willing to let God move you amidst your fears, your pride, and your frustrations.

To have your faith move us from a place of transition and grief, to a place of trust and hope and excitement of what God has in store for all of us. It may take some time, as I have been so grateful for the trust and support between all of us on the ministry team and that I'm so excited to work with Kathi, Dirk and Carol, Sam, Patricia, and Michelle...so excited to work with the staff and the ministry leaders and the many of you who have already been so kind to me. I hope we all grow in our faith and walk together the journey that God has put before us.

Thank you for allowing Pastor Kathi and I to be your new pastors and to serve here at Los Altos, and this I know for sure: our faith is a journey, and this will be a chapter of transformation and renewal for us all. Grace and peace be with you all, Amen.

Jon Visitacion

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*Jonathan Dana Kenji Visitacion,
Jon, Jonathan, Jon-Jon, J, JV, V,*



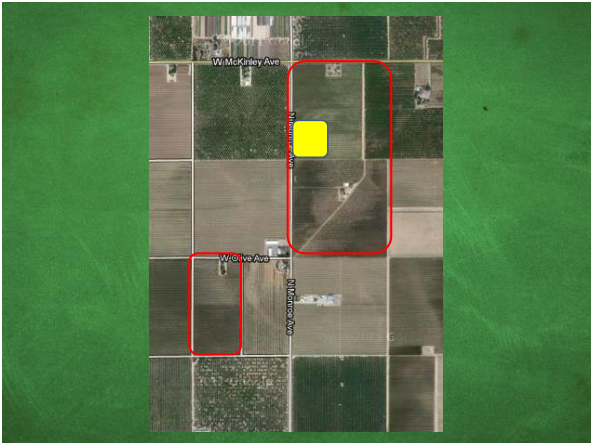


Faith is a Journey.

Faith is a Journey.
The End.

Chapter 1 – *My Family*





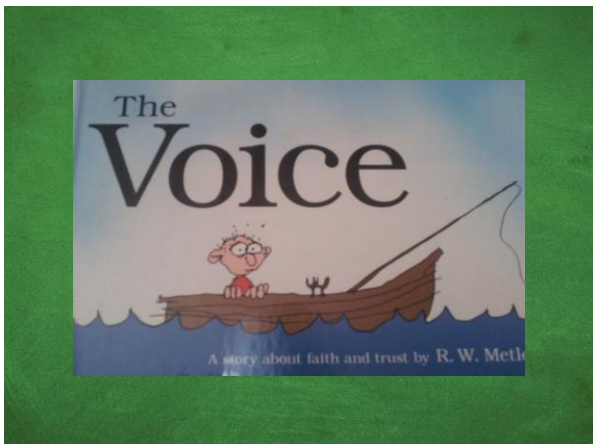
Chapter Two – College





Chapter Three – Leaving the Nest

Is it the program?
 Is it Los Angeles?
 Was it the people?
 WHAT IS WRONG!?!?!
 Is it Being away from home?
 IS it ME?



- ### Epiphanies
- God is always intentional
 - Our parents want the best for their children, but most of all they want them to be happy
 - My goals and dreams may not be aligned with the purpose God has with me





Romans 12:1-2
So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.

Romans 12:1-2
Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what god's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

Chapter Five – New Chapters