



A Publication of the San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church
"Growing together and reaching out in the love of Christ"

Firmly Rooted

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him." Col. 2:6a
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Courage and Fear

While in Washington, D.C. last November, we visited Congress. There is now a plaque in the rotunda to honor the victims of United Airlines Flight 93. The plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field on that fateful day, September 11, 2001. Some passengers stormed the plane's cockpit to overcome the terrorists who wanted to crash the plane into the U. S. Capitol. Those passengers were courageous. They boldly stepped forward, risking their lives.

A former neighbor of ours, a salesman, was very outgoing. He had no fear meeting new people and talking to them. He loved doing that. He was successful in his line of work, because he was so outgoing and personable. But if he climbed a ladder just three feet, his knees would start to wobble. He had a fear of heights. There are others who have no fear of climbing a ladder, but are afraid of meeting new people. Perhaps some of the passengers who overcame the terrorists on Flight 93 might have been fearful of speaking before a large audience. We all are courageous about certain things and fearful about some other things.

The problem with fear is that it boxes us in. Fear sets boundaries in our lives. Life becomes limited. Some, such as Jennifer Aniston and Cher, fear flying so they don't travel much. Fear is one of the consequences of our sinful nature. Too often, we fear making a mistake or failing. And too often we fear what people will think of us. And so we do nothing. God does not want us to be fearful. He wants us to be courageous (Joshua 1).

Jesus was fond of Peter, even though he made many mistakes, because Peter was courageous. He was the only disciple who asked Jesus if he could walk on water. Peter was not afraid of making mistakes or making a fool of himself. God can work with a person like that, someone willing to step out, someone not afraid of failing and not afraid of what others will think, but focus on what God wants.

Rev. Jim Toda, our former pastor, was a quiet, modest man. He was not like Peter, full of talk and push. Yet, he did his job as pastor, leading the church and preaching every Sunday. He often did things that did not come easy to him. He looked to the Lord and found strength and courage to do what God called him to do.

God told Joshua, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*" (**Joshua 1:9**). Why did God tell Joshua that? Because He knew Joshua would be afraid. He wanted to assure him. God knows we have fears. And when He calls us to do certain things, He knows we may be afraid. What He told Joshua, He also tells us.

God was telling Joshua to **choose** to be courageous, even though he may feel fear. Almighty God says, "I will be with you." I have to remind myself of that when I am fearful about something.

-- Vernon Kam

My Spiritual Journey

By: *Richard Law*

I grew up in an Air Force family and we moved every two to four years until I was in my early twenties. While growing up, I attended mostly Episcopal churches every Sunday with my family. My parents were involved in our local church and my father often served as a member of the vestry. Most of my relatives are Christian, so the concepts of God and praying were very familiar to me. I remember when I was young, maybe pre-teen, my mom encouraged me to read the Bible like my cousins did. I just couldn't seem to imagine wanting to read it. The Bible seemed like an ancient book full of stories from a far off time and characters with odd names that I could not relate to. I never could read more than a book or two before giving up on trying to read it.

Before I went away to college, I mostly attended church because I had no choice. Our family went to church together, "End of discussion," as my dad might say. I attended a small Christian liberal arts college in South Carolina. It was an environment with many Christian students and lots of opportunities to learn more about Christ. Despite all this, I didn't draw closer to God. I wanted to distance myself from my parents and have some independence. At this point, I viewed church and God as something that was part of my parent's world. I didn't need it. Now that I was nine hours drive from my parents, I decided to live life on my terms. I learned quickly I wasn't so good at doing that. I joined the party fraternity, which led to a lot of adventures, some headaches, and many life lessons. Our group was the "Animal House" of the frats. I am amazed that I survived those years, and I just barely managed to graduate.

Life after college had its own series of challenges and as time went on I felt the desire to seek a church of my own, since in my mind that was the place where God was most present. I found some comfort and peace at church, that I couldn't describe. I know God was with me all those years I ran away from Him, and I wanted to learn more about Him. In my 30's, my career was going well and I attended an Episcopal church in Washington, D.C. a few miles from my condo. I joined a small group of young professionals who met on Sunday afternoons. We had very good discussions about God and read some popular Christian books, many of which I would categorize as very academic.

About this time, I became friends with a Korean co-worker, who lived close to me in D.C. She invited me to an event at her church out in the suburbs. I thought, "Why would I want to go to your church so far way from where I live?" It was a 40 minute drive compared to my church, which was five to ten minutes away from our neighborhood. She kept inviting me, and one day I decided to go with her despite the distance. Her church was so different than my church. First of all, it was HUGE! Each service had a few thousand people. The



Rumiko Clark, Richard Law, Frank Nakasone, Josh Scott and Brent Kihara at their membership reception on Dec. 12, 2010

music was contemporary Christian, people dressed very casual, and worst of all... people raised their hands in the air during the music. This looked to me like they were riding a roller coaster! At times, I felt very uncomfortable at her church.

The teaching (sermons) were so different from what I was used to. I started to learn new things about our Father in heaven and His Son, Jesus. Despite how different this place felt, something kept bringing me back to this church. My church had a traditional-style service with an organ and hymns. My church was a place where people wore suits and dresses and looked like they might work at the White House or a federal agency. This new church was like the church from another planet! Although there were differences, I felt a desire to attend this new church with my friend. After a few months, she suggested we take a class called The Alpha Course. Once a week over the next ten weeks, I drove out to the suburbs after work with my co-worker and learned many new things about God and Jesus. For the first time, it was like all the pieces of information I learned all my life about God were finally connecting, allowing me to understand how much He really loves us-- so much so, that He would send His Son to die on a cross for our sins.

I believe God orchestrated these events to prepare me for my move to San Francisco in 2001. The second weekend I was in California, I got plugged into a great church called City Church San Francisco. It became my Christian home for the next seven years, and helped me to grow in my walk with God. Then in May 2006, I visited San Lo for the first time for the Sunday evening service with my friend Cheryl (Seid) Ikegami and a few Young Life high school kids from San Francisco.

After the first visit, I started to attend the evening service a couple times a month until it became my regular church experience. I developed a relationship with Shimada Sensei over the next couple years. On December 7, 2008, Noriko Akiba and I were married by Shimada Sensei at the annual Hawaiian event during a San Lo evening service. Noriko and I attended the evening service together for more than a year and then started attending the morning services (English and Japanese) in spring of 2010. We became members of San Lo the same year.

In summary, even though I grew up in a Christian home, it wasn't until my 30s that I learned the benefits and joys of submitting to God's ways over my own every day. I had so many opportunities to learn about Jesus over the years, but somehow I couldn't believe the Bible and its contents. God kept pursuing me all this time and never left me alone during my darkest hours.

I am grateful for the Christian foundation that my parents established in me and their constant prayers for me over the years. Walking with God the last ten years has been an adventure in which He has been so faithful and provided for me so abundantly. I look forward to the rest of the journey and learning to be more like Jesus Christ, as I attempt to reflect God's light into the dark world around me each day.

Winter Vision 2011

On Jan. 14-17, many junior and senior high students gathered from all our Conference churches at Koinonia Grounds. Kristin Yoshioka and Teon Lee were two of our youth who attended. Here is what they share ...

A science project due the day I got back and finals in two weeks. And the usual weekend homework. Those were some of the things that were coming up when I went to Winter Vision. There was so much that I needed to do.

However, I really believe that God had a plan for me when I squeezed into the van that took all of us kids to the campground where we would be for the next three days. I had questions; I was looking for answers. God revealed some of those answers to me at Winter Vision.

The theme for this year was "All In," meaning to be "all in" for God -- heart, body, mind, and soul. This means that you are living for God through your actions and lifestyle. Our speaker gave us this phrase, "All of me, for all of God, for all the world." Being "all in" means that sometimes it might be hard to do what God wants, but He is worth it. He loves us so much that He did everything that was required to bring us back to Himself. He sent Jesus to live the perfect life for us and pay the price of sin for us by dying for us so we could have an eternal relationship with the Father. Jesus is the King. He isn't just a king on a throne, as the speaker put it; He was a king on a cross who overcame death. Wouldn't you want to be "all in" for a king who did that for you?

Will you be "all in" for God?

-- Kristin Yoshioka

As the car drove through the countless twists and turns to the campsite I was optimistic about my weekend. I had finals the week after so I was stressed to study four months of material in so little time. I followed everyone to the registration, where I met other campers. That night was session and I sat next to familiar faces, Kevin and Jon guided me through to night. The first game we played

Teon (in front) with his cabin-mates at Winter Vision



was "wedding dress." I was the last to lose to "Rock, Paper, Scissors" so I was the one wrapped in toilet paper and walked down the aisle. I returned to my cabin and met my cabin-mates: Brett, Jared and Riley. We hit it off pretty well and went to sleep.

The next day I woke up to session and I returned to the singing and meeting people. I realized that one of the most beautiful things in the world is hearing teenagers sing in harmony to God. The songs really reflected my love for God and almost brought me to tears. The rest of the weekend continued like this with seminars peppered throughout and freedoms where I got to know my cabin leader better. As the weekend came to an end I experienced a spiritual high. I felt like the altitude brought me closer to God and I really felt like the first disciples seeing God. Sadly the weekend winded down to the last day and I faced the return of school and life. I said my good-byes. When I look back at the weekend, I'll remember the tears that I shed when I remembered Jesus and the blood that He shed for me. I look forward to next year and Mount Hermon.

-- Teon Lee



Each year our church pays your way to attend the BASS Convention. It's our way to bring you top-notch seminars that our church alone cannot provide. BASS is an opportunity for you to be encouraged, challenged, equipped and refreshed. We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to choose from workshops given on countless topics from marriage, counseling, teaching, child-rearing, women's ministry, worship, music, drama, youth, men's ministry, missions, and more! Dr. K.P. Yohannan, Efreem Smith, and Chip Ingram are this year's keynote speakers. There is something for everyone! Please go to the BASS website at: bassconvention.org to find out more or grab a program in the church foyer. When you attend, simply tell the registrars you are with San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church.

BASS is March 3-5, at Redwood Chapel Community Church, 19300 Redwood Road, Castro Valley. We hope you are able to attend one, two or all three days!