

## Introduction of Myself

I am Gen Hashimoto, Pastor of Japanese Fellowship Church, Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. This is a bilingual church, English and Japanese spoken, like your church, Kitahama Christian Church. I will talk about the Japanese Fellowship Church later.

For the sermon today, I would like to talk about my background: **1. how I became a pastor**, and **2. how I was lead to Minnesota** 5 years ago. Therefore, this is more like my personal testimony.

### 1. How I decided to become a pastor:

Before becoming a pastor, I was a business man for 10 years in Kubota, Ltd. During these 10 years, my wife Etsuko and I moved ten times, 10 different locations, 10 different departments in the company. It was because I did not fit anywhere. I was a returnee from USA, spent most of my adolescent years (9yrs) in the US. I was little too weird for them and was called, "Gaijin" means...you know, "foreigner". I had 10 different bosses but they did not know how to handle me. After 9, or 10 years I started to wonder for my future. Should I stay in this company for the rest of my career life transferring one place to the other. Or should I serve the Lord full time as a pastor or missionary? Or I could be a layman and still serve the Lord while working. So, which is God's plan? Big decision, that would change my life completely.

I wanted to know God's calling for my future. While still wondering, one of my American friends introduced me to Pastor Kuroda for counseling. Although it was first time meeting Pastor Kuroda, he was kindly talked to me and gave me a very important advice.

I asked him, "how can I get to know God's calling? I'd like to know if I should stay in business or quit the job and become a full time God's worker?" Pastor Kuroda told me these words I never forget.

"Pray, pray, and pray some more. Even with fasting you pray seriously. If you pray enough, you'd know God's answer. He may give the answer to you in different ways; His answer may be through the Word in the Bible, through a conversation with a fellow Christian, through supernatural phenomenon or just natural phenomenon, or through your dream. Any cases, you would know that is His answer if you pray sufficiently."

I thought it wouldn't be too hard just to pray. Pastor Kuroda continued, "if you got His answer, do exactly what He says, do not hesitate because it is His will...everything will be done, and nothing will hinder. Doors will be opened one after another."

I took his advice seriously and started to pray from that day on, but nothing happened for several days. One week past, still nothing. This was my prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12...I change "we" to (I) (my) (me), so that God seems to be directly with me.

<sup>11</sup>With this in mind, we (I) constantly pray for you(myself), that our God may make you(me) worthy of **his calling**, and that by his power he(I) may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.<sup>12</sup>We (I) pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you(me), and you (I) in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

I might be still a little selfish...everything is about me, ad myself.

Second week, praying hard but still nothing. However, toward the end of second week, I had a strange dream. In my dream Jesus appeared in the white robe. He stretched His arms toward me and said, "Gen, Gen, come follow me. Follow me for the rest of your life." I knew it! It was His calling! I was full of joy, and cried so much in my dream. When I woke up my pillow was very wet with my tear. I told my dream to my wife, Etsuko, she was pleased to hear and decided that very day to go to a seminary together.

I had some problems resigning my job... I was a translator and secretary, knew too much about the business of the company. My boss was a well-known selfish man. When I told him for my resignation, he said, "nnnn...Ok, I understand, but you promise to be a good pastor."

Next stage, I had to get a permission from Etsuko's parents because we were leaving them and going to the United States. Etsuko's father was a business owner and strong Buddhist. Amazingly he said, "do whatever you decided, man has to do what he believes. You weren't a good business man anyways. I will support you." Very good encouragement, ya? By the way, later in his life, Etsuko's father accepted Jesus and got baptized in his bed by Pastor Kuroda (about 3 years ago). He went to heaven peacefully a couple weeks after the baptism.

We experienced doors open one after another. My father was not very happy when he heard about my decision of going to seminary to be a pastor. He was saved just a few years before. He said to me, "no way, you can't be a pastor. You don't know how busy pastors are. You've been too lukewarm; buying many brand clothes, traveling around often, and eating gourmet food. What you say is blasphemy."

So, I explained about my dream and my decision to my father. "I don't need to buy any good clothes, don't need to eat any good food, or don't travel around like before. I just want to serve my Lord Jesus because He is calling me to serve Him. You know my joy?" My father was silent for a while...nnnn... And then he said "Ok I understand, I'll support you."

Another door opened as Pastor Kuroda said. Everything went amazingly well, and a few months later, we sold everything in Japan and came to US only with 2 suit cases. I started to attend a seminary in Columbia, South Caroline. It was like miracles after miracles. Doors after doors opened.

Another great miracle happened. For 9 years Etsuko never got pregnant...not even once. The first week we arrived in Columbia she got pregnant. The detail of the miracle pregnancy will be told by Etsuko some other time. Everything was God's timing and His plan. If we had a child before, we weren't brave enough to quit the job and move to Columbia. God waited for that timing. After we arrived there, He said, "well done my servant, here is my gift...gift of precious baby girl." We got rid of everything unnecessary in Japan, but we received everything we needed from God. As 2 Peter 1:3, 20 says,

**His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life** through our knowledge of him **who called us by his own glory** and goodness....  
Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to **confirm your calling** and election. For **if you do these things, you will never stumble**,

This is how we experienced God's calling, the word above says it all. That was my first testimony, how I decided to be a pastor.

After graduating from the seminary (took me 4 years, instead of 3), I got the first assignment from God, to be an associate pastor in Seattle, WA. So, we rented a truck and travelled across the US continent, from the East Coast southern point to North West in the West coast. A good 5,100km... It took us 15 days with our little girl, myself, Etsuko, and her brother who helped us driving. I tell you America is huge!

I served in a church in Seattle for 5 years, and got another baby girl, Seattleite. We then moved to Maui, Hawaii and pastored the only Japanese speaking church for 8 years. Kids grew up with Hawaiian culture. Then moved back to Los Angeles where I first lived 35 years ago when I was a high school student. For 8 years we served in a Japanese American church in LA. When they have reduced Japanese ministry, I looked for a new church where I can serve Him fulltime.

## 2. How I was led to Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Kuroda Setsu-san, (now Shimizu) brought a good news... a church in Minneapolis looking for a full time Japanese pastor. My first reaction..."I don't like cold place. I never been to any cold places." Actually, that was calling from God. He called me to go to Minneapolis. But I said, "no thank you. Please send me to a warmer place like Southern California, or Hawaii like I used to live." My answer was unfaithful to God, and God was furious at me. I was running away from God, just like Jonah.

When God called Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh, Jonah did not obey Him. He ran away from God, and headed to other place. In today's reading, Jonah 1:1-3 it says:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."  
<sup>3</sup>But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish.

God was furious for Jonah's unfaithfulness. God caused a storm in the sea while Jonah was in a ship. That ship was about to break up...v4

Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

And you know the rest of the story, don't you? Jonah was thrown into the stormy sea. And then a big fish swallowed him. For 3 days and 3 nights Jonah was in the fish. From inside the fish Jonah prayed and asked God to give him one more chance. In Jonah 2:1,4

<sup>1</sup>From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. <sup>2</sup>He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry....  
<sup>4</sup>I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

God heard Jonah's prayer / cry and He did...

<sup>10</sup>And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah miraculously survived, and this time, he obeyed God's command and went to Nineveh.

I had a very similar experience. When I refused to go to Minneapolis, God punished me for disobeying Him. I felt like something hit my head, and I could not move for a few days...3 days and 3 nights...I don't know why I became like that ...it could be too much pressure for losing pastor's job and going to unknown place. My brain, my mind and my body did not function at all. I was half dead. Medically called "adaptability disorder". Any ways I was not movable. God called me again, "Go to Minneapolis" this time I had to say, "Yes Lord, I go anywhere you lead me to." I followed Him.

After I said this to the Lord everything went so well. A few weeks later I went to an interview at Minneapolis, people were already waiting for me and accepted me as their pastor on that day. We moved within a month or so we arrived in Minneapolis. All are God's plan. When I obey His calling, everything works well. Doors open one after another.

### **Minneapolis:**

Japanese Fellowship Church in Minneapolis is a great church. Everyone here has very warm heart although the weather in winter is very cold. (-35C) Together with the congregation, we started many new ministries, such as ukulele ministry, hula ministry, Japanese language ministry, English conversation for new comers, Mom and child ministry for kinds to learn Japanese culture and language, summer camp, and so on. We will have kayak ministry, and maybe next year Hawaii ministry may start, too.

Many international couples are in the church, mostly Japanese wives and American husbands. With ukulele and hula team we visit senior citizen homes every month to give praise & worship service. By singing together with those senior residents, we receive a lot of blessings from God. I call these our specialties. We of course learn His word every week with four different Bible study classes; English, Japanese, non-Christians, & mature Christians.

### **Rochester:**

There is also a branch in Rochester, located about 140km south of Minneapolis. Rochester is a hospital city where Mayo clinic has brought many doctors and patients to this city for more than a century. Many young Japanese doctors also come to research for 1 to 2 years. I have a great opportunity to minister to these families. Almost all are non-Christians or seekers. For the last Christmas service 75 people attended....maybe all Japanese families in Rochester.

Etsuko and I go to Rochester 3 times a month, and about 12 to 20 women come to our Bible study class. Since Bible study alone is not attractive to non-Christian people, I started free ukulele lessons along with Bible study. Many women want to learn ukulele. After ukulele class, having Bible study and refreshment. Mothers enjoy relief from babies since Etsuko takes care of babies while we meet. Rochester ministry is really blessed. Several of them are getting closer for receiving Jesus. Would you pray for this ministry in Rochester?

### **Conclusion:**

God built the Japanese Fellowship church more than 40 years ago in the middle of nowhere...or at the end of the world... in Minneapolis, Minnesota. God had a purpose of reaching out to the people in this city. He called me to do His mission work... reaching out to the Japanese and

English speaking people in the community. The Lord uses men to do His work. God uses anyone who is willing to serve Him.

When God says to you, "Go to xxx or ooo", He has a good plan for you. If you obey Him, then wonderful plans open up for you. But if you refuse to obey God. He is not happy for you. Does it really matter to you?

Let us think about...if God calls you today, how do you respond to Him? Your answer may be "Yes Lord, here I am. Send me." Or you may say, "not me, not now, no thanks, not there, not enough, not interested. I am too young, I am too old, I am not educated, I am not experienced, I am too busy, I am... I am..." Do you find your excuse among these?

To say yes or no to God... I had done both in my life as I told you today. God wants you to use you and wants to send you to do His work. if you say yes to Him, He is more than pleased to work with you. He is waiting now for your good answer. I encourage you to say yes and serve the Lord in your specific way. God's purpose for you is very special.

This is my testimony and my message today. May God bless you.