

16 - Transition with Pastor Kenny Wada

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Garrett Inouye: Hey everyone. Welcome to episode 16. My name is Garrett Inwe, and today we have another special episode. Recently, we announced that Pastor Dan and Pastor Kenny would both be stepping down from pastoral ministry at Evergreen Baptist Church. Last week we invited Pastor Dan to share about his transition on the podcast.

If you miss that one, I encourage you to go back and listen to that conversation. It's episode 15 today, pastor Rocky and myself talk with Pastor Kenny, and again, it is a long episode, but if you have the time, I would recommend listening to the whole thing. To give you a little roadmap to today's podcast, roughly in the first third, we talk about Kenny's testimony, meeting his wife and his history of transitioning on and off the Evergreen staff.

In the second third, we talk about Kenny coming back on Evergreen staff for the second time, calling in general and grieving change. In the last third, we talk about Kenny's call to assist in the transition, the blessing of transition, Kenny's timing for transition, and Kenny's plan for the future. Like I mentioned last week, it's our prayer that as the church digests this news, we would be able to process and mourn the transition well and that as we look to the future, we would have faith that Christ is our hope.

Because we believe fixing our eyes on Christ gives us a firm foundation, even when transition seems to take away our sturdy ground. Thanks for joining us. I hope you are encouraged by this episode.

This is Pursuing Discipleship, a podcast of Evergreen Baptist Church of San Gabriel Valley, where we are committed to forming intentional relationships that build Christ likeness. In this podcast, our hope and prayer is to encourage one another's discipleship to Jesus Christ, grow our love for his. And explore our response to his command to go and make disciples.

We're so excited to have you join us. And so let's get into today's conversation.

Uh, Kenny, thanks for joining me. And Rocky, uh, by the time this podcast has come out, we've already, um, uh, Dan's podcast. And so Dan got a chance to share, uh, a little bit about, uh, his testimony had come to Evergreen. Um, just some of the blessings of being to Evergreen and then share a little bit about, uh, the transition.

And, uh, you only got like five minutes in service, so we really wanted to make sure that we gave you the time as well to be able to share. And, you know, honestly, I've been looking forward to this conversation. Um, but before we kind of get into a lot of questions about your transition, we ask all the guests to share, uh, just a quick testimony of how they came to know the Lord.

And so I was wondering if you'd be willing to share, uh, just yeah, how you came to know Jesus.

Kenny Wada: Well, um, my parents grew up in Honolulu. Nice. And they did not grow up in a Christian family. Uh, when they got married, they moved out to California, Los Angeles, and I really don't remember, um, much about the early years, but I do know that we started to attend Williamsburg Presbyterian Church when I was seven years old.

Uh, we mainly went there because there were a lot of people, a lot of families there from Hawaii, and they also had a basketball program. Okay. And they played in so Southeast Youth Organization. Yeah. You played basketball. Yeah. So I started playing when I was seven years old. That's why we started going to the church.

Yeah. Um, I don't think my parents, I, I don't know. I don't know. I didn't really have never asked them if they really were seeking the Lord or seeking purpose or anything like that. But they brought us to that church. And by the grace of God, uh, my whole family. I ended up hearing the good news and coming to Christ.

Uh, for me it was when, uh, we would go to this yearly conference that many people know about Mount Herman. Okay. Yep. And I was in sixth grade going into seventh grade. I was at Mission Springs, uh, one of these camps. And that same year during my sixth grade year, I had met a guy and he just had introduced me to a lot of just, uh, ungodly things.

And I followed him. And he was one year older than me. And, um, I just thought it was exciting to be around him. Parents really didn't know him. Um, but I knew what we were doing, uh, was wrong. And so, but I just kind of kept

that to. , um, kind of like, just like, just foolish things. Like I lived in Santa Ana right next door to orange, and so they had a lot of orange groves back then.

Mm-hmm. , which they don't now, but like we would, he would go into the orange grove and then we would take oranges and we'd throw them at cars. That went by. I thought, you know, he did it first and I thought, oh, that's so cool. Right. And so I did it and we'd run away.

Rocky Seto: Sorry

Garrett Inouye: to pause the podcast, but Kenny wanted to make a quick clarification point.

So Kenny.

Kenny Wada: Okay. I just wanna clarify that this happened one time. Just one time. Okay.

Garrett Inouye: Kenny, we get it. You only did it one time. It's still a naughty thing to do. All right. Back to the podcast.

Kenny Wada: I know. And then yet I would feel very guilty. You know, I'd come home and feel very guilty about that, but there were other things that he also showed me that, you know, just, uh, I knew were wrong.

Um, so that year when I was at Mount Herman, I still remember it was Roy Na sake. And so he's, um, The father of Ryan Narasaki at Lighthouse. Yeah. But he was giving an altar call. Uh, it was toward the end of the week, and they were sharing again, the message of, uh, Christ giving his life for our wrongdoings, our sins, and that there's forgiveness with Christ.

And I remember just bawling, just crying and crying and wanting, um, to be forgiven for the things that I had done that year. Um, and I remember, uh, saying, I want your forgiveness. And I remember too, feeling cleansed. I mean really feeling washed and, uh, a burden, huge burden lifted off. Um, I think because of that, like when I came back from Mount Herman, this friend would come over and I immediately knew I couldn't hang out with him anymore.

And so, uh, as I look back on that, I wish I was more mature, evangelize, , but he was more like . He was more scary to me or more threatening than, than I was in my faith. And so, um, I just kind of avoided him. And, uh, but something

happened there. And I think because I, you know, this is sixth grade going into the seventh grade, I think because that happened to me in junior high.

I, I think since then I've loved youth ministry and I believe that that kids at that age can understand forgiveness and the, um, the mercy and the grace that can come to God through them. I think kids understand their need for forgiveness. I'm sure you know, everyone's at a different developmental stage, but I just think because that was my experience, um, I just really believe that that's possible.

Yeah. Anyway, from there, um, I live like a little junior higher Pharisee and I'm not silking oranges across. No, no, no, no, no. Just judging everybody. Cause I thought they was so righteous. Um, throwing stones at people.

Rocky Seto: Yeah. .

Kenny Wada: Exactly. And, uh, yeah, all those things, when I remember them, I regret them and I think the Lord for his forgiveness.

Um, but anyway, it was in high school in my junior year where um, our youth director named Kurt Oga, uh, took like about maybe 10 to 12 of us and just said, Hey, do you guys want to study the Bible? Do you want to read, uh, study some books? And we read The Pursuit of Holiness by Jerry Bridges. Uh, he took us the two navigator bible studies.

Uh, we read a book called The Victorious Christian Life by Alan Redpath. And, um, and he just taught us, you know, the gospel, the good news. And what became my life first was a verse he shared at a second Corinthians five 15. And it says, and he died for all. Jesus died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died in Rose again on their behalf.

And, um, I just remember him saying that, you know, Christ died for you, not only to forgive you, but to actually bring you back to him to buy you and you are to live for him. And that again, just sunk deep in my heart. Um, and I think at that point, that's where I really, I, I believe I just said, Lord, my life is yours.

I'm living for you and, uh, high high school. High school. Yeah. Yeah. 11th grade. Mm-hmm. . Um, and kind of set the trajectory, I think of my whole life. Yeah. Isn't that funny? It's awesome. Like what, 16 years of age, right? Yeah. So, I don't know. I believe that still happens today and that's why I love youth ministry and college ministry so much.

Yeah. I, I don't

Garrett Inouye: remember exactly what the. Man, someone might fact check me and fact check me, and let me know if I'm wrong, if you listen to this podcast, but I, I think I read somewhere that there's a really high percentage of, um, missionaries that when you ask them their testimony, uh, and not saying that this is the way it has to be, right, but that there is a large portion of missionaries who fill a call either in their, uh, early teens to mid-teens.

Yeah. And, uh, it's not necessarily that they make a commitment to go overseas or go to a specific country or people, but that they have this, uh, shift in their heart way they decide they wanna live wholly for the Lord. And yeah. So I, that's actually something similar that was in Dan's podcast when he was in junior high that he felt like he wanted to serve the Lord.

Mm-hmm. . So really encouraging to see now how many, not that many years later, you're still young, but, uh, years

Kenny Wada: later you're still I'm only 25. Yeah. I'm only five times two plus two. What? No. Plus seven.

Garrett Inouye: Yeah. But, um, so then that was all at winner Burke. Um, yes. How did you. So Winberg, you know, a church, uh, in Orange County, uh, kinda like a cousin church maybe to our church

Kenny Wada: historically, um, we were, there were just a lot of Japanese American churches that were connected through gems, Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society.

Yeah. And so we were connected through that, that organization.

Garrett Inouye: So then how did you somehow make your way from, from Williamsburg over to, uh, evergreen? And when was, when did that happen?

Kenny Wada: Yeah, that happened in 1990 and it happened through, what often happens, I think, to many people is that they marry somebody who went to Evergreen.

Okay. . And so my wife Kathy, uh, she became a Christian in high school and um, she started to attend Evergreen. Okay. Baptist Church when I was in East LA Okay. Yeah. Way back there. And, um, I met her going into the summer, uh, before my freshman year at uc, Irvine. Okay. So we were at a barbecue. At

Guy named Kevin Ye, we had a common friend, Kevin Ye and yes, we're at his house having a barbecue and he introduced me to her.

Um, and yeah, I mean we just kind of talked and then it was there where I found out she was going to uc, Irvine, and I was like, oh, that's where I'm going. Um, no fireworks. I think for her. She was totally in love with me by then. ,

Garrett Inouye: is this true? Kathy, you can

Kenny Wada: let us know anyway. No. So she wasn't interested either, but we just found out we're both going to uc, Irvine, and, um, it was at uc, Irvine where uh, I just got to, uh, we just hung out in a big group and got to know her better.

Um, by the end of our freshman year we were dating, and then in our junior year, I thought, you know, I think I'm. I feel like we can get married. Wow. Yeah.

Garrett Inouye: What was some of the first things that drew you to

Kenny Wada: to Kathy? The first time I like, again, when I first met her, we were just friends. And I tell this story, we're at her apartment and she was, we were sitting at the kitchen table and, uh, we prayed, we were praying for something.

I don't know what we were praying for, but all I know is that when we finished and I looked up at. And then she's smiling at me. I'm like, oh my gosh, I like this girl . And from that point on, it was super awkward. I mean, I was totally fine, you know, talking with her before that. But right when I started to like her, I became a total dork.

And I, I couldn't carry a conversation. I remember one time I was at school and um, I, I, like, before I would just go by their apartment, but this time I felt like I needed a reason. Like, you know, why do you need a reason? But I think cuz now you like her and you just think I need a reason. So what I did is I knew she had cats and so I went to the Albertsons and I bought kitty litter and I brought it go on mess.

And I knocked and then I'm like, sweet. Here's some kitty later for you. Again. So romantic. Yeah. . It was so dumb. Anyway. That's awesome. It worked though. It worked. . I don't think that worked, but . Yep. But that's how, and then, uh, so how did I get to Evergreen? So we got married, uh, I loved Winberg Presbyterian Church.

Um, so we started to attend Winberg, and for the first six months we did. Um, and she, she just, I think she really loved Evergreen, the teaching, the community. Um, and so she asked could we meet with Pastor Corey to discuss, uh, just, just to discuss about how to discern what church to go to. I wasn't really open.

But I said, okay. And so we sat down Pastor Corey, and it was at that meeting, he asked me what I wanted to do in the future. And at the time I was teaching at Roosevelt High School. Mm. Who were you teaching? I was teaching math and science and physical sciences at Roosevelt High School. So in East LA? Yeah.

Yeah. Right down the street from, uh, evergreen Old Evergreen. The original site. Original site. Boy Heights. Yeah. And, um, I told him, well, I, I'm teaching Kathy's getting her masters in linguistics and English, and when she finishes that she's gonna go to work. And then I was planning to go to seminary cause I wanted to be a youth pastor.

We kept on talking and then toward the end of the conversation he says, you know, I feel like the Lord's leading me to ask you to consider being our youth pastor. And so yeah, if you consider coming on as an intern in the summer of 1990 and then after three months, then. Or I don't know how many months.

And then full-time as the youth pastor. Um, we left that meeting. Cathy was elated, to say the least. And um, I was a little, I think I was a little suspicious or just like, okay, cause I really didn't wanna leave when Yeah. But we prayed and I thought, okay Lord, maybe this is the opportunity. And so, um, in the summer of 19, We left, uh, Cypress College where we lived, where we had our first apartment, and we moved out to Monterey Park.

Wow. Yeah. Monterey Park, the, the city of like, Asian people, , all, all I know is

that

Rocky Seto: come from Orange County. Right, right. I know where you're going with

Kenny Wada: this. And I, and when I came to Monterey Park, I, so we packed up all our stuff and I drove around and I remember, uh, driving on a stoplight and I looked at my rear view mirror and there's like an Asian person come on.

And I looked to the right, there's an Asian person. I look to the, to the left, and there's an Asian person. I'm like, oh my gosh. And then I went to Arco gas station and I'm paying the guy that guy's Asian, and

Rocky Seto: then you realize that you're Asian too. ,

Kenny Wada: sorry. And so I drove home and I open, I go back to the apartment.

I go, Kathy, I think I can run for mayor in this city, . Oh, it was such, it was so strange. And now that I live, been here ever since in, in San Gabriel Valley, San Gabriel Valley, it's very normal to me. But now as I go out to other places, I, I realize, wow, this is really a, a unique place.

Garrett Inouye: Can I back up just a, a little bit?

Oh yeah. So you mentioned that you met with Corey, and, and in that meeting you, uh, kind of mentioned some plans that you wanted to go to seminary to be a youth pastor. Yes. So between high school and college and, uh, dating Cathy and then trying to decide, you know, what church to go to once you're married, where did youth pastoring come into that?

I mean, you, you already had a job thinking about going back to school to study, to, to be a pastor is kind of a big thing. Where did that come from?

Kenny Wada: Oh, so, um, in high school actually when I feel like that's when the Lord really captured my heart. Mm-hmm. , um, when I was a senior in high school, I started to work with the junior high at our church at Winburg Presbyterian Church.

Yeah. Um, I started to teach Sunday school and then all through college I worked with, uh, the youth group at my church. Okay. Yeah. So throughout all those years and then, um, . Yeah. Didn't retreats, youth retreats all through the college years.

Garrett Inouye: Yeah. Yeah. So then it was kind of as you continued to serve with the youth, uh, and youth ministry is so, uh, integral into your faith journey, that that's kind of where the desire to be youth pastor kind of came in.

Yeah.

Kenny Wada: I don't think it was because I, I just think I wanted to lead and, and teach people, and then I'm in college so I can't do that with adults, . So I just think my audience was youth and that's where I started. But, but essentially that's just where my heart was over the long haul.

Garrett Inouye: Okay. Yeah. So then you meet with Corey, uh, essentially to talk about church stuff and then he offers you a job.

Right. Did you ever ask him why he did

Rocky Seto: that? I did.

Kenny Wada: Okay. I did. And later I said, you know, you didn't really know me, cuz he didn't, he knew Cathy. Um, he married, uh, he, you know, he met us with us like four times for counseling and I said, you know, yeah. Why did you offer that to me? And what he just simply said, he just said, um, well, I had heard, you know, um, I talked to others about you.

And he goes, and I don't know, I had, and there were good things. Mm-hmm. , and then he goes, and I just had a good sense, you know, but that, that sounds very much like Corey, right? , like yeah. The sense that I should do that. And so, but it was truly out, out of the blue for me.

Garrett Inouye: Cool. So then you, uh, started interning and going to seminary at the same time?

Or how did

Kenny Wada: that Actually, I started interning that summer and then, uh, because I still needed a job. The principal at Roosevelt High School, I was on an emergency credential for one year, and if you renew that emergency credential, you need to go to school to renew it. But he actually renewed me for an adult education emergency credential.

And so I taught almost for like. Through the summer. Oh, I get, yeah, that's right. I taught all the way to the end of 1990 and I taught like part-time at Roosevelt and I was an intern at, at Evergreen part. So the Lord provided income for your family? Yes, yes. So internship, money, uh, pay, and then, uh, part-time at Roosevelt.

Yeah. Wow. Yeah. Yeah. And then at the end of that, at the end of that semester, then I came on full time, and then that's when I started at Tbit. Okay.

Yeah. Started at Tbit and then I never finished. I took like, uh, one year's worth of classes for Miv. Okay. And then, and then I left ministry, ended up Leav Leav ministry.

Garrett Inouye: Yeah. So you're a youth pastor for how long? What, uh, when you were

Kenny Wada: pastoring till the end of 1996. So I started full time at the beginning of 91. Okay. And then I, my last day was like December 31st, 1996.

Garrett Inouye: And then just so some of the people at our church know who were some of the. Some of your students that some people might know, some of your

Kenny Wada: youth students.

Yeah, so, uh, uh, Paul Moy. Okay. Former youth pastor. He was a freshman. Um, let's see. Well, Adam, no, who used to be the administrative pastor. He was like a junior when I was a youth pastor. Um, I mean, all the Ishida girls, Carly Shani, um, can Greg Salgado? Okay.

Garrett Inouye: There's a lot. There's a lot. Yeah. There's a lot. Yeah.

Yeah. And some of the pastors other churches too, right?

Kenny Wada: Uh oh yeah. Kyle Zaki. Yeah. Yeah. Cool.

Garrett Inouye: Yeah. That's amazing. So then, um, so you had a transition and you transitioned into, what

Kenny Wada: did you do? Oh, what you mean? When I came out of, uh, youth pastoring? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So my first, uh, stint in youth pastoring, I really, I mean, I ended that just burnt out, you know?

Um, I, I did not, I was not angry at God, but I just had no emotional kind of relational energy for that. Mm. So I remember, uh, talking to Pastor Corey like a year before I actually left, and I was like, you know what? I'm, I don't know what's happening with me. It's like, I really didn't want to teach anymore.

Um, and so, but I would, cuz I needed to, but I felt like a hypocrite because the, like, the sincerity of my soul wasn't there. And I just remember just asking God

for help. Um, but things did not change for a good year. And then, uh, I just, I remember listening to James Dobson. had nothing to do with youth ministry, but he was talking about, um, Isaac, Abraham and Isaac and how, uh, a Abraham, when he, when God asked him to sacrifice his son, essentially, um, he was asking Abraham to like, give up, um, his promise, like God's promise to him that he would bless Abraham, you know?

Uh, and, and Abraham did that. And I just remember, I don't know if it was Jim do Thompson or the speaker with him, the guest with him was just saying, you know, God was asking him to give up, uh, his dream and youth pastoring was my dream. And I remember hearing that and just, just like really weeping and I just knew.

Oh, it's over, Lord. You want me to give this up? And so I called Corey that same moment and I said, Hey, I think I'm done. No, not, I think I know I'm done. I don't know the exact time that was, but it was sometime like on the fall of 1996. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And then I had no idea. And he said, okay, hey, we will give you, I remember this, but I remember I'd already been on, like, I, I feel like I had already been on the pastoral role for like, over, almost little bit over a year and I wasn't, I just knew I wasn't given it my all or there was just something wrong.

And so he goes, okay, you could stay out until the end of the year and then we'll give you severance for three months. Right. And I just told him, no, I'm done. I'm just done at the end of the year. We'll see what happens. And um, he said, okay. And, uh, two weeks. Okay. Before, it's my last day. I have no idea what I'm gonna do.

Wow. And, um, our former missions pastor named Joel Roberts, uh, calls me and he says, Hey, the program manager at our homeless shelter, um, quit. He's awol. And, and, uh, but what, this is the answered prayer is that Kathy, we have, we have Jessica now. So Jessica's in her family. And so one of us, we committed that one of us would be at home always.

And so I'm looking for a job that's swing shift cuz Kathy works in the morning. She works six in the morning to like two o'clock. So I'm looking for a swing shift job. Um, so anyway, Joel Roberts calls me and he says, Hey, my project matter's AWOL hours 4:00 PM to 12:00 AM and uh, Sunday to Thursday to Thursday.

He goes, do you think you can come and step in just for like a month until I could hire somebody else? And then, uh, you know, and this helped me out like

that. I'm like, yes, I can . And it was perfect. Yeah. And so my first night working there was December 31st, 1996. And I Wow. And I ended up being there.

Captain New Year. Exactly. And that's a story in itself. But anyway, , uh, I worked there for a year and a half, so

Rocky Seto: did he. You're stepping down. He did know

Kenny Wada: I was stepping down. Yeah, just curious. Okay. But then just

Rocky Seto: that his, he called, yeah. Providentially. There was an opening there. Purposeful sovereignty. Don't take my thunder.

Now don't take, that's coming up. Come on.

Kenny Wada: I don't tell you these things to

Rocky Seto: unveil stuff. Okay. No, I'm just kidding. Exactly. Purposeful sovereignty. Yes.

Kenny Wada: Providence, Rocky shared with me John Piper's definition of providence. So I just said it. Yeah. .

Garrett Inouye: Thank you. Yes, yes. Man, that's, that's,

Rocky Seto: uh, that's crazy. That's how many years was that though?

It went beyond a

Kenny Wada: month, correct? Yes. It ended up being a year and a half. Oh yeah,

Rocky Seto: you said that.

Kenny Wada: I'm sorry. A year and a year and a half. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you so much for just asking these things. These are like bringing up great memories. Yeah. Yeah. They're encouraging, they're encouraging to me as I move on again to my next step because Yeah, they, I mean, God has been incredibly faithful.

Yeah.

Rocky Seto: Yeah. Now, 2010. Yeah. 2010. So I never, when I was here at Evergreen. Yeah. I didn't know you as a pastor. Matter of fact, I didn't even know who you were until 2010 outside. We went to a party. We did. Yep. And you remember that.

Kenny Wada: And you had, I had just come back to ministry, right? Yes.

Rocky Seto: Yeah. So, and now me, my family were leaving mm-hmm.

to Seattle at that point. So I remember you were right there in the front lawn having come onto staff. Mm-hmm. or publicly telling people you come onto staff, maybe starts at the next year or something, but, and then, and then I leave for seven years and then we come back for seven years. Seven years later.

And then I remember just that whole time it was, it was interesting because. I didn't know you as a pastor until the only time I knew you as a pastor is when I come back to join you as a pastor. You know? Yeah, yeah. Cause that's a really neat time. And we had this interesting thing of future things to come Yeah.

In that front yard. I mean, it was, the more I look back at it, I was like,

Kenny Wada: wow, it was right. And I, and I think about it and I think about again, uh, the purposeful sovereignty in it all. So I had come back to ministry in 2010. I was talking with Rocky outside of, um, uh, off of Garibaldi and we're sitting there and, uh, I think you're telling me about going up to Seattle, right.

And yet you wanted to go into the ministry, even back then. Yeah. You're talking about going in the ministry and, and what God would have for you. And, um, at that time I gave you a book called, uh, was it Hearing God, experiencing God Experiencing God? Mm-hmm. by, um, K Black be Blackaby. Yeah. I had, I had just read that book and um, it was very meaningful to me and I just said, Rocky, here have this book is in the trunk of my car in You Trunk.

I remember it in trunk. Yeah. I brought it out. But I remember almost feeling like it was a holy moment. And so I told this, I go, Hey, can we get on our knees? And we got on our knees outside of that, you know, and, and I prayed for him. I prayed for him as he, as he's going up. Cuz I just felt like that there was a wow.

Yeah. That there was something that God was gonna do. I thought up there I go, wow, you're gonna do something pretty great. Well, he did do,

Rocky Seto: he did a lot up there too. But That's true. It was a foreshadowing looking backwards. Yeah. I mean, that's my point is why do I bring that two thou? I can't relate to anything that you just said from winners to 1996 to 2010

But that 2000 tens where our lives got kind of got more intertwined. It did. You know? So,

Kenny Wada: and it was just like that moment, because the next time, I mean, I didn't really even talk to you until we actually took a trip, visited to Seattle

Rocky Seto: 2013 or 14,

Kenny Wada: something like that. Right. And you welcomed us in our house and we took us all around.

And I just remember Kathy going, we don't even really know him that well. They're taking such good care of us. I'm like, yeah, it's awesome. It's great.

Rocky Seto: That was fun having people visit, you know? And so it was nice. And then I remember, um, union Girls went to the facility. Yeah. Watch practice. We had a Katsu burger at our house.

I did .

Kenny Wada: I did

Rocky Seto: Kiku. My mother-in-law. Yeah. Kiku. Yeah, she's wonderful. And then I remember driving up to Kirkland, I think to visit with you at the, that's right. Double Tree or whatever hotel you guys staying at. Hung out at the lobby for a couple hours. He did? Mm-hmm. ,

Kenny Wada: he did. We were at, we were at the hotel and then mm-hmm.

And then you asked if you can come, and I think it might have been like after 10. It was late. Yeah.

Rocky Seto: It was after practice in meetings on that song. Oh, okay. I probably came my coaching

Kenny Wada: clothes, you know? Yeah. You came. And then I told Kathy, I don't know why he wants to meet. And then we sat down and we talked.

Rocky Seto: I don't even know, remember what we talked about? I just wanted to see you. I think, you know. Oh, okay.

Kenny Wada: Did you remember, I remember you did ask about, you know, can you share some things

Rocky Seto: publicly that Yeah,

Kenny Wada: yeah. You share. I mean, one, one of you did ask about like, you know, um, Corey retiring, and then what I thought about who would become the next senior pastor there.

Oh. You know, and I did tell you, I, I felt like the next senior pastor would, would have a lot of problems. I knew it was gonna be hard. Not problem. Like I knew it was gonna be hard challenge, I remember. Oh yeah, definitely. Cause I mean, when you have a senior pastor like Pastor Corey for 40, you know, plus years, any kind of transition.

That's

Rocky Seto: funny. I don't even remember that, but I know I, I talked to you, so that's cool. I'm glad you reminded me of that memory, you know?

Kenny Wada: Yeah. Yep. Yeah.

Garrett Inouye: Wow. Can I go back and ask, uh, you mentioned coming back on staff, uh, 2010. How did, how did that happen?

Kenny Wada: Um, so. Uh, uh, I worked at the homeless shelter for a year and a half, and then during that time I realized I don't think I'm gonna do this

And actually, when I look back at my life, I, um, I just have a, you know, I just feel like God, I want to, and I still actually do want to do, my heart is drawn to the outcast and to the poor. And so when I first came outta college, I worked at a group home for abused boys. Um, and I got to see that system for six months.

And then I worked at juvenile hall in Orange County, and then I was a teacher and then a youth pastor. So as I came out and I started working with the homeless shelter, I was just like, wow, God, you really have brought me into these different, uh, areas. But, um, when I was working with the homeless population, I mean the, the least, and I tell people this, uh, I said, And I don't try to downplay their homelessness, but, um, like that's,

that's an outcome of all the life abuse that has happened, right? Yeah. And I think that societies or our culture's answer is to provide for them shelter. And I know that there's, there's so many other programs that understand that it's not just about shelter. Mm-hmm. . But I think that's, when you hear like the big media push, that's the answer is shelter.

But there's so many more, much, much deeper things. Yeah. Right. So

Rocky Seto: what, was there big problems that led to these situations? Just curious as

Kenny Wada: you say that, uh, there's a lot of, there's substance abuse. Mm-hmm. , there's alcoholism, and then along with that then comes mental illness, you know? Um, and there's just, yeah, there's, there's a history of.

Um, burning bridges with family members because of abuse, uh, substance abuse, things like that. Um, and so it's hard. And so actually the ones who did the best in our program were actually, uh, those who had immigrated from Mexico and they were homeless, but they, uh, actually, you know, they had work ethic.

Maybe a different reason. For a different reason. Exactly. And so they would come in and, um, they would, they, they would actually wanted to get out too. And so they would come in, they, maybe none of them stayed the whole 90 days. It would be like maybe a month, month and a half. And then they're, they're settled.

They've got some stuff and then they go. Um, but, uh, oh. Anyway, so as I was working there, I realized that, um, I mean, we had a good, it was a good, uh, ministry, not a ministry, but a non-profit. Um, but I just saw that there's also deeper issues and so I just knew I wasn't gonna be there. But while I was there, I learned how to data cable and so I data cabled the building and then I started to learn networking.

And then here's a name from, it's been around for a long time. Peter Lao was a network administrator and I asked him, Hey, can I follow you? So what I would do is I would follow him before my working hours and then I would go to work, but I just wanted to see what he did. And, uh, I started to learn networking.

And so after a year and a half of at the shelter, I started my own business. Um, and my goal, in this business was to try to do ministry, uh, and work well was to work part-time. , this is my prayer, Lord. I wanna work part-time, make full-time money, not so that I could be lazy, but so that the other half I can actually do ministry.

10 making yest, making very much so. Um, and by God's grace and I also wanted to stay home with our kids. Our family was growing and I wanted us, one of us always to be home. Not, not me, but Cathy and I both wanted one of us to always be at home with our, our girls. And um, yeah, God was able to bless that.

The only thing I couldn't control was the schedule. So sometimes I'd just be swamped with work and other times I'd have none. And so that was the only thing that was really hard. Oh, and then so how did that come back to industry? Yeah. Yes, yes. Sorry. Sorry, Garrett. No,

Garrett Inouye: this, this is, well, I, I, I wanna say I'm glad you shared that.

Cause to be honest, like I think all this stuff really is, is displaying a pattern of the Lord being good, um, as you seek to be obedient and follow as will. And, and so I'm glad you're sharing all this stuff. I think it's really, really important. It, it, it gives greater context to maybe this one transition that we're gonna talk about, that the, um, purposeful pro, wait, I got it wrong.

Sorry. John Piper. Purposeful sovereignty. Purposeful

Rocky Seto: sovereignty, and coined in the term the, uh, theological term providence of God. Yes. Yes. Purposeful sovereignty of God. Yes. Accomplishing his will.

Garrett Inouye: Thank you. Yeah. But I think all this stuff is, is all your testimony, uh, is kind of building a context and, and a pattern of just a Lord being unchanging depend, uh, independent of what transition we're, we're going through.

Yeah. Um, so. Back. You, you, you started Jo, a company you're

Kenny Wada: working and then Yes, it was called odm Sanct, them Networking. Oh, s n I know, huh. That's, so, anyway, the only reason why I was, I was reading a book, a spiritual formation book, and they said that the monastery, the monks had a term odm sanctum, and it meant Holy leisure.

Holy leisure. And that's what they called their work. Oh. So whenever they weren't praying or meditating on scripture, then they, they had odm sanct them. Holy leisure. And so I really liked that and I said, Lord, I want my work to be like that. The holy leisure that providing and. And so anyway, so that was the name of it.

Um, there, there's even more stories on that, but God did provide mm-hmm. through that. Uh, when I look at my journaling, I think I just, there's just stirrings in my heart to, um, just to have a little bit more freedom to minister to. I, I remember one, one quarter I'd committed to teach a, uh, a, um, Christian education class at church at Evergreen here.

And like the week before I had to start, I got swamped by some great jobs, but I was just working constantly. Mm-hmm. . And so I remember the first Sunday I had to teach, I was, it was. So I'm feeling unprepared and yeah, it was just really bad. Um, but things like that were frustrating. Mm-hmm. . And so I was like, Lord, you know, what are you doing?

And um, at that time I started to then sort of sense that maybe my business was gonna come to an end. That was 2008. Okay. So in 2008 I began to sense, you know, I, so every, it was in January I journaled, you know, Lord, I think my business might come to an end. But in 2008 I ended up making the most money I'd ever made in my life through my

Um, and I was like, oh, that's funny. . And also 2008 was a really bad year for the economy. Yeah. But for me it's like, it was great. Um, And then in the beginning of 2009, I actually wrote, you know what? I think my business is gonna end this year. Um, I did not know how, I didn't know when, but I just felt like it was going to, again, I just write these things down.

I don't, cuz you know, you don't know what's in the mind of the Lord. Mm-hmm. . But um, so as time went on, uh, I think in 2009 we had, and someone's kind of check fact check me on this, but I think we had our all church summer conference. Okay. That year.

Rocky Seto: 2009.

Kenny Wada: Yeah. Yes. Does that make sense? Is that right? We did.

Okay. Because we were at Biola in Sutherland Hall. Mm-hmm. . And so I'm kind of seeking the Lord, I'm sensing my business, it's gonna end. I'm not sure what I want to do. Um, and so I remember sitting in Sutherland Hall and Jan Lee, pastor Jan Lee. Was up there doing announcements before, uh, the speaker. And I remember looking at him and I thought to myself, huh, he feels, and, and this is just how I interpret that, he feels like he's leaving.

I go, I think he's leaving. Cause I knew that maybe he was thinking of that, but it was just sort of a passing comment or something. Like, I feel like he's leaving. And so what happened is that, um, as I was coming into Sutherland after that session, I was outside and as I was coming outta Sutherland, and he was, I was coming in, I was going into Sutherland, and then he was coming out.

Um, we passed through the doorway and I stopped him and I hit his chest. And I said, and I said, you're leaving. Huh? It was a very bold, it was, yeah. It was a very bold moment because I, and I don't do that. I just don't do that. But it was just a sense, right. And I go, you're leaving. Huh? And he goes and he laughs like that.

And, um, I forget what he told me, but I remember when he left, I said, I said to my, you know, talking with the Lord. He didn't say no. And I just thought that was very significant. I went back to the dorm, I journaled that, you know, and maybe two weeks after that I just said, you know, I need to talk to somebody about this.

I feel like, so actually called Corey and I said, Hey, I wanna talk to you, um, about just what happened. Um, I'm thinking the Lord's calling me back to ministry. I don't know, uh, when or what. Mm-hmm. , you know, and then he, he said, um, can I call you back in one month? , and I. Okay, and I, you know, at that I was thinking, okay, something's up.

What I didn't know is that, uh, like that week or very recently, John, uh, John Jan had got the call from Ocos Church to be their pastor. And so he was planning to tell the church sometime later that month or something. Yeah. And just for

Garrett Inouye: context for our church, Jan was, uh, what was his

Kenny Wada: role? Jan Lee was a congregational life pastor.

Mm-hmm. . Okay. Yeah. So a month goes by, I think that the call is confirmed and, um, Corey met me again. I think that, I think, I think Mary Calendars, that was like the place, .

Rocky Seto: Yeah. That sounds about right now. Or Denny's. Yeah.

Kenny Wada: Or my view was twos, I forget. Um, But we met, and then he told me that Jan was indeed gonna leave and pastor at Waco.

And then he asked me if I would consider coming back to congregation, to pastor now as a congregational life pastor. Wow. Um, that was in like the fall of 2009. Wow. And, uh, yeah, again, I was, I came home and told Kathy and she was sort of like, well, really . I think the, I think the thing, like for me, um, calling has really changed over the years.

Like when I first went to youth ministry, I felt like going into ministry was the way in which you gave your life to the Lord. I mean, like, full on. Gave your life to the Lord. Um, well, after I burned out, I just realized, you know what? Every believer gives their life to the Lord. Yeah. Just like second Corinthians five 15.

Right. We live for him. Everything of our life is now from the one who gives us life, gives us purpose and everything. Yeah. And so, um, when I left ministry, I really believed that and lived for him. And so then I saw calling into ministry very specific. I saw it not as like, okay, now I'm really giving my life.

It's more like, what are you calling me to do? Mm. What are you calling me to do? And so when I came back in 20, I just was like asking like, what do you want me to do? Because I understand the sacrifice. And one of the huge sacrifices was that Sundays would now no longer become family time. Mm. Yeah. Yeah.

And that was huge. So now I had a full on family, you know, four, four girls. And Sundays were, they're very enjoy. They're, I don't know if they're enjoyable, but they're relaxed. Right. And you'd come, you listen to driving one car, drive one car. Exactly. Yeah. Well, you know it, you guys. Yes. Well, you guys, you totally know it.

And then when you go into ministry, it's like that, that's all gone. So I think it's kind of funny, out of all the sacrifices, that we thought about, that was like the biggest one, you know? Um, so anyway, uh, yeah, I came back and it was like,

what, what, what would you have me do? Uh, in, in, in here? And at that time, Corey was, uh, planning to retire in 20.

Okay. Yeah. 2015 and so, so like six

Garrett Inouye: years, or five and a half years from when you came on, that was the plan?

Kenny Wada: Yes. Well, I came on January of 2010. Oh. And he was planning on retiring in 2015. He had asked me if I felt called to the senior pastor and like, without even blinking my eyes and like, no, you know, cause I really, I don't, I don't feel called to that.

Um, um, I don't want to do that and I don't feel called to that. I mean, you could also, you could not want to do something but be called to it and then, you know, you have to wrestle with that. But I also did not feel called to it. Um, and so one of the things I really sense that, but a deep conviction though, was that I was gonna help with that transition.

Mm. Um, as I shared earlier, I just knew that the next senior pastor that came, it would be a very difficult transition and I wanted to help. Uh, the church and I wanted to help the senior pa, new senior pastor work through that transition. And so that was my hope. And so I just observed how the, um, leadership work, how we worked as a church.

I had certain ideas of like what I would like, what I thought would be good if, um, for the transition. Um, I just saw how central a figure, uh, pastor Corey was. Mm-hmm. and had become, and very naturally, I mean, he had been the senior pastor since it was maybe like, what, 20 people? And now it's over all these years.

There was a lot of trust in him and just, and rightly so, and so, I just knew that something needed to happen, but I really didn't. Um, all I know is that when 2014 came, we hadn't made any plans for him to retire. Yeah. And also he wasn't sensing that it was time, and so he said he was going to stay on for another seven years.

Yeah. And then I was like, oh my goodness. Then I, I, I did not imagine that I would Yeah. Be on that much longer to help the, I didn't know that it would be that much longer to the transition. But the,

Rocky Seto: you're like, you were like, um, this was to be here in 2015, seven more years. On top of that, you're thinking, oh, how's this gonna play out?

You're wondering probably at this time. Right, right.

Kenny Wada: And I remember thinking, gosh, 2022 and what I shared with you really recently is that memory, because now it's 2022. Wow. And actually now I'm actually coming. So I just think the Lord has a plan. Yeah. You know? Cause I remember in 2014 when he said, yeah, actually I'm gonna stay on for several more years to 2022.

I just remember thinking, I don't know if I can last that long, but now here it is. And yeah. So anyway, I shared that with Rocky. I was like, that was very meaningful to me when I remembered that. So anyway, um, what happened is that in 2016, for those who are in service, Corey broke down. You know, he couldn't speak cuz he was crying.

I remember that. Yeah. Yeah. And um, he just said, you know, there's stuff stirring in him. And I remember thinking, what is going on? You know, and what had, what had happened is that it was actually back in 2014 where he sensed that, uh, the Lord told him that Pastor Ro at Rocky would be the next senior pastor.

But he just didn't move on that at all. But that some certain things were happening in Rocky's life and he just thought, uh, just in general that now was the time that maybe it was time to move on that. So, um, yeah, we prayed about it. Uh, we had a board meeting where Rocky zoomed in and we got to interview him.

You know what I was gonna do is I was gonna, at that retreat, okay, I got a rock from the beach. Oh yeah. Cause I remember walking on the beach and I picked up this rock and I wrote this verse on it, and it's, um, John's 16. And, um, I don't have my, let's see, have my Bible. It's John 16. And, uh, he's speaking to his disciples and he says, behold the hour is coming.

This is verse 32. Indeed it has come. You'll be scattered, , gosh, can only emotional here, um, each to his own home and will leave me alone. And then he says, yet I am not alone for the fathers with me. And um, I remember walking along the beach, I picked up the rock and I just said, you know, Lord, I don't know what's ahead, but, um, I I believe you're gonna be with me.

Mm. Uh, I think there, I think I get emotional cuz back then I didn't know really, um, maybe what I would experience. And Rocky, I think you could testify to it too, right? There's things that we went through that I don't think anyone else could know, that no one else could know, but the Lord, right? And that we, we wouldn't be able to share actually with anyone else.

Um, but we're not alone. He's with. And so I took that rock, I wrote that verse on it. I wrote all the people's names from the board on it that were at that retreat. And I drew a really lame picture of waves, and little seagulls, and I, and it's on my mantle in my living room. Wow. And I left it there. I dated it cuz I just felt like, all right, uh, let's go.

You know, this is it. I really felt God's peace about it. Um, but I also knew it was gonna be a hard transition. Mm. So

Rocky Seto: beach or Oxnard. Mm-hmm. , boom, boom, boom. We get the little interview. It wasn't so much of an interview, it was just . It was, I don't know if it was an interview, but when Kenny, when, when we finally decided to come down in 2017, when.

That, uh, board retreat was January, 2017, I believe. Right. And you had us on FaceTime that That's right. iPhone, FaceTime, that's right. And I was able to address the board and the pastors, or senior associate pastors. And so when I came down in June of 2017, we had a Ligonier's conference year at the church, evergreen Church.

But, uh, I was able to meet with all the senior associate pastors, whether it was that time at Phoenix Inn or later on when I moved down in July of 2017. In your office, you made it very clear to me what your purpose on the staff was. Yes. Which is to help with the transition, like you said earlier. Yeah. So in terms of when you felt called, what was the issue or what was the, the tasks that you had transition.

And I remember that you said, you know what, I'm, I'm not saying I'm leaving tomorrow, but I just wanna let you know that day's coming. I'm here to help with the transition. And, um, that was 2017, June or July. And I, I really appreciated that. I was like, oh, okay, but , here we are to that date. And yeah. So when you told me, I don't know, maybe back in June, may of this year, something like that.

Mm-hmm. , I forget. Maybe even sooner.

Kenny Wada: It's like in June, right. This year. Told you I think, yeah. I think the times come

Rocky Seto: Right. And you told me that, and I'm like, okay. It drew me back. It harken me back to that conversation that we had in 2017, five years earlier. Yeah. And so anyway, I'm just trying to kinda show my view of what I, I knew and how it unfolded.

That was a big deal. And, um, how did you kind of come to that realization? What were some things that you felt like, okay, transition is far long enough for me to come off the staff?

Kenny Wada: Yeah. Um, I don't know if I had any like criteria. Because not only did we go through the transition, but then in March, 2020, the whole country, the whole world was shut down.

And we went through like another incredible, never before experienced , uh,

Rocky Seto: didn't teach you this at . Exactly.

Kenny Wada: I said in 2020, this is what, but this is what you do when you have a pandemic and you have to use something that wasn't invented yet. . Um, and so, uh, so anyway, I think I already knew the transition was going to be very difficult.

Um, I think it, we had shared many times it would be like if, um, many said that he was a father figure to them. And I think toward the end it was like latter 10 years. I think he was almost like, I mean he was like a grandfather figure. Um, sorry Corey. You're not that old, but . But, um, uh, and it would be like losing somebody who's very significant in your family and then, but they're not really gone dying.

They just left and then you have another, you know, uh, leader come in. Um, I just think that I was mostly concerned about the emotional and relational losses that people would experience, and I knew that that would be difficult. That would be difficult. And so even, um, with yourself being a man full of integrity, uh, love for the Lord, um, you know, you there, there could be nothing wrong with the person coming in, it's just that you're dealing with, uh, a.

Just loss. Just loss. And if there's one thing, like not just, um, Asian culture, but I just think our culture in general, one thing that we're not good at is we're not good at grieving loss. Yeah. We're not good at grieving loss. I think just really

weeping and being sad and acknowledging loss and just, we're just not good at that.

So, um, and because we don't really know how to grieve through those things, we become either depressed or we become angry. And, um, I think those are the two responses that come out when you just don't grieve something that is lost. And I think that's probably been the hardest part in the transition is that, you know, people, things have changed and so there's a longing.

It's like, I want it to be the way it was. Um, And, uh, it, it's, it's, it's not going to go back that way. Something new is coming about, has come about and, um, and I just think now it's working through that grieving process.

Garrett Inouye: Kenny, for you though, how, uh, would you mind sharing, like, what, what does healthy grieving, uh, look like to you as he, as he say

Rocky Seto: that?

Kenny Wada: Um, I think one healthy grieving is, uh, one, I think it is, it's, it's mourning over what was lost. Um, and I think sometimes you're just mourning and you don't even know what you're mourning about. So I think healthy grieving is talking about it, um, talking about it to somebody. Uh, and also if somebody, Um, maybe is not, I think what it is is that a lot of people are uncomfortable talking about talking to someone who's sad in general.

You know? I think so. I think if, uh, people can just begin to ask questions like, oh, what do you miss? You know, or, or why, and I just think that as you talk about it, um, start to pray that the Holy Spirit, you know, identify, help you identify what is it that I'm really sad about. And for, for myself from a lot of times it's just sort of like, I just miss the past, you know?

And I think when it comes down to that, Better able to identify, oh, I dismiss the past. Then you could accept that, you know what, that's the past. It's like your little, it's like your children, you know, as they get older, they're no longer like right now, Garrett, they love you. Your kids love you. Your girls adore you, right?

And they hug you. They love Shannon and they hug you. But you know, there comes a a time where you aren't the most, yeah, you almost like their enemy. And I think you could sit there and like mourn of what was lost and just stay there and depressed. Or you can get angry, you know, you know what man, how

much I've given to you and you treat me like that, you know, and you can get angry or you could just, you know what, that was the past.

Thank you Jesus for that. You know, when my kids were young, we're here and you know what, it's gonna get better right now. And so just not sticking back there, but looking forward to the future. Um, and I think. Just being able to accept that. I think it's hard. It really is. There's a little, um, there's a thing in Ecclesiastes Ecclesiastes seven 10 here.

He goes, well, one at verse nine too. He says, you know, be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the heart of fools. Right. Say not why were the former days better than these for it is not from wisdom that you asked this. Um, and you know, that's not true. I mean, there's just some wisdom there, and I think part of the wisdom is just being able to grieve the past.

Mm-hmm. . Yeah,

Garrett Inouye: I, I know you're, uh, considered well one, you're the, um, the crying pastor. The weeping pastor. Weeping pastor. Sometimes it's not because you're sad sometimes just moved. Right. Sometimes that's because you're, that's true grieving to, but, um, but also you're known as being, uh, one of like a super relational pastor.

Um, and so I can imagine a lot, a lot of the transition was you just diving deep into relationship with, with people, with the staff. And, uh, I, I know you've talked to a lot of people and, and, and I know that that's been super helpful. Was there other things that, um, you found yourself doing to help with the transition, um, over the last few years?

Kenny Wada: Um, I think, well, I know I've been praying a ton, right? Um, I just think that there's things that are just like when somebody, I'll apply this, like specifically in kind of like in generally how. Um, we handle the transition. Is that like when someone's grieving, like really, really grieving a loss? Um, it's not time to teach them.

Mm. It's just time to listen. It's time to just be there with them. Uh, maybe try to say a few things, but not to, not to alleviate their grief. Like, I never felt this need to alleviate their grief. I felt like the Lord would do that. Um, but afterwards I would pray. I'd definitely pray for them and follow up, see how they're doing.

Um, I think what's been difficult is that, as Rocky shared from the Pulpal one time, is that we have two groups of people in our church, those who have, don't have the history and they've come more recently. And so as you're talking with those people, it's like, it's a different, um, type of care and, uh, encouragement and leading.

And then you have those who've been with us 25, 30 plus years. And they're experiencing the change differently. And so I think we just need a lot of God's grace and mercy. Yeah. Through it all, I'm, I'm very grateful for those who, um, who are experiencing the change and they're just coming with the Lord, asking the Lord, you know, what, what would you have of me in during this time?

Um, and I just know we're really grateful for all the, um, yeah, just all the support. Um, and it's, there's times it's been hard, but overall, uh, I think we've had good support. Yeah.

Rocky Seto: Oh, Kenny looks at me and, no, the church family is super gracious, particularly those who have a conviction. To know that this is the Lord's Church and this is the church I'm part of, and I really appreciate that.

I mean, I've shared this with the staff and others that those who made a conscious decision to stay and be committed have really captured my heart. I know that just means a ton to me. You know, because all those things that you said, There's grieving, there's loss, there's other folks that have been praying for this type of church, and they, they're just absolutely ecstatic.

Right? So there's two different type of, uh, experiences going on, and of course, we're encouraged and, and want others to come join our church family. But it's particularly those who understand the depth and the context. So the changes and, and the things that are happening that are hard mm-hmm. , but yet they goes, you know what, this is the Lord's Church.

This is the church family that God's called me to invest into. And, uh, so I, I understand what you're saying. People have been super gracious, particularly as I look back into the congregation, I see faces, I get to know people's stories more. And yeah, it's been amazing. It's been a, people have been very, uh, encouraging in that way.

Yeah. Um, transition help. I just wanna give you my, uh, take on how Kenny, pastor Kenny has helped. Um, so, and there's a ton of other things that I don't know, or if you know, if I do know. These are the things that come to my mind

in, in 2017 till 2022. I mean, Kenny has been super instrumental in helping out with some very difficult issues, right?

And, um, I don't know if I could have got through it without you, so thank you brother. And, um, secondly, c I mean it was helpful to have you as a cohort and when there's 10 different opinions and doesn't mean you and I thought the same on everything, but real close enough. And I drew a lot of strength from you, so I want you to know is a big deal.

And so, church, family, I just want you to know that, I mean, in a lot of ways Kenny's been fulfilled that role in a very unique way. And a lot of his roles are like, he's like, The, the putty that kind of fits between the cracks, you know, and , you know, he just kind of helps fit things together. And a lot of our conversations, you know, we'd have a lot of conversations over the years at the office, at your house, on the phone, and we agree on a ton of things.

We disagree on 10 things, but I feel like I could talk to you, you could talk to me. I definitely know what you think, you know what I think. And then at the end of the day, it's like, well, let's just support each other, love each other, and let's go, you know? And so that has been super encouraging, helpful to me.

I mean, those are some big things right there. And, um, there's more. But I think those are some massive pillars that come to my mind in terms of at least my portion of the, um, wide portion of the, uh, transition. How, how I've seen it. So, thank you so much. You know? And, um, I just, I just am grateful for that, you know?

And. I just, who knew from way back in 2010 that this would be a kind of a relationship that we would share that way, you know? Yeah. You know, I didn't know that. Yeah. Here we are recording this podcast in 2022. You know, it's 12 years ago. Yes.

Kenny Wada: In 12 years, actually. 13. 13 years. Okay. Because it'll be the end of 2022,

Rocky Seto: right.

The whole year past. Right. And in that time your hair's grown more. I got less hair, . There's a lot, there's a lot of transitions that's taken place, but I just is, I'm just marveling it kind of how that worked out. You know, just kind of how our paths crossed a little bit. I didn't even know you, like I said, we weren't like friends when I was attending here, you know, earlier two thousands, you know?

So it's amazing how that worked. So thank you. Oh, yeah. Thank you so much.

Garrett Inouye: Um, getting back to Rocky's, uh, question. He, uh, I wanted to come back and ask, uh, so then how did you, um, kind of sense that you had completed your task of, of, uh, helping and assisting in the transition?

Kenny Wada: Yeah. You know, I don't, like I said, I, or maybe I didn't say it.

Um, I don't think I had certain criteria mm-hmm. about it. Um, I think it was just, I mean, at, at the end of 2019 actually. Okay. I told my wife, I said, you know, I think I'm, I might be done, you know? Yeah. At the end of 2019. And she said, so to help with the transition, you think ending in 2019 accomplishes that

And I was like, Nevermind .

Rocky Seto: So the voice so recent.

Kenny Wada: Exactly. And I, I, uh, and I just think after that, I just always just asking the Lord, you know, when is the time? Um, I actually felt, um, toward the end of last year, uh, 2021. Okay. End of 2021 that I thought that, um, my time had that the time was coming to an end.

That's what I had thought. Uh, why did I think that? I really felt like, um, just that the leadership. The church had had kind of settled more. Mm-hmm. . Um, I know that there's still, um, changes that people felt, um, this year, but I just think that there was a settling, uh, and the leadership direction, um, commitment to discipleship, building relationships and that still needs to be filled out, but just the overall, uh, commitment to, uh, walking with people, uh, throughout their life and continually growing together in Christ likeness.

Um, just really aiming at the heart what's going on between them and the Lord and believing that when that relationship is strong, other ministries, the outward stuff is gonna happen. Um, I just think that that commitment. Began to get settled. Uh, we had not brought on Jeremy or Hugo yet, but, um, I think I saw that as another transition without even them coming on yet.

I was just thinking, you know what? I think my time's coming to an end. Um, little did I know that I, that Dan had gone on sabbatical and went that fall in 2020, and I didn't know this until I found out he was actually leaving in July of this year. So I didn't even know he was going to, that he had that, that God was moving in his life in that way.

But at the end of 2021, he also sensed that he, he was gonna leave. Um, and then in January of this year is when Paul shared with me, you know what, um, I'm sensing that the Lord's gonna move me. So I think that there was a, a Purposeful sovereign movement of God to, in our hearts, maybe to us three, just kind of moving on.

Um, and just in his timing. So when I look back at that, I think, oh Lord, you know, I think you have purposes in that. Mm-hmm. . Well

Rocky Seto: as a thank you for sharing your story, but two things come to my mind and just looking at your life, you left Roosevelt High School. Alright. And to become a youth pastor. Mm-hmm.

So that was a big transition after getting married, of course. And then, then you felt kind of burned out. So you went into the homeless ministry and then cabling business for, I don't know, 13 years or something like that. Yeah, yeah. Quite a clip. And then from, and then 2010, you decided to come back into ministry for transition.

I mean, and then 2022, you're stepping down here, you told me in July, June. And there's always been a purpose, you know, whether there's something's next, you know, and, um, I could see that you're very purposeful in that it's not just stepping down just to step down or coming off to come off right. But, um, but also I just see the Lord's providential hand in this and I just, he's building up the church, building up the staff and the way he wants it and, and to, for our, for our church family to understand, you know, um, besides the difference of all the, everyone's felt differences and changes the staff has felt the most, I mean, in the sense of, uh, I'm different from Pastor Corey.

They signed up under a different leadership, different style leadership, different emphasis. Um, all those things are different. And so I'm super grateful for the time that whether it's Paul or Dan or Kenny or any other pastor that is able to give. To the church. I never asked for like a 10 year commitment or anything like that.

And it just kind of, this is what it is. And so I totally understand that. It makes perfect sense and in God's good timing, these, these are the things that he's doing for the good of Kenny, for the good of Dan Paul, but also for the Good of Evergreen as well. And so this is where we could trust in God's purpose, full sovereignty, his providence, so to speak, as we've been saying that over and over.

But I could see that, I mean, just to explain from Kenny's vantage point, I mean this is not exactly what he signed up for either yet. And also his purpose was to help out with a transition. I could see that. I mean, that's kind of what it is. And in some ways we'll be transitioning forever. It's not, or until the Lord returns, so, so there's really no end point to that transition.

But I think, as Kenny said, how I understand it and our conversations as well is that you kind of start to see things kind of. Not harden in cement, but starting to harden and starting to take form and take shape. And I think that's a, that gives 'em assurance. That makes you feel like, okay, we we're kind of getting to that help get to this point.

And I think that means a lot to me. And, um, so anyhow, as I see your own life, I mean, I, if I put myself in your shoes, that's exactly what I see, you know, and just from your own various transitions in your history of your life, but also what would it be like if I was an assistant pastor with a new pastor, senior pastor coming in?

It's a different thing. And, uh, you've been great and, uh, and, um, super grateful for the time, but also help knowing, I mean, it, it's a sad day for me as well, but it helped knowing back in 2017 that this day would come as you warned me or told me ahead of time, you know? So anyway, that, those are some thoughts that come to my mind,

Garrett Inouye: Kenny, thinking back on your life and all the transitions.

That have happened that required you to step out in faith? Can you maybe reflect and, and, um, speak to what the blessing of transition is? A transition that the, that the Lord is bringing upon you or, or a group of

Kenny Wada: people? Yeah. Um, I think in all the transitions, um, that I've gone to, gone through, I think it's definitely, um, just increased my, uh, trust and, uh, belief that, uh, like God loves me, , you know, um, I, I joke a lot in that.

I feel like, uh, that's always my message. God loves you. Do you believe that? God really, really loves you. Um, and so I think cuz you know, your, our hearts are right. I mean, they're being redeemed. His spirit is there, our sin nature is there, but it's dead. No longer rules us, and yet we still feel its doubting of the Lord, um, its desires.

Um, and so it just, it hangs on our, our nature hangs on to, um, the things around us, circumstances, situations. And I think that's where we begin to try to find

our security and purpose. And so I think in transition, those things that you hone onto or maybe that. Build your identity upon, or just value, I think, um, go away.

And I think in those moments, you just start to pray and really seek the Lord, like, Lord, uh, I'm making this, yeah, this move is happening. Um, you are my hope. Mm-hmm. , you're the one who gives, you're my provider. You're the one who gives me purpose, um, in following you. And I'm gonna trust that as, as this thing ends for me, which was predictable, which was secure that in this next season, you're gonna do it again.

You're gonna be there. So I think in each transition, I believe my confidence in him has increased. Or you could say, your, my faith has increased. Um, my hope for what he could do has increased. Um, and so I think that's been the, the benefit, you know? Um, I think, yeah, I was talking to another guy that's been completely unrelated to the church and everything, and we're just talking about like, um, he's a business owner and he lost, he, he loses like key employees or he loses accounts and he says it just really, you know, just really throws 'em off and he turns to the Lord and he prays.

And, and as we were talking, one of the things I, uh, was, was becoming evident though was that his trust in the midst of all the different circumstantial changes was being transferred to, was being really focused on the Lord. And that, you know what? I need you God. Mm-hmm. , and when I have you, then if I lose an account or if I lose a critical employee, I have you.

And then we're talking about it. We're like, you know what? I think God is preparing us for heaven. You know, because mm-hmm. in heaven is him. And I think on this earth, it's like mm-hmm. , all the circumstantial things that we hang onto, um, are gonna pass away, but in the end we get him, you know? And, and I think that's probably, yeah, probably the greatest joy or, or the greatest outcome in transitions is that I think he becomes more and more my hope, my love, my joy.

And so heaven isn't a place to finally escape, but actually heaven is a place where I fully get him. That's

Rocky Seto: when transition is completely over, correct? Yeah. Yeah. We're pilgrims. And what I heard from you is each transition has increased your faith. Yeah, definitely. Similar to the disciples in the boat with the Lord at the storms.

Yeah. Wow. Now Kenny, um, what's next? As best you could say, I know you don't have a crystal ball, but you have kind of a general

Kenny Wada: thought there. Yeah, yeah. Um, when I left, when I was coming outta youth ministry, my first stint in ministry, I remember thinking, I felt like, oh man, I'm giving up my dream. Like Abraham sacrificing Isaac.

And I remember thinking, I can do nothing. I've studied, I've prepared for ministry. That's all I've done. I could do nothing. And, and so I was preparing to just find a job, like an entry level job and just do that. Um, and the Lord ended up bringing this project management job. Joel Roberts. Joel Roberts, right?

Mm-hmm. . And I end up doing something. Yeah. Anyway, open and complete. So I think now, um, as I look to the future, Um, I, I have looked into, uh, cuz I, I was thinking about going back to like network administration and working for a friend of mine. Um, and there was a weekend where I went golfing with, uh, some high school friends that hadn't seen in 30 plus years.

And, uh, I just spent time with them. Uh, they did very well. My high school friends did very well and as they asked me what I was doing, I was just sharing with them about ministry, things I was doing there. And, um, we just shared life. And at the end, um, the guy who was in the cart with me, he just said, Hey Kenny, I'm really in essence just saying, um, like, you spent your life.

Well, you know, and I just drove home and I thought, you know, Lord, You have, you've, you've given me a good life. And actually I think I want to continue if I can, uh, to invest in disciple people. I want to teach people, I wanna walk with people. Um, and so I, I thought, well, I still want to do that. Um, but, and I wanna stay at Evergreen as a, a part of my family here.

And so I started to think about Parachurch, uh, ministries. And so I am looking into, uh, some college, college ministries like Crew and Navigators. Um, but I'm also, I also just sense that he wants me to wait, uh, to see what might. Announcement is, well, this podcast is happening after the announcement, but after the announcement, I just feel like he wants me to wait to see what might come up.

Um, I'm not thinking, oh, I need to just find any entry level position. I think now I'm like, Lord, you could do anything. Yeah. You know, and so I wanna wait and yeah, just pour out my heart in terms of this is what I like to see happen. And then just wait. So I'll see, I,

Rocky Seto: I, um, as I think about you, pray about you, I think whether there's those guys in the golf cart with you and you wanna be as effective as possible for the Lord in the years of good energy and time that God gives you.

And that's what I sense looking at you thinking of. Not that you don't love pastoral ministry, but your boots in the ground, hands on. Face to face, eyeball to eyeball, discipling type of guy. And not that you can't do it here as a pastor, but you know, as a p pastor there's a lot of administrative things that you have to take care of.

We understand that. But I think you wanna spend most of your energies and time away from your family doing that, you know? And, um, I don't know, perhaps the next Joel Roberts will give you a call or email after the announcement on, on Sunday. Right? Exactly. So let's see what the Lord brings, is

Kenny Wada: what you're saying.

Yeah. Maybe somebody will call me and go, you know what? I just want you to, I just wanna pay you to meet with people. . Right. Really .

Rocky Seto: Thank you. But the good news, Kenny, you be a part of your, continue to remain a church member here at Evergreen Church. Definitely. Cause that's what I heard. And, and you'll still be serving in any capacity for the college group and as well, but you want to spend your time perhaps with some kind of a parachurch organization.

Kenny Wada: Is what I heard. Well, apparently yes. Open. Handedly open. Yes. Yes. I think that, uh, I can fulfill the vision and mission of the church to disciple people, um, in intentional relationships, uh, in pursuing Christ. I feel like I could do that best. Um, again, working with people just one on one. Yeah. You know,

Rocky Seto: what you said really ministered to me.

You said the, your identity was growing in each transition. Mm-hmm. , I mean, evidently if your identity was being a school teacher, you never would've left. If your identity was being in a youth pastor, you never left. If your identity was being a business owner, you never would've given that up, you know? And so right now, if identity was being a pastor, you wouldn't be stepping down.

But your identity is in Christ loved by Christ. And your overall themes to look to disciple people in whatever context that may be. You know? And so that's a key point that you brought up. You know, while you were able to confidently move to the next thing without a lot of unknown still. It's not like it's all laid out for you on this next chapter either, but identity that God has you, God's got this.

God is sovereign, his providence is all over your life cuz he loves you, you love him. And, um, that's evident and, uh, grateful for you to taking us through that journey a little bit. That's amazing. There's a lot of stuff I heard that I didn't know. Did you know all this stuff, Garrett? No. No. I didn't know all this stuff.

I knew Roosevelt, but I didn't know a lot of other wrinkles in there, you know, so that was pretty neat. Yeah, I mean,

Garrett Inouye: as, as I listen, kind of same thing that Rocky said. I feel like this whole time, like Romans 12 has kind of been sticking my head, the offering. Your body is living sacrifice. Holy pleas to the Lord for chalkboard.

I see you. Since you are, uh, even, even when you're really young, like, uh, seven or eight entering your, your church, um, growing and understanding what it means to give more of yourself to the Lord. And then after that, in Romans 12, it says, be transformed by the renew of your mind. Then you can test and prove God's perfect pleasing goodwill.

Mm-hmm. . And I see you, the, the identity being formed through these transitions, these trials, um, trials. Not meaning necessarily bad, just change. Right? And the Lord is transforming you, uh, metamorphs, right? Complete transformation. And in each step, it's like the Lord is leading you to know what his good will is.

Maybe you don't know exactly what it is, but you, you have a sense of where to go. You step in faith, and then the Lord provides the path for you to continue to walk forward in faith. And I just think that, The truth of scripture being lived out in your life. And I think that's so encouraging. Whether you're going to hear, whether you're going through transition in a church, you're going transition in your own life with a job or family changes or whatever changes going in your life, it's so encouraging to hear and see someone else's life and so consistently see the Lord be faithful.

So thank you so much for sharing that. Um, we did this for Dan. We asked a ton of questions of you, so we wanna give you the mic. I, I don't know if there's

anything you would like to say or any additional things you'd like to say about the transition or to the church. Uh, just wanna give you that opportunity.

Kenny Wada: Yeah. I think, um, one of the greatest blessings, uh, at, of being at this church since 1990 has, um, just come from seeing, uh, just people growing and remaining in the faith. Uh, Rocky preached from third John. Um, I forget when, but a few weeks ago. And then third John four, John writes, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

He has no greater joy. And I, I, I guess full wholeheartedly agree with that. Mm. I have no greater joy than, you know, sharing with people. I mean, I'm telling my story and I just want you to know that all the transitions and, um, it's not like I walked through those things with full face. Sure. It's like I was totally falling, failing, sometimes looking for quick money schemes to try to make money

And, you know, and each door was closed and God graciously brought me back to himself. Um, and, but he, he showed me just continually showing me that, uh, Christ has paid the price. And I'm his now I'm his. And, uh, I think. Uh, when somebody, you know, whether it be a kid or a college kid or even, you know, adults or whatever, finally, you know, really begins to believe that, that I'm, that Jesus died for me.

He loves me. The father loves me, and, and he wants me to receive that. And, um, we're just not used to being given so much love and, uh, care that it just seems, it, it's unbelievable. But I think when you start to believe it, like actually start to weep and take his favor, you know, and realize that he's asking you, Hey, get up.

You know, get up again. I'm for you. The reason why you're standing in the first place is because I was holding you up anyway, . And so keep going. And I think just that, that belief, when that starts to grow more and more and more, then you're never leaving him. And so I think my greatest joy is when I see someone embrace that and they embrace it over and over again as their faith grows and the sacrifices maybe increase.

And it seems like, God, I'm, I'm giving up so much only to realize, no, I'm giving you more than you can have ever imagined. You know? And I just, um, that's just true. And so, uh, so that's what I would wanna say to the family. I think there's been a lot of, uh, sacrifices. On every side, you know, um, I, I so many on staff in the congregation laying aside what they want, and I pray that it's before the Lord and saying, Lord, I'm, I'm laying this aside because, um, you cannot outgive him.

I know that's a cliché, but you cannot outgive the bountiful love and mercy of God for you, you know? And, um, I, I could just see it, right? Uh, we get to heaven. Um, the new heavens and the new Earth are, maybe we are just at the final state. I just know. I'm not gonna say, oh man, that wasn't worth it. . I didn't know that's not gonna happen.

I just think I'm gonna be crying. I'm gonna be probably like, why did I ever doubt you? You know? Why did I ever, why was I ever, why did I waste so much time? You know, doing this out of worry. Why did I do that? You know? I just think it's gonna be awesome. Yeah. So, so that's what I would wish for the family.

We'd grow in that we'd grow in it together. We'd have total patience with each other and doing it, but we'd grow

Garrett Inouye: in that. Thank you. Thank you for sharing. That's really challenging and encouraging. Mm-hmm. .

Rocky Seto: Well, just in case you missed the announcement, so Kenny will be on staff through March, through that month of March in 2023 as you'll be on sabbatical January, February, March.

Um, anyway, so that's his timeline in terms of his. Time on staff. Um, so effectively he will be, uh, I guess relinquishing his duties December 31st, 2022. Correct. Does that sound right? And then three months sabbatical. I, I could have said that a little bit clearer, but he's taking a three month sabbatical, which he's accrued over the years, uh, in, uh, in, at the top of the year.

Yes. So, that's right. Praise God. You'll be able to see his smiley face, uh, at church. And you talk to him, encourage him. And, and we will think about doing a wa of Celebration Waa. Celebration sometime after he comes back from sabbatical.

Kenny Wada: I'll probably, I mean, she would probably still be here, but I'm just the college group that I, I mean, that's gonna be my ministry, right.

As a layperson. Right. I told them I was gonna be there on Friday nights. All right. Well,

Rocky Seto: maybe, maybe before that then. I don't know. We'll talk to you,

Kenny Wada: but, but probably not. Maybe there'll be some Sundays. I'll, I'll go visit another trip.

Rocky Seto: Yeah.

Garrett Inouye: Yeah. Um, how can we pray for you and your family, uh, in this transition season?

Kenny Wada: Um, you could, uh, you can be praying. Well, one, pray for Cathy. She's been great through this. I was thinking about it and I was like, you know, like when I, uh, talk with people about it, one of the common questions they ask is, how does Cathy feel about this? And I want you to know, she's been so supportive, uh, through every single transition.

Um, she just, I think it's, uh, she's, I, I feel that she is very confident in like, I'm not gonna make a. A, a quick foolish decision. So I feel her confidence in me in terms of seeking the Lord. Um, so you could pray for her though. Cause I still think it's a challenge. Um, is I transition? Um, I think the two things that I think through every transition I go through is I'm challenged to trust God with provision.

You know, even though I've seen him provide abundantly, I think it's still, it's like, I think it's just the, um, It's in nature. I think it's the doubt. So the Israelites, right? I mean, God reigns manna every day. He brings the birds at night and then they still like, you know, are you gonna provide for us?

Mm-hmm. , he brings water from a rock. Yeah. . It's silliness. And yet they still, uh, are challenged. They didn't have the spirit back then. So I, maybe I don't have an excuse. Um, so you could pray that I would continue to trust wholeheartedly that, and it's not even for me, it's for actually my children and Cathy and the family that God's gonna provide abundantly for that.

So his provision and the other, if you can just pray that I would just, uh, continually trusted, God is purposeful that there's purpose in this. Mm-hmm. , um, uh, I, each transition I've gone through, uh, the next thing came up pretty quickly. Wasn't something I was planning for, but it did come up quickly. Um, I told Kathy, and again, it's just a sense it has.

So, you know, I hold it lightly. I told her, I go, I have a feeling this one might take longer. You know, so if it does pray for that, that there's purpose in that mm-hmm. , you know, it's purposeful. So if you can remember those two things, provision and just that this time is purposeful. Yeah.

Rocky Seto: Cool. Okay. Should I pray?

Yeah, let's do it. All right. Let's pray. Thank you guys for this time. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this testimony of what you have been doing in Kenny's life, Kathy's life, the girl's life from just how you saved him back in Orange County, from the people that you brought to his life, to his wife that he, he, you've given him, Cathy to the four girls that you've given them to take care of, to raise up disciple to.

Thank you for his role as a teacher at Roosevelt, and then his time on staff as a youth pastor, and then onto other things, business and working at a homeless shelter to coming on staff. Lord, we pray that these things, these connected dot providential moments in his life and the wads famine life will give him confidence that everything is purposeful.

Mm-hmm. , everything is purposeful under your sovereign hand to develop him Lord, to teach him to trust you Lord, to grow his confidence in you, Lord, to grow his identity in you Lord, and I pray these things would be happening, and no matter what happens in this next transition, he thinks it's gonna be a long time, whether it's short or long.

Father, I pray you'll be very purposeful in this time and I pray for Kathy. Lord, I thank you for the great help mate that you've given Kenny and her support. And although it's not easy, I pray you encourage her in a unique way and continue to grow her faith. And Lord, I pray Father for her, for, for their girls that they will be able to see how to make decisions, how to, uh, transition well as throughout their lives.

And so I just thank you for this time to, uh, visit with Kenny. I thank you for, uh, his help and with me and the church transitioning and I just thank you, father. I pray Lord, that this would serve as a great encouragement and comfort to our church family, your church family, evergreen Church. So thank you.

And Jesus need. Amen.

Garrett Inouye: Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you guys. That's it for today. Thanks for listening. Again. We've created a chat group on the Evergreen SUV app called Pursuing Discipleship. Our hope is that we can use this chat group to dig deeper into the content we cover in the podcast. We'll post discussion questions, polls on what topics we should cover, send out resources that have been helpful for us, and really the goal is to just intentionally gather around the idea that we are all pursuing discipleship together.

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Bye.