



“What’s something that you like about yourself?”

*“I like how silly I am.”*

I first met Raymond at Chatime during the first week of school. I was drawn to his ebullient personality and found his candor to be refreshing. We sat down for dinner together at Noodles and Company, and it was here that I got to hear his story.

Raymond’s story starts in California, where he was born and raised. He described his high school experience as competitive and surface-leveled, where there was always the pressure to do more, and where many people sought out friendships and experiences for their own personal gain. His senior year of high school was especially difficult for him in many aspects, which is why Raymond sought out a change of pace. A fresh start “*to rewrite my narrative*”. And thus, this West Coast native found himself in the Midwest. It was here that he experienced his first snowfall, made the realization that yes, indeed, the cold can be painful—but most importantly—he found a welcoming community that encouraged his faith and spiritual growth.

When asked about the things he wanted to work on, he expressed his desire to be more present. Rather than leaning on outside factors to find his sense of worth and comfort, he strives to instead focus his life on Jesus and to take a moment to find stillness and complete fullness in Him — despite the exhausting fast pace of life. He also conveyed his desire to strengthen his relationship with his parents and his sister, which had weakened especially since coming to college.

A musical virtuoso and an appreciator of the word “*good*”, Raymond radiates light and brings joy to the people around him. To me, Raymond is a paragon of what it means to have strength in vulnerability. After having dinner together, I admire him so much more now. I was left in awe of Raymond’s strength, sincerity, the grace in which he carries himself with, and his willingness to communicate deeply with others.