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Japan Harvest  
Summer 2018

# Cultural Understanding

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Karuizawa Union Church



## October

### WIM Fall Day of Prayer Plus

October 3, 2018  
Rose Town Tea Garden, Ōme, Tokyo

### CPI Church Multiplication Vision Festa Nagoya (Japanese)

October 16–17, 2018  
Nagoya, TBD



### CPI Urban Church Planting with City to City Seminar

October 18–19, 2018  
Ochanomizu Christian Center, Tokyo

## January

### WIM Winter Day of Prayer

January 15, 2019  
Japan Alliance Mission Chapel, Higashi Tokorozawa, Tokyo



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**jema.org**

Also see our online magazine: **japanharvest.org**



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# Cultural Understanding

It's common to hear gripes about tourists in whatever country you live. Online, it's easy to find stereotypes of tourists from various countries. A survey of tourists in Hong Kong last year confirmed what we already knew: the behavior of tourists depends on what's acceptable where they come from.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, tourists operate out of their own cultural values. Though they might sometimes do what is inappropriate even in their own culture, they often disregard what is acceptable in the country they are visiting.

Tourists in Japan might get away with ignoring cultural values, but it isn't advisable to ignore them if you live here. The challenge for foreigners in Japan is that many cultural norms are subtle.

One example is not causing problems to others. We had to explain to some friends visiting from Australia why all of us (four adults and five kids) couldn't go into a small Japanese bakery at the same time, since it would make people uncomfortable and generally block others from using the shop. (*Jama* is the word I wanted to use, but of course they wouldn't have understood it.)

In a more difficult scenario, a missionary friend asked me last November about a situation with her neighbours. She came home one day to find that all the leaves in front of her house had been swept up and a plastic bag with a new pair of work gloves had been left on her doorstep. She hadn't swept up the leaves because she'd been busy with ministry and every time she was available it was raining or the leaves were still wet from rain. My friend asked if I thought the "gift" was a hint from one of her neighbours that she should have swept the leaves up more promptly.

Understanding Japanese culture is a lifelong struggle for most missionaries. Yet if we desire to share the gospel well, we need to understand the culture and adapt accordingly.

This issue is chock-full of articles about Japanese culture as well as examples of how people are contextualising ministry to reach Japanese. From weddings, funerals, and

making friends to getting involved in a music subculture, it has stories about how people are diving into Japanese culture. We're excited to bring you an article about contextualisation by cultural anthropologist David Lewis, who wrote *The Unseen Face of Japan* and last year published a new book: *Religion in Japanese Daily Life*.

We also have a letter to the editor this issue (page 33), one of the first in the six years since I've been managing editor. I encourage you to read it as it helps us younger missionaries see what life used to be like for missionary families in Japan and gives us perspective on the challenges we face these days.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Gary Bauman for his years of service to JEMA and especially his dedication to this magazine and JEMA communications. He was appointed editor of this magazine in 2005 and has overseen many changes in his 13 years of leadership. Back then, the magazine was in black and white and cut to a special US paper size. JEMA now has two live websites, an active email communications and advertising department, and a full-colour magazine in A4 size. The magazine staff has also increased from two to fifteen. At the JEMA annual meeting in February, Gary resigned from his service with JEMA as communications facilitator. We will miss his insight and experience.

In our survey last year, cultural understanding and contextualisation were frequently suggested as topics for future articles. Hence, the theme of this issue. I hope it benefits you as you go about your ministry.

1. Denis Tolkach, Christine Yinghuan Zeng, and Stephen Pratt, "Tourists behaving badly: how culture shapes conduct when we're on holiday," *The Conversation*, accessed April 2, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2MkqDvZ>



Yours in Christ's service,  
Wendy  
Managing Editor

#### The themes for the upcoming issues are:

**Autumn 2018:** Renewal/revival (submission deadline closed)

**Winter 2019:** Returnees (submission deadline August 30)

**Spring 2019:** Engaging the community (submission deadline January 10)

## A Christian's second career as a farmer

*Christian Shimbun, January 7 and 14, 2018  
(combined issue)*

*Translated by Atsuko Tateishi*

*Photos submitted by Christian Shimbun*

In April 2016, after 41 years teaching at a private school for children with intellectual disabilities, Tsutomu Matsui, a member of Yokohama Uenomachi Church, relocated to Ueda, Nagano Prefecture to farm his father-in-law's land full-time.

Tsutomu's original plan had been to take up farming after he retired, but this was delayed when Japan's retirement age was raised from 60 to 65.

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**"In natural farming we don't regard weeds, earthworms, or microbes as enemies. I farm with the help of the natural order that God has created."**

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Then his father-in-law passed away. His sister-in-law's husband inherited the farm, but subsequently suffered a stroke which left him unable to continue working the land. Tsutomu could not bear to see the farm abandoned. For the last three years of his teaching career he commuted over three hours from Yokohama to Ueda on weekends to tend the fields—growing rice and vegetables. Eventually, he retired one year early and moved to the farm.

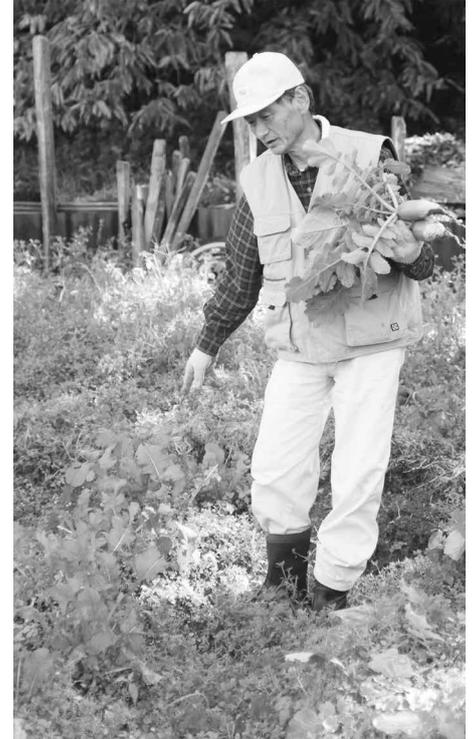
During his first year as a full-time farmer, Tsutomu followed his father-in-law's traditional farming practices. But then, in January 2017, he came across the

Ueda Organic Farming Association (*Ueda Yūki Rakunōkai*). From them he learned how to farm without chemicals or fertilizers. Initially he grew rice using soil microorganisms that he had purchased, and today he produces his own farmyard compost.

Tsutomu notes the importance of the symbiotic relationship between plants and microbes. "The principle of natural farming is to control microbes with microbes," he says. "When there are good microorganisms present, they suppress the growth of harmful ones. In natural farming we don't regard weeds, earthworms, or microbes as enemies. I farm with the help of the natural order that God has created."

Working alongside the Ueda Organic Farming Association, Tsutomu's objectives are to:

1. Produce vegetables full of natural energy.
2. Support communities where people can enjoy optimal health and longevity.
3. Develop villages that are abundant in every aspect of life.
4. Revitalize the local mountains and woodlands.
5. Invigorate agricultural fields through organic farming.
6. Share the fruits of his labor fairly among everyone involved.



The benefits of organic farming were clear to Tsutomu even from his first year of harvest. The produce tasted better, and he harvested more rice than he had expected. After switching to natural fertilizers, his cabbage patch was no longer plagued with caterpillars.

Early in November 2017, two couples from two Tokyo churches visited Tsutomu's farm: Pastor Mitsuru Ōi and his wife, Yurie, of Itabashi Church, and Pastor Toshio Miura and his wife, Naoko, of Tsurukawadai Church. They were considering buying vegetables

and rice directly from the farm, seeking to provide their church members with safe, quality produce. They spoke with Tsutomu and sampled some of his wares.

As a former educator, Tsutomu also hopes to serve young people in urban areas, providing them with opportunities to experience nature and try their hand at farming. ■



# uest News

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, Your God reigns!*<sup>1</sup>

## Finding the father I never had

*Christian Shimbun, December 24 and 31, 2017  
(combined issue)*

*Translated by Grace Koshino*

*Photos submitted by Christian Shimbun*

Antonio Koga has played the guitar for 70 years, and in 2019 will celebrate his 60th year in the entertainment industry. Mentored by the late Masao Koga, he debuted as a singer in 1959 with record label Nippon Columbia Co., Ltd. He has since appeared on numerous television shows as both a singer and guitar virtuoso, touching hearts with his music. At Christmas 2016, Koga attended a church service for the very first time, and the experience moved him to tears.

“As I sang the hymns, tears kept streaming down my face. Joy welled up within me, and it felt as if I had met someone,” says Koga, recalling his first visit to Tokyo Onnuri Christ Church (pastored by Bonju Mun). He had been invited by Tōtarō Wajima, music producer and CEO of Voice Factory, with whom he became friends through his work. Usually Koga would be busy performing at dinner shows during the Christmas season, but in 2016 his schedule was unusually clear, and he was intrigued to find out what Christians did at

Christmas. His wife and son agreed to go along to church with him.

Korean and Japanese believers worship together at Tokyo Onnuri Christ Church, and the worship ministry is robust. Koga recalls that the moment he stepped inside, “The atmosphere was wonderful. I was astonished.” The service began with worship and ended with worship. Koga spent the entire time crying.

A week later Wajima invited Koga to a New Year’s service, and after that Koga started attending church regularly. Eventually Pastor Mun asked him to play the guitar for them. In April 2017, at Easter time, Koga and his wife Kazuko were baptized.

Koga was born in 1941, the year that the Pacific War broke out. When he was two years old, his father was killed in Burma (now known as Myanmar). “I only saw my father in photographs, and don’t have any memories of being held or scolded by him.” Koga is grateful that his mother worked hard to raise him. “She brought me up with a lot of love,” he says.

At the age of seven, Koga first met his mentor Masao Koga at a show he’d gone to with his mother. At one point a solo guitarist played “Kōjō no Tsuki”

(The Moon over the Ruined Castle). “When I heard that, I said to myself, ‘I want to play the guitar. I want to play that song.’” He first took lessons from inspirational guitarist Yasuo Abe, and later, starting at the age of 17, from Masao Koga. Taking his mentor’s name, he debuted at 18 as Antonio Koga. He traveled all over Japan playing at various shows, and performed as a backing musician for singers such as Hisaya Morishige and Hibari Misora.

Now a Christian, Koga stood on stage at Love Sonata Tokyo<sup>1</sup> in July 2017 and shared his testimony. “At the age of 76, I was baptized along with my wife. And all of a sudden I found the father [God] I never had.” At this, the hall filled with roaring applause. Koga’s voice wasn’t at its best that day, but he remembered the words of his mentor, Masao Koga: “A song is not sung with one’s voice, but rather with one’s heart.” Koga felt that the Lord was telling him, “Accept yourself as you are,” and so he felt able to sing. “It was a wonderful feeling to be in that place. I just cried out to the Lord,” says Koga with excitement. With a beaming smile he explained how he feels that, “It was meant to be, for me to become a Christian. Even before I believed, God was protecting me.” ■

1. A cooperative event held at the Tokyo International Forum by Korean and Japanese churches.



# Jesus-style contextualisation

*A look at evangelistic approaches in Japan and how Jesus provides a model for contextualisation* **By David C. Lewis**

While talking with a Buddhist man about God's creation, I said to him, "Look at that bottle of water in your hand. Do you think the plastic just happened to be that shape? What about the label? Were those words there just by accident?" After he had acknowledged that they were designed, I gave the application: "If you can't believe the water bottle just made itself by chance, what about your body? Your brain is far more powerful than any computer, your eye more complex than any camera." The discussion evidently stuck in his mind because when, two weeks later, I asked him if he remembered what I told him earlier (though I was actually referring to a different conversation), he immediately responded, "About the water bottle?"

I got this idea from a pastor in England, but I realised that Jesus did the same thing. He wanted his listeners to look at a child or a coin physically in front of them (Matt. 18:2; 22:19).

*Close to the heart of a culture are writings and narratives that embody respected values or beliefs.*

His words "Look at the birds of the air" (Matt. 6:26 ESV) were given during his open-air Sermon on the Mount, where, presumably, actual birds were flying around. The visual aid seems to make the message more memorable.

Often we think of "contextualisation" as referring to evangelism or church planting in cultures outside of our own, but the same principles also apply to evangelism within our own cultures. Each society is diversified, and various approaches might be needed for sharing the gospel with people of different generations, genders, or educational levels. Moreover, because each individual is unique, we still need to "contextualise" our message to some extent to make it relevant to that person.

## *Learning from Jesus' example*

That is why we can learn some basic principles of contextualisation from the ministry of Jesus, even though he usually spoke to Jews rather than Gentiles.

At first glance, they seemed to be from the same culture as Jesus, but in his incarnation Jesus had left the "culture" of heaven and had, as it were, "gone native", adopting the customs of his host culture. In this way, Jesus was a perfect anthropologist because he learned the new culture from the inside out. He was involved in people's daily lives—at a wedding, sharing meals, healing,

helping fishermen in their work, and getting a reputation for hanging out with those at the margins of society. He was doing what anthropologists call "participant observation", which is the best way for anyone to learn about another culture.

## *Asking questions*

Jesus also asked questions, which is the essence of research. At the age of 12, he was "sitting among the teachers . . . and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Likewise, when we are in an unfamiliar culture, we need to ask questions and perhaps consult experts about certain topics. Jesus often asked questions in reply to questions (e.g. Luke 10:26; Matt. 21:25; John 18:34). In doing this, he was finding out where the person was "at". He also challenged people with questions so that they would think about something for themselves (e.g. Luke 10:36; Matt. 22:42).

Some of us can be so eager to evangelise that we do not take time to ask questions and hone our message according to where the person is at. In particular, the question "Why?" is very important because it elicits motivations. For example: "Why did you use *seimeihandan* (name divination) when choosing your child's name?" "Why do you have a *mamori* charm in your car?" "Why do you visit the graves at the *bon* festival or *higan*?"

## The outer circle of a target

My book *The Unseen Face of Japan* contains suggestions on how to apply cultural knowledge when sharing the gospel, but the Holy Spirit can show us the right approach to use in particular circumstances. Applying cultural knowledge to evangelism is like shooting at a target. Just as it is easier to hit the outer circle, there are many very general themes that relate to almost anyone. Christ's parables and comparisons use themes from everyday life, including birds (Matt. 6:26; 10:16,29), flowers (Luke 12:27; Matt. 6:28), salt (Matt. 5:13), water (John 4:7-15), or children (Matt. 11:16-17). This is the essence of contextualisation: taking something familiar and imparting to it a new spiritual meaning or using it to draw people into a deeper understanding of spiritual truth. Illustrations from nature often seem to appeal to Japanese people. For instance, Jesus' resurrection made more sense to a Japanese woman when I compared it with a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. Illustrations from nature may also point towards a Creator. Nowadays, some Japanese people doubt that millions of deities could agree enough among themselves to create a universe with inbuilt laws or constants. A worldview shift is inclining some Japanese towards a belief in a Creator.<sup>1</sup>

## Getting closer to the centre

The middle circle of the target relates to illustrations that are more specific to the local culture. Even if some examples may be characteristic of the region (e.g. East Asia) rather than specific to Japan (e.g. the use of certain *kanji* as points of contact to share spiritual truths or to relate to the early chapters of Genesis), they can still bring the listener to an "I get it" moment.

Folk sayings or proverbs often embody folk wisdom about life, and we can use them as points of contact to illustrate a spiritual truth we want to convey. In Matthew 16:2-3, Jesus quotes the Jewish equivalent to "Red sky at night, shepherds' delight," which has counterparts in many cultures. However, it is important to understand

clearly what the saying actually means within the culture so we can use it appropriately.

Close to the heart of a culture are writings and narratives that embody respected values or beliefs. Jesus often quoted the Old Testament, while in a Gentile context Paul cited Greek literature (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). Likewise, pastor and former missionary to Japan, Patrick McElligott has used Japanese literature as a starting point for communicating spiritual truths. For instance, poets such as Issa refer to cherry blossoms as a metaphor for the transience of life but McElligott then points beyond the fading flowers to that which is eternal—the word of God (Isaiah 40:8).<sup>2</sup>

Jesus also used current events as opportunities to share spiritual truths (Luke 13:1-4). He did not give a political commentary, but he explained the spiritual significance of these events. In Japan, a land subject to natural disasters, we need to be sensitive to suffering and express our compassion in deeds as well as words, but we also need to address the spiritual questions people are asking. After the 2011 tsunami, local people claiming to have a religious belief approximately doubled from 27% to 52%.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, many Japanese people believe that their country was miraculously saved from the Mongols in 1274 and 1281, but they are unsure which deity sent the *kamikaze* (divine winds). I suggest that this "unknown God" not only cared for Japan, but was great enough to save Western Europe from the Mongols, too.<sup>4</sup>

In talking with the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), Jesus used water as a metaphor to bring out a spiritual truth. Although this form of contextualisation was in the "outer circle" of the target, it aroused the woman's curiosity and provoked questions. Such contextualisation provides relevant metaphors for explaining spiritual concepts and ideas. Jesus not only knew about Samaritan culture but also gave an example of how to get beyond surface-level cultural differences to address more important spiritual issues (John 4:19-24).

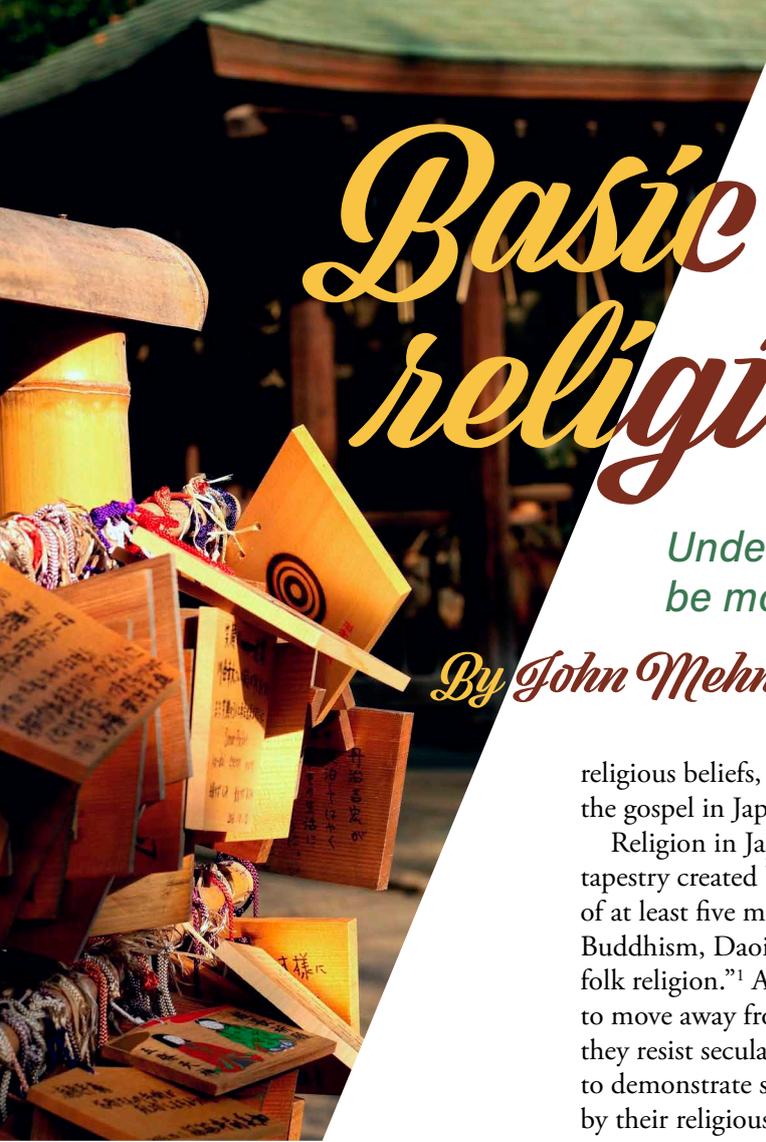


## Hitting the bull's eye

Moreover, his cultural knowledge was informed by spiritual discernment. Jesus hit the bull's eye when he referred to the woman's marriage history and private life—knowledge that was revealed supernaturally. Similarly, we need to address not only the mind but also deeper issues in the person's life. In sharing our contextualised approaches, we also need to be listening to the Holy Spirit, who may give us deeper spiritual insights. **JH**

1. David C. Lewis, *Religion in Japanese Daily Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 292-297.
2. Patrick McElligott, "Using Japanese Literature in Preaching" in Carl C. Beck (ed.) *All things to All Men: Interaction of Biblical Faith and the Surrounding Cultures*—Major Papers presented at the 24th Hayama Men's Missionary Seminar, Amagi Sansō, 5th-7th January 1983 (Tokyo: publisher unstated), 32.
3. Norichika Horie, *Continuing Bonds in the Tōhoku Disaster Area: Locating the Destinations of Spirits* (Journal of Religion in Japan Vol. 5, Issue 2-3, 2016), 210.
4. David C. Lewis *The Unseen Face of Japan*, 2nd edn. (Gloucester: Wide Margin Books, 2013), 295-296.

**David C. Lewis** (lewisanthropologist@gmail.com) is a British cultural anthropologist whose latest book is *Religion in Japanese Daily Life*. He teaches postgraduate courses in Social Anthropology and also conducts training workshops for Christians on contextualisation and cross-cultural ministry.



# Basic Japanese religious beliefs

Understand the Japanese worldview to be more effective in sharing the gospel

By John Mehn

Communicating the gospel among Japanese means engaging with their religious beliefs and worldview. We want to touch their hearts and meet their needs while contextualizing the gospel for Japanese soil. How do we go about doing this?

**Scene One:** A group of women gather for a craft class in Ishinomaki, a city affected by the triple disaster in 2011. Their immediate community experienced over 400 deaths. The discussion turns to their fear of using certain roads at night due to concern for ghosts (*yūrei*) in the area.

**Scene Two:** A longtime Japanese friend visits your home for dinner. In the entrance he takes out a case containing Buddhist prayer beads and fastens them to his wrist. He points to them to remind you of his devotion.

Exactly what is going on here? If these scenes are typical of Japanese

religious beliefs, then how do we sow the gospel in Japanese soil?

Religion in Japan “is a variegated tapestry created by the interweaving of at least five major strands: Shinto, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and folk religion.”<sup>1</sup> As Japanese continue to move away from organized religion, they resist secularization and continue to demonstrate spirituality as evident by their religious behavior.<sup>2</sup>

Communicating the gospel in Japan will be more effective if we progress from a framework that understands this religious belief system.

## Religion in Japan is unstructured

Much of Japanese religion is a mix of formal religious concepts and animistic beliefs. Japanese are more likely to follow the traditions of the local neighborhood shrines and their immediate family. Their attention is often on immanent beings of this world, especially their local guardian deities.

In many ways, traditional religion in Japan resists any definition or analysis (logical or systematic). Asking Japanese people to explain the origins of their beliefs is often fruitless as they honestly do not know. Japanese do not have neat and tidy books of systematic theology. If interviewed, those women from Ishinomaki would no doubt present us with several different solutions to these “wandering spirits.”

Religion in Japan is unstructured and defies analysis because it bor-

rows heavily from other religions and combines values that are contrary to common logic. While Christianity has been accused of being too logical for the Japanese, the logic of their Japanese religion is that it meets their needs and is effective rather than appearing unified and rational.

## Religion in Japan is adaptive

Many Japanese will be married in a Shinto ceremony and have their funeral at a Buddhist temple. Mixing and borrowing from other religious traditions is commonplace. There is a common stream of Japanese traditions, but practices vary considerably between locations in Japan, each adapted from that common stream.

As Christians we want to understand the context of Japan. So, while holding to a high view of Scripture, we adapt the forms, content, and practice of Christian beliefs in the Japanese setting. However, because of the adaptive nature of Japanese religion there is a constant danger of syncretism or the compromise of gospel truth.

**Scene Three:** Two Christian believers from a prominent church are observed discussing in detail their shared Chinese horoscope sign as key influencers of their behavior and life direction.

So we need to practice critical contextualization that interprets both Scripture and the context; as “good

contextualization draws on scripture as its primary source but recognizes the significant role that context will play in shaping theology and practice.”<sup>3</sup> We must provide deep answers for Japanese Christians while avoiding compromise, otherwise they will profess faith but still hold on to previous religious practices and become syncretistic.

## Religion in Japan is pragmatic

Folk beliefs attempt to answer many questions of life such as: meaning in this life, the problem of death, well-being in this life, the problem of misfortunes, knowledge to decide, the problem of the unknown, righteousness and justice, and the problem of evil and injustice.<sup>4</sup>

Religion serves Japanese people in difficult times. The old phrase *kurushii toki no kamidanomi* (turning to a god in time of trouble) is nearly synonymous with a definition of Japanese religion. The practical benefits of religion are “primarily material or physical gains such as good health, healing, success, or . . . personal advancement in one’s life path, . . . and freedom from problems.”<sup>5</sup> This pragmatic value is especially true for the youth of Japan who use religion for immediate, concrete problems.

The beliefs about ghosts from those women from Ishinomaki imply very practical concerns. People who have died “bad deaths” become nameless spirits (*muenbotoke*).<sup>6</sup> If these do not have proper rites performed on their behalf, they could become vengeful spirits (*goryō*) and seek vengeance on the living.

In sharing the gospel with Japanese, we must not merely share the promise of heaven after death and neglect the worldly benefits of belief in Christ. We must also be aware of the danger of erring in the other direction—like in prosperity theology—and promise an easy life without suffering. We should challenge ourselves to think about why Christian religion in Japan is often viewed as impractical, intellectual, and stiff.

## Religion in Japan centers on ancestor practices

The most commonly practiced aspect of Japanese religion is the veneration of ancestors. These popular practices are conducted at home in front of the Buddhist altar (*butsudan*) or the Shinto god shelf (*kamidana*), in shrines and temples, at gravesites, and even at schools and in the work place.

These religious beliefs and practices are the very center of their religion and the glue that binds the Japanese to each other and to previous generations. So, a son who recently experienced the death of his mother would wear prayer beads as he believes this would continue his relationship with his mother after death.



## Towards providing Christian answers

Faced with the nature of religion in Japan there are some concrete practices for us:

1. Pray fervently. We are in the midst of spiritual warfare where Satan is blinding the eyes of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4). We need to pray for wisdom and for God to open our eyes like Elisha’s servant (2 Kings 6:17) to see spiritual answers.
2. Listen and observe well. When a Japanese person says, “I went to a palm reader because I want to get married,” we need to listen and determine their heart needs and understand their core beliefs.

3. Read and study. We need to read both the Scriptures and materials on Japanese beliefs. We need to be able to discuss with Japanese their ghost stories, prayer beads, and other religious practices. They need to hear from us the scriptural worldview that addresses their underlying needs and encompasses a wealth of answers for life’s questions.
4. Seek Christian answers. We should not accept simplistic answers or mere proof texting but “do theology” with the Japanese context in mind. Answers can be sought by humbly listening to the whole church, seeking Japanese believers for their insight, and extending caution from potential error.

To share the gospel, meet heartfelt needs, and answer the longings of Japanese people, we need to look past their religious behavior to their values, beliefs, and worldview. Understanding this religious context is difficult and makes sowing Christ’s gospel in this context extremely challenging. But then we have been assured that we will “take captive every thought” (2 Cor. 10:5 NIV) leading to truly indigenous belief in Christ himself. **JH**

Edited excerpt from Mehn’s upcoming book: *Sowing the Gospel in Japanese Soil: Understanding Japanese Religious Beliefs*.

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5. Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 2.
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Photo of *o-mikuji* by Flickr user Wally Gobetz

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# Three key cultural dynamics

By Graham Orr

*The first of a two-part series, this article examines three cultural forces that shape the way Japanese people interact with each other*

Japanese people are renowned in the West for being opaque and inscrutable, and even those who have lived and worked among them for a long time still sometimes have trouble understanding their reactions. Part of this difficulty is because Westerners do not fully appreciate the hidden dynamics at play when Japanese interact with each other. Three key factors that shape Japanese people and influence their behaviour are group identity, deference, and shame.

## Group identity

Japanese people commonly say to each other “*wareware nihonjin*” (“we Japanese”) as a self-reference to explain why they do the things they do. *We Japanese are Buddhist. We Japanese go to Shinto shrines. We Japanese don't push ourselves forward.* To Western-influenced ears, this may seem an inadequate explanation for a particular act, but for Japanese people doing some-

thing because everybody else does it is a deep-rooted motivation for action. It is foundational for Japanese living. It maintains harmony in relationships and preserves their sense of identity as Japanese.

If you broach the subject of Christianity in Japan, you frequently receive the reply: “We Japanese are Buddhist.” There is no rudeness here. It is like you saying “I live in Tokyo” and them replying, “We live in Osaka.” It is not an issue of personal conviction but of group identity. The implication is that it is fine for you to be a Christian and we Japanese are not. We Japanese are Buddhist.

Such a statement is complicated by the fact that few Japanese know the four noble truths of Buddhism, and fewer still follow the eightfold path. When they say they're Buddhist, they usually mean a Buddhist priest will conduct the family funeral. More important than the religious content of

the ceremony is that they use the Buddhist sect the family has always used. Group identity surfaces again.

Japanese take their babies to Shinto shrines. They take their new cars there too, to have them purified and protected. As a church leader in Japan, I was asked to conduct car blessings too, and did. Parents dress kids up in traditional costumes and take them to shrines (at ages three and seven for boys, and five for girls). Everyone does it because everyone does it. If you do not do it as everyone else does it, there is a fear that if something bad happens, you might be blamed.

Many weddings are white, held in a churchy sort of room, with a cross at the front, and a foreign man dressed as a minister-like person. Again, there is not much concern about content but rather a desire to follow popular fashion.

Japanese society is a group society. It may be more deeply so than most



others because of the centuries of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world (between the 1630s and the 1850s). This period distilled the cultural values of that day—values that persist despite the modern-day façade. It is particularly noticeable in the rigorous adherence to ceremony and ritual. For example, at schools, there are all sorts of assemblies. In our children’s local primary school, there was a pool-opening ceremony in the summer term. Everyone was there. Everyone participated. The words read at the ceremony were the same every year. Japanese feel at ease within this highly choreographed structure. It helps them find a place, belong to a group, and be assured of their identity.

When asked in the UK what religion the Japanese adhere to, I usually reply (a touch provocatively), “Being Japanese”. To Japanese, being Japanese means doing what Japanese do. This applies to being a family member, a company member, or a member of the class that graduated in 2004. Japanese feel these group ties strongly. It is the preservation of these meaning-giving ties that lies behind the other two influences of deference and shame.

## Deference

The suffix *san* and the more polite *sama* placed after people’s names indicate that I consider you above me. As a church leader in Japan, I also received the suffix *sensei* (literally, one who has lived life a little longer). Verbs and verb endings also change depending on the deference needed. There are subtleties on subtleties. Japanese show everyone the appropriate level of respect in everything they do—from how they address others, to grammar changes, to the length and depth of each bow.

In case we think this is easy and automatic for them, the following incident shows otherwise.

One year my daughter had a Japanese friend stay with us over Christmas. Her English was excellent. I tried many times to switch into Japanese with her. She never wavered in using English. On the third day, I asked her

about using Japanese and she replied, “Yes, but how polite do I need to be with you?” I had made constant comments that she was part of the family while she was staying with us, but that left her unsure of what to call me if we used Japanese. In English, I was just “Graham”. In Japanese would I be *Graham-san*, *Orr-san*, or *Orr-sensei*?

If you ask any Japanese person what causes them the most trouble and stress in life, you will receive a uniform answer: human relationships. Deference is just one small area. All relationships require it, and it extends to all areas of life from pouring drinks of water at a meal table to what time you are allowed to leave the office after work. If a person at school, work, or church is a year older than you, their opinion has priority; yours is best left unmentioned. You do whatever someone above you requests. You do it humbly, without questioning. And you have the security of knowing that the person above you will take responsibility for you. Showing deference in all situations can be quite tricky.

## Shame

It may seem to Western-influenced minds that Japanese avoid dealing with issues when in actual fact they choose to deal with them indirectly and invisibly to save public face. When I first lived in Japan, I was hired by a language school in Sendai that made out my contract on two sheets of paper. At the regional immigration office the school’s business manager submitted the top page that fulfilled immigration requirements and omitted the second sheet that did not comply with requirements. I saw what I thought was going on and told the immigration officer it was a lie. I was a young, naïve Westerner who didn’t understand! I caused the business manager huge embarrassment when he was just trying to help me get a job. In retrospect, I can see that the business manager showed deference to

Japanese feel at ease within this highly choreographed structure.

required form, and that he and the immigration officer knew what was going on, but they could not say so without causing shame, embarrassment, and a breakdown in relations.

Deference is shown in all public relations to preserve group harmony, while the underlying private communications are surmised, discerned, and guessed at—but never mentioned. When these unspoken codes of conduct are not followed, relationships break down and cannot be mended. If someone is found to be involved in a financial scandal at a company, they resign. They remove themselves from the group in shame because they’ve let the company down publicly, and the whole group feels shame that one of their group has been found out. Often the boss also resigns to take responsibility for the group’s shame.

All is well as long as the public face is preserved. No one thinks financial mismanagement is not happening; the problem and the accompanying shame only arise when it comes out and the public face is damaged. **JH**

*The second article in this series will look at how these dynamics work out when Japanese travel and live abroad. The original article on which these two articles are based is available at: <https://omf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/MRT-12.2-Japanese-cultural-dynamics-Japanese-diaspora-returnees-Graham-Orr.pdf>*

Photo “The Bow” by Flickr user Akuppa

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# A time for decisions

Some ways to reduce the cultural barriers to confessing faith in Jesus

By Dan Ellrick

I knew what I had to do. Even so, I had to force my feet forward to where my wife and the worship leader were sitting. When they looked up, I blurted, “I want to join the club.” It wasn’t a very clear confession of faith, but they understood, and I was baptized one week later. Thirty years have passed since that day, but I still remember how uncomfortable it felt to say those words and how I resorted to euphemism the first time I told someone I believed. If a first-time confession of faith is that hard for some Americans, how hard is it for Japanese people?

Four of us stood around the hospital bed as we talked with Fumiko.<sup>1</sup> After a few minutes, my assistant from church gently brought Jesus into the conversation. The frail, 86-year-old woman’s

face flashed a sudden, conspiratorial grin, “Oh, I believe in Jesus,” she said. Her daughter’s mouth hung open in shock as Fumiko explained that a grade-school friend used to take her to Sunday school. “Since then, I have always believed in Jesus; I just couldn’t tell anyone until now,” she finished. Opposition from society and family had closed her mouth for seven decades, but Fumiko’s faith was real. I baptized her 30 minutes later. Not long after, she went home to Jesus, her secret friend and Lord.

Opposition to Christianity is far weaker now than when Fumiko was young, but it still stops many Japanese people from speaking their hearts. Furthermore, Japan is a land of indirect communication and social nuance.

Speaking out about faith draws attention, and few Japanese people feel comfortable being the center of attention.

Isaiah 57:14 (NIV) says “Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.” Surely, we can apply Isaiah’s passionate cry to cultural barriers as well as to stones on the road. In the following, I describe a few things I do to lower the barriers in Japan for expressing first-time decisions.

## Lay-led small groups

“Last night at McDonald’s, Makiko prayed to accept Jesus!” Our youngest small-group leader gushed her latest praise report. Her Bible study had brought quite a few new people to the church and had been blessed



with several first-time decisions. Over time, from observing dozens of lay-led small groups, I have come to three unexpected conclusions:

- New Christians with one week-end of training can be successful group facilitators.
- Diverse groups—with seekers and believers, men and women, and young and old—have the most lively and fruitful discussions.
- Young believers who are responsible for a small group grow more spiritually than those in discipleship classes.

Since traditional Japanese culture respects age and experience, I used to assume that small groups led by mature Christians would be more effective, but my experience has been different. Perhaps it is because newcomers hesitate to ask questions or disagree with elders. Elder-led small groups may be best for teaching information, but knowledge does not always change hearts. Heart change happens more easily when the facilitator has a strong empathy with the questions and feelings of seekers, and this is natural for young Christians. Of course, we don't want error to creep in, so I encourage the use of prepared materials and tell them, "Never put on the teacher hat." Instead, "be Bereans" (Acts 17:11). Read or watch the lesson, and then examine the Scriptures together to see what is true. When the group finds Bible truth together, they all own it together.

Of course, not everyone wants to be in a small group or feels comfortable in discussions. Many Japanese people, especially older men, would rather read a book. So we try to provide good resources for them to use in their search for faith. For example, we stock the lending library and a mini-bookstore with titles from authors like Ayako Miura, Kazuko Watanabe, and C. S. Lewis.

Regardless of how Japanese come to believe in Jesus, most of them find it hard to share the news with others. Even in the best small groups, some people will not announce their decision until they are given a specific opportunity to do so. For example, I have seen several Japanese people come to

faith during the Alpha Course without telling anyone until they fill out the end-of-course questionnaire. Names are optional and no one will see their answers until later, so they don't have to worry about becoming the center of attention.

## Communion

In some Western churches, it is common to ask people to raise their hand or stand if they want to accept Christ, but Japanese culture conditions people against calling attention to themselves. For this reason, I think invitations to express faith are best framed as invitations for all who believe to do something together.

If your church allows it, you can use communion as an opportunity for new decisions. Just say, "All who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are invited to join us in communion, even if you are making the decision for the very first time today." This way, seekers are regularly challenged to decide whether they are ready to believe. If they find faith in their heart, they can express it by receiving.

"Did you see? Last Sunday, Nobuo took communion! I had no idea he was even close to making a decision!" Chieko told me with tears of joy. After 30 years of her prayers, her husband had finally accepted Jesus. Chieko was full of joy then and when Nobuo got baptized. But she still laments, "He never talks about his faith with me." Even so, Nobuo has come a long way. Philippians 1:6 is a great encouragement: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Nobuo is not alone; I know other older Japanese men with similar stories.

## Baptism-explanation meetings

At the end of the baptism-explanation meeting, I passed out applications, prayed for the group, and left, saying,

*Heart change happens more easily when the facilitator has a strong empathy with the questions and feelings of seekers, and this is natural for young Christians.*

"If you're ready to get baptized, you can fill the form out today and leave it on my desk, but it's also fine to take it home and think about it more."

Later, I found three completed forms on my desk—one of which surprised me. Etsuko had been a seeker for some time, but she had never announced a decision. Early in my time as a pastor, I had decided to replace baptism-preparation classes with baptism-explanation meetings. Everyone who wants to learn more about baptism is welcome, and seekers often attend—sometimes they attend more than once. The meetings can be scheduled several times a year, even when we have not received any requests for baptism. At each class, I review the gospel, explain baptism, and answer questions. More than once, I have been surprised when I got the forms back. Some people are just waiting for a comfortable opportunity to say they believe.

How can you prepare more and better opportunities for decisions to believe? The examples I have shared won't work for every ministry, but perhaps you can find something that works for you and those you are ministering to. **JH**

1. Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Photo by Karen Ellrick

*Dan Ellrick and his wife Karen came to Japan as missionaries in 1996. Their current focus is resource development. Dan was formerly the pastor of Osaka International Church and is also the Japan representative of International Ministerial Fellowship.*



# Bumping into *tomodachi*

The difference between the Japanese word *tomodachi* and the English word “friend” has important implications for missionaries in Japan

By Zachariah Motts

It's the little words that are surprising. The ones with very short dictionary entries that pop up casually in daily life. The simple nouns that seem so concrete and guileless. Those are the words that are so shocking when, after years of being in Japan and using them, they turn out to be carrying unexpected cultural freight. When we learn another language, we may be aware that dictionaries are only a starting point and that semantic domains do not overlap perfectly, but we only make individual discoveries as we awkwardly use and bump into words in different contexts. The word I bumped into recently was *tomodachi*.

Tomodachi? That's easy: friend. Tomodachi comes up very early in Japanese language learning. We know that word, right? However, I started to doubt my understanding of it after being asked to do a small-group talk at a youth camp for Japanese high school students. The title of my session was “Friends”. The title was in English, but I would be speaking in Japanese.

I knew it was a broad topic, but I started to realize that the cultural differences could well be immense. What do I know about making friends in Japan? I was never teenager in Japan, and I have never been inside a Japanese high school. Beyond that, though, I started wondering whether I really had a grasp on the word *tomodachi* itself.

About the time I began preparing for this talk, I read something on friendship in ancient Greek culture. In ancient Greece, there were many hierarchical relationships, but friendship was a relationship between equals. Greek friendship did not cross hierarchical boundaries. This made me wonder how the still-present hierarchical structure in Japanese culture affected the definition of *tomodachi*.

## Small group about *tomodachi*

The day of the small-group session arrived, and five young ladies had signed up for the Friends session. Since I knew there was much I did not know, I spent most of the time asking questions, listening, and letting them talk to each other. We talked about what makes a good *tomodachi*, the difference between *tomodachi* (友達) and *nakama* (仲間, which also can be translated “friend”), and some of the difficulties with technology and friendship today. They also wanted to discuss how to tell a friend at school that they were a Christian.

It was a good conversation, and I learned a lot from those five high school students. I was the adult leader of the session, though, so I tried to bring things together at the end with a quick devotional on Jesus and friendship. But their answer to my opening question almost took all the wind out of my sails. I asked, “Did Jesus have any *tomodachi*?”

and received the immediate answer of “No.” No hesitation. Jesus had no *tomodachi*. It was an awkward opening, since my devotion looked at people who were Jesus' friends like the people he sat down to feast with—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and the disciples. The devotion was supposed to climax at John 15:9–15, where Jesus calls the disciples *tomodachi*. It says “*tomo*” in the Japanese translation (the literary form used for *tomodachi*), so Jesus obviously had friends, right? The faces of the students in my group, though, said that they were humoring me—“If you say so, missionary man.”

The immediate “no” I got when I asked whether Jesus had any *tomodachi* stuck with me. Having friendship is a high value in English-speaking societies. We would probably think that Jesus was in some way pitiable or lacking in humanity if he never had any friends; a person relationally cut off from the rest of human society. So, what really is the meaning of *tomodachi*, if it is not the same as our English word “friend”?

## What does *tomodachi* mean?

Like the Greek context, *tomodachi* in Japanese carries an element of hierarchical nuance, it is a relationship between people on the same level. The definition in the *Great Japanese Dictionary* begins with 対等の立場, an equal footing or situation.

On the bus on the way back from the camp, I sat with a school teacher and asked him about who he could be tomodachi with. In English, I could say that I was friends with my boss and it would be considered a positive thing to say in many situations, but he could not say his boss was his tomodachi, no matter how good their relationship was. Tomodachi did not work across a hierarchical boundary. A pastor, student, or boss could not be called a tomodachi.

Afterwards, I asked a couple of Japanese pastors about this. One told me that if she heard me say that my boss was my tomodachi, she would think that I either did not know what the word tomodachi meant or that I was saying something rude. The other pastor told me about a time that the head of his denomination came to visit him at seminary in the United States. Another student walked up to the two of them and said, "Hello, is this a friend of yours?" and the pastor answered, "Yes." He realized, though,



## I started wondering whether I really had a grasp on the word *tomodachi* itself.

that in Japanese he would never say that the head of the denomination was his tomodachi.

If Jesus is not on the same hierarchical level as anyone around him, then it would be obvious that he had no tomodachi. He could have other relationships with people. They could be very good relationships, but they would not be relationships one could describe as tomodachi. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is above everyone else, so he has no tomodachi.

### How do we understand John 15:15?

Well, what do we do about that passage in the gospel of John where Jesus calls the disciples his friends? The word is *philoí* in Greek, which is translated "friends" in most English Bible translations. It's rendered tomo in the Japanese translation. Jesus calls the disciples friends, so obviously they are friends, right? After the reaction I got from my five high school students, I decided to tweak the devotion a little and try it again in a Sunday school class with three Japanese junior high students and an adult helper. This time, I tried to leave the question of whether Jesus had friends or not much more open. The junior high students didn't give me much of a reaction, but the adult helper was very concerned at the end to clear up one point. She wanted to make sure that I was saying that Jesus could call the disciples tomodachi, but the disciples would not call Jesus tomodachi. As the "higher" person in the relationship, it was okay for Jesus to call the disciples tomodachi, but the disciples would call Jesus "Lord" not "tomodachi," right?

She brought up an interesting interpretational point. From my American point of view where lack of hierarchy is assumed, I read John 15 and thought, *Jesus says they are friends and so Jesus is their friend. The disciples can call Jesus*

*"my friend."* However, from a hierarchical point of view, Jesus can call the disciples tomodachi, but still not really have any tomodachi, because he remains above and the disciples will continue to think of him through the lens of "Lord." They cannot call him tomodachi.

Is there a right interpretation here? It could be that the cultural context of Jesus' world is much closer to the Japanese understanding than our Western cultural contexts are. It could be that Jesus' culture reads the interaction in John 15 as that of a generous superior to a group of inferiors, which did not change their hierarchical relationship: a metaphorical use of tomodachi. On the other hand, Jesus could have been subverting the hierarchical relationship between master and disciple, as he subverted other cultural relationships. Or is that wishful Western thinking?

Whatever you conclude about how to understand John 15, the Japanese meaning of the word tomodachi has implications for missionaries. There is an emphasis in missions right now on relationship. However, we need to be aware that the expectations of relationships and the relationships that are possible for us to have may be defined very differently from culture to culture. If we expect to make friends and find we cannot become tomodachi because of the position we hold within a Japanese community (like *sensei*), we may be disappointed. Being aware of the definitions and understandings that those around us hold about relationships can temper our expectations and lessen our cross-cultural frustrations. Taking time to listen to the little words afresh can help. **JH**

*Zachariah Motts is a missionary with World Gospel Mission and has served in Japan almost six years in total. He grew up in Ohio and currently lives in Tokyo with his wife and daughter.*



# Conducting weddings in Japan

By Ken Reddington

*Wedding ceremonies present a great opportunity to share the gospel with many who don't come to church*

A common saying in Japan is that one goes to a Shinto shrine after being born, gets married in a Christian ceremony, and is given a Buddhist funeral when one dies. Traditionally, about a month after birth, parents take their child to a shrine to have a priest pray for his or her health and happiness. When a Japanese person dies, it is considered normal for them to have a Buddhist funeral.

But isn't it interesting that, in a country where less than one percent identify themselves as Christians, it is also considered natural for Japanese people to have a Christian wedding ceremony? It is true that most "Christian" weddings are not done in a church; they usually take place in the wedding chapel of a hotel (though I have done weddings in restaurants and other places). But it is amazing that many Japanese people are willing to have a pastor perform their wedding.

## Reasons for choosing a Christian wedding

Just because someone has a Christian wedding does not mean that they are Christians, any more than going to a shrine as a child or visiting a temple makes them a Shinto or Buddhist believer. If you were to ask a

Japanese person if they were Buddhist, most would say yes. And if you were to ask the same person if they believed in Shinto, they would probably also answer yes. An article from last year says that according to the *Annual Statistics of Religion (Shūkyō Nenkan)* published by the Japanese government's Agency for Cultural Affairs, 190 million people were involved in religion in 2015, more than the population of Japan!<sup>1</sup> It quotes a Chinese media source that said: "Japanese have a strange sense of religion." The article also says that "Going to a shrine, church, or temple has hardly any religious meaning to Japanese. It can be argued that those places are just considered somewhere to get married, somewhere to celebrate the New Year (or a newborn baby), and somewhere to pray for the dead."

So why get married in a Christian ceremony? Alas, as has been mentioned, it has nothing to do with religious faith. The main reason Japanese want to have a Christian wedding seems to be: "that's how they do it in the movies." Japanese are known to admire all things Western, and this is part of it. The image of a little white chapel with the bride in a white wedding dress and the groom in a tuxedo is very powerful.

## A great opportunity

But this willingness of many couples to get married in a church or have a pastor perform a Christian ceremony provides a real opportunity to minister to them. Though they might not know it, they are asking to come under the hearing of God's Word. That is a great opportunity for us in this land where getting people to hear what God has to say is very difficult.

## My experience in conducting weddings

I began doing weddings at the wedding chapel of the Kōchi Shin-Hankyū Hotel 26 years ago. The year before, the hotel approached me and asked if I could be their wedding pastor. I had never really considered doing weddings before, but when they shared the type of person they were looking for, I agreed to take the job. In fact, I was the only one in Kōchi Prefecture who could have done so! You see they were looking for a foreigner, a pastor or missionary, and a non-Catholic. So, I accepted their offer and got involved early enough to help them with the design of the hotel's chapel (being an architect by training helped). I also performed the groundbreaking ceremony, the dedication service, and, more recently, a rededication service when they remodeled the chapel.

Though we missionaries think of doing weddings as a ministry, for hotels it is a business. So, market forces can change things, even at places we have done weddings for a long time. For instance, when I first started doing weddings 26 years ago, I asked to do two two-hour sessions of premarital counseling with each couple, and the hotel agreed. But that quickly changed to one two-hour session, since most of the couples did not live in Kōchi anymore. Many grew up in Kōchi, but as it is a small “country town” with very few jobs, most people go to the big cities to find work. That means that when they return to Kōchi for their wedding, they don’t have the time for lots of counseling. Of course, if someone were to ask to be married in our church, I would insist on at least two counseling sessions. But as a hotel employee, I can’t force that on people. In fact, recently, I have not had any counseling sessions with couples, because they often come back to Kōchi right before the wedding.

But even though I rarely do premarital counseling now, the hotel has allowed me to expand my message during the wedding service to include a direct appeal from Scripture to the couple (though, of course, others are listening). Since then, I have gotten many positive comments on my message, which have led to opportunities to share Christian principles in many different formats and in various places. I praise God for that. I also give each couple a Gideon New Testament.

I used to do about 120 weddings a year, but that has recently dwindled to less than 40. However, this still means that, with an average attendance of 50 to 60, I can share the words of God with thousands of people every year. The reasons for this decline in the number of weddings include the lower number of people of marriageable age and tighter financial constraints, which cause more couples to just register their marriages at the city hall and not have a wedding ceremony.

We need to be aware of the possibility that things might change. Since we are working for a business, there is no guarantee of how many Christian weddings we can do or how long we can continue to do them. I know some

“wedding pastors” who were asked to leave because the hotel or wedding chapel made a contract with another group (often a music company) who would provide a pastor, an organist, and singers for a cheaper price. I am glad that has not happened to me, but there have been times when the hotel wanted the Christian weddings I do to have more of a party-like atmosphere. I thank God that it has gone back to a more reverent situation.

But we are really working for the Lord. And we can be grateful that people are interested in having a Christian wedding. Though in my case, only one couple has come to our church (and that for only a short time), I have a long list of people (over 3,000 couples) I can pray for. I hope and pray that some of them will be in heaven when I get there.

There are more than market forces at work when it comes to performing Christian weddings in secular places. Please pray for us as we seek to be a light in this needy country. **JH**

1. Taken from 正月に神社、教会で結婚式、死んだらお経・・・奇妙な宗教観を持つ日本人＝中国メディア  
<http://news.nicovideo.jp/watch/nw2584712>  
 (accessed March 8, 2018).

Wedding photos from <https://hmi-wedding.jp/kochi/>

*Ken Reddington and his wife, Toshiko, are church-planting missionaries in Kochi-ken. Ken is a missionary kid who returned to Japan as a missionary from the US in 1978.*



**Though they might not know it, they are asking to come under the hearing of God’s Word.**



By Christina Eads

# Friends for life

Three principles for making and keeping Japanese friends

We all understand that developing friendships is key for ministry and lasting impact in Japan. This is good news. We want friends! So how do we make and keep Japanese friends?

## Be ready to make friends

After a few months in Japan, late one frigid night, I found myself battling with bus schedules. A short-haired girl named Yu recognized my struggle and kindly explained that the buses don't run late on weekends. So, I set out to walk home. I think I surprised her, but she joined me. The 30-minute-plus journey provided a great opportunity to connect, and she seemed to enjoy the English practice. She found out I was Christian and expressed her gratitude for Christian groups that had outlasted other volunteers to the Tohoku region following the tsunami.

I maintained contact with Yu for months. I had opportunities to personally show Christ's love to her, and she even came to a church outreach. How did I meet her? Just by allowing her to help me on the street. The Lord taught me very early on that there's potential to make friends anywhere.

Many of my long-term friendships also came from unexpected places. We may tend to see language school as one more hurdle before we can begin ministry. But I found the spouses of several classmates were Japanese and particularly open to friendships with foreigners. My first *hatsumode* (first visit to the shrine in the New Year) was with an Argentinian classmate and his Japanese wife and friends. We've since met each other's families, I gave a speech at their wedding ceremony, and we've had countless dinners and conversations. Simply making the acquaintance of my classmates and getting coffee together after school blossomed slowly but surely into meaningful relationships.

Another gold mine for meeting Japanese people has been university alumni associations. These types of connections between graduates of foreign universities may be particularly strong in Tokyo, but there are all kinds of partnerships and sister schools with universities across Japan. I met my dear friend Mari through the University of Southern California Alumni Club of Japan. She took me under her wing when I didn't know a single other member at my first event. She gradual-

ly introduced me to tons of her friends through birthday parties, beach days, *toshikoshi soba* (soba eaten for the last meal of the year) gatherings, and even a giant slip-and-slide event. We also bonded with other alumni watching football, which had the added perk of discovering some decent pizza places.

The point is that we have connections and plenty of common interests with Japanese people. I believe the possibilities are essentially limitless for where and how to make friends. Whether it's the "random" person next to you on the train or at a café, odds are you make an attractive potential friend. And even those uninterested in English or foreign culture likely share a common hobby or network. We just have to be ready and willing.

## Let them set the tone

In Japan, foreigners, English-speaking foreigners especially, are appealing on many levels. I repeatedly hear Japanese friends comment how they love our friendliness, approachability, and intrigue, as well as how we make them feel free and uninhibited. However, some of us can also be domineering and insensitive to their culture.

Please understand: I am by no means condemning the inevitable blunders we all make. I strongly believe crying and laughing those mistakes off is a critical part of living in a foreign country, especially a structured society like Japan. I just hope each of us is growing in cultural sensitivity and being sure to apply what we learn.

For example, I think many of us know Japanese people tend to be extremely busy, particularly in the bigger cities. But do we apply our knowledge or easily forget to invite them in advance? Some friends need to schedule to meet six weeks in advance or your relationship with them won't deepen. In rare situations, friends will LINE hours before or accept our invitations on short notice. It's ok to try reaching out at the last minute if circumstances don't allow a well-planned invitation. (Without a doubt, God uses our communication, done in love, with our friends regardless of how tactful it may or may not be.) But if we're thoughtful and adjust to what works best for our friends, then our relationships will progress more smoothly and last longer.

other invitation, preferably with lots of time in advance.

I'm sure many of you excel in meeting people where they are. If you haven't learned to go out of your comfort zone, try something new. Let your Japanese friends dictate how you spend your time together. For me, this has been a blast. I've tried badminton, Ultimate Frisbee, and rock climbing, and I've seen a variety of performances. Adopting the predominant tendency of Japanese girls to shop for hours on end has been more stretching for me, but the fruit of growing closer with them outweighed any displeasure!

### Speak their language

If you speak English, or any foreign language for that matter, you're wise if you use it to your advantage for making friends in Japan. However, it's extremely unwise to make excuses for learning the native language of the vast majority of people around you. We must continue improving our Japanese skills if we want to maximize and maintain friendships with Japanese people.

Learning Japanese is hard—very hard. I doubt many people would

have heard a Japanese friend exclaim in awe, "You speak Japanese!" when all we said was *arigatou*. Initially, our friends will be very easily impressed and appreciative of our interest in their language regardless of our level. Also, many Japanese people hear the gospel for the first time in English, so don't despair.

On the other hand, if you have the privilege (however painful it may be at times) to study Japanese full-time, or even part-time, then I want to see some sweat and tears. Seriously.

There are Japanese souls waiting for someone to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ, and less than 1% of the population is Christian. It's ok if it takes time. It's ok if you make mistakes along the way. We all do. But if you utilize your opportunity to live as a Christian in Japan, using whatever language you possess, then you will bless the body of Christ in Japan and the over 99% who don't know Jesus yet. If you need encouragement, call a trusted friend, or email me (my email address is in the JEMA directory). Ask for prayer. You can do it.

It can be challenging and heart-breaking to serve in Japan. But there

**Try to stay open to making friends anywhere, allow them to set the tone of your relationship, and don't give up on the language.**

We can also allow our friends to set the tone in how often we meet. It's ok to have expectations, but it's important to hold them loosely. Again, on average, we Westerners can seem dominating compared to our friends from a group-minded culture. Even after a phenomenal time together, our smiling friends may be cringing on the inside if while saying goodbye at the station we shout, "See you again next week!" Despite their desire to meet up again, if there's a hint you expect too much, they might get scared off. Instead, we can say, "Let's hang out again when you have time!" They'll usually show you how often they're available to meet up. If they don't initiate, you can always wait for an opportunity to extend an-

argue this point. But it's worth it. I've never heard someone say, "Wow, I invested too much time in learning Japanese. I should have gotten out onto the mission field sooner." On the contrary, I see those who have progressed in the language reaping the rewards of more meaningful friendships in Japan.

Maybe you're thinking, "I don't have the opportunity to study Japanese." If that's the case, then might I suggest you keep using what you know? If your circumstances prevent extensive language school, then just do the best you can. Use the greetings and words you hear repeatedly as much as you can. If your conversations are limited to Japanese people who speak English, they will still appreciate your efforts. Most of us

are many joys and blessings waiting if we persevere. We will have setbacks and days when friendships with Japanese people seem impossible. Just remember, as God's child, you are desirable. God's love and joy shine out of you making people want to be your friend. Try to stay open to making friends anywhere, allow them to set the tone of your relationship, and don't give up on the language. I know God wants to share his light through you. **JH**

Photo "Two Friends, One Beach" by Flickr user Damian Gadal

*Christina Eads has been on staff with Japan Campus Crusade for Christ since fall of 2011. The beach in Chiba, running at Inokashira Koen, friends, and the grace of God have kept her in Japan.*

# A vision for subcultural contextualisation

The genre of noise music provides opportunities to reflect about God and how he relates to subcultures

By Dave Skipper

For the last seven years, I have been heavily involved in Tokyo's underground music scene performing regularly, collaborating with different artists, and organising many events. In that environment, I have sought to be salt and light as well as a faithful, supportive friend.

The most intriguing and exciting music I am involved in is noise music.<sup>1</sup> Unless you have come across it before, noise music is probably nothing like what you have ever imagined could pass for music! Crashing waves of distortion and feedback, a veritable maelstrom of audio chaos! No singing, no melodies, no rhythms—a no-

holds-barred, undistilled exploration of extreme sonic textures.

As I've immersed myself in underground music culture, particularly the subculture of noise, I've often pondered how the Bible relates to these communities. Not only in terms of sharing the gospel, but in relation to the actual sounds, music-making, and artistry in itself. I've also continually grappled with what discipleship might look like with my noise friends. What format would Bible study or church look like within this subculture? What appropriate resources are available that they would connect well with? I've been long on questions but short on answers.

## My vision

I want to deepen my involvement and impact in the noise scene, both locally and globally. However, I'm not interested in doing this by raising my profile as an artist. Personal relationships in the context of community have been, and continue to be, my top priority. Last year, I concluded that to take things further, deeper, and longer, I need to develop a comprehensive, biblically informed perspective on noise and noise music.

My vision is to reshape perspectives on noise, with the goal of pointing ears, minds, and creative hands to the glory of Christ and the expansion of his kingdom in the sonic realm.

## Blogging about noise music and theology

The first step in my writing and research has been to start a weekly blog called *The Word on Noise* ([www.TheWordOnNoise.com](http://www.TheWordOnNoise.com); currently English only, with selected Japanese content in the planning stages).

Why a blog? It means I can start getting my ideas out there now and provide a steady flow of material for my noise friends to absorb, while allowing me to improve my writing skills. And a blog opens up channels for conversation and feedback, which I can take on board.

As well as writing for my noise friends and for experimental and avant-garde music lovers around the world, I also hope my articles will be interesting for Christians who are involved in the



arts in some way or who think seriously about how to apply the Bible to different spheres of life. Although I'm writing specifically about noise and noise music, a lot applies to music and the arts in general.

### The ultimate noisician

God has many names and titles in the Bible that refer to familiar concepts: shepherd, father, gate, provider, king, builder, and lion, to name just a few. No name is exhaustive in its scope of what it teaches us about God's character, but each one contributes to our understanding of how great, deep, and marvellous God is in all his ways. There is always perfect harmony among God's attributes; paradoxes, yes, but no contradictions or conflict within the Godhead.

Paul writes in Romans 1:20 (NIV) that, "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." Because God is revealed and reflected in his creation, I expect to be able to find never-ending parallels of truth in both the natural world and in human culture.

God's creation is astonishingly detailed and diverse, and I am compelled to go deeper than the simple assertion that "it's amazing because God created it," true as that is. With the Bible as my foundation, I want to go as deep as possible into exploring how noise

music reveals God and how theology can guide and inform the creative art of this music style.

God speaks many times in the Bible, but aside from speaking, the sounds that the Bible associates with

God are very noisy: thunder, earthquakes, rushing waters, and so on. He is the ultimate noisician—creating noise, structuring sound, and communicating through his noise! These passages teach us about God's attributes of power, glory, holiness, majesty, sovereignty, wisdom, and much more. Once I understood that noise can be perceived and harnessed as pointers to who God is, it took my appreciation and love for noise music to a whole new level!

### Beauty in noise

Noise music can be found in different parts of the world, but Japan is widely regarded as the mecca of noise. What makes the Japanese noise scene special? It's partly historical, but I believe it is also cultural. I think there are aspects of Japanese cultural sensibilities that find their way into Japanese noise and give it something distinct.

Silence and space. Shadows and form. Subtlety and detail. The transience of cherry blossoms. The sensory overload of pachinko parlours. The immersive escape of *onsens*. Taking concepts, feelings, and technology to extremes. An emotional—more than

intellectual—approach to truth and art. These themes are familiar to anyone who has lived in Japan for any length of time. They pervade much of the culture, and all have the potential to reflect spiritual truths. And yes, these connections even find expression in noise music of all places!

### Japan's many cultures

In writing my blog and this article, I'm not trying to persuade anyone to "get into noise music" or to suddenly start "using noise music for the gospel" in their own church or



ministry. Far from it! I simply believe that any field of interest unavoidably reflects and embodies biblical truths about the character of God, the nature of man, and the truths of the gospel. In God's providence, I have the privilege and responsibility of attempting to unpack these connections in the context of the Japanese noise music scene.

A Japanese pastor once told me that he used to think that Japanese culture was essentially one culture. Over time he came to realise that Japan is actually made up of numerous subcultures, each with their own specific identity, codes, values, rules, and language. Every circle in Japan, therefore, has its own unique possibilities for discovering and embracing the eternal truths of the gospel and the Kingdom. I'm so happy that even the weird world of noise music is included among the cultures of the world that can be touched by God's truth and grace. **JH**

1. For more information about Noise Music, see an article by Dave Skipper, *Japan Harvest*, Spring 2012, p. 20.

Photos provided by author

*Dave Skipper is from the UK, and his wife Heidi is from Finland. They are part of the Innovative Ministries Team of Japan Baptist Fellowship, and have been living in Tokyo with their family since 2010. Dave blogs at TheWordOnNoise.com*

**Every circle in Japan, therefore, has its own unique possibilities for discovering and embracing the eternal truths of the gospel and the Kingdom.**

# Funerals in Japan

*God's grace and love experienced by the grieving*

“Please come and visit my wife today. I don’t think she has long to live!” Mrs. M’s not-yet-Christian husband had faithfully served his wife during her year-long hospitalization. It was time. That morning Mrs. M assured me of her desire to see Jesus face to face. That afternoon she had a stroke. That evening Mrs. M was in Jesus’ presence. It was just before Christmas.

During the series of ceremonies held over the next several days, Mrs. M’s words testified powerfully about Jesus through a number of things she had written about her faith for her funeral. I had visited her in hospital that whole year and baptised her in her private room in hospital six months before. Her transformation into Jesus’ likeness was evident through her testimony. The poignancy of grief has a way of opening hearts to the reality of life in the face of death.

## *The changing nature of funerals in Japan*

As of January 1, 2017, the annual number of deaths in Japan has hit a record high: 1,309,515.<sup>1</sup> The funeral business is booming! And changing. Indoor tombs and gardens for ashes in Hokkaido are springing up, making “visiting the dead” possible all year round.<sup>2</sup> A survey by the Japan Consumers’ Association says that 90.1% of Japanese funerals are Buddhist, 3.4% Shinto, and 2.4% nonreligious. But “as the population of Japan continues to age and society shifts toward nuclear

families with fewer children, the growing trend for funerals is away from traditional [Buddhist] services toward smaller, inexpensive ones. Increasingly, people are choosing intimate services that reflect their personal thoughts and beliefs.”<sup>3</sup> This change includes more meaningful, Christian-orientated funerals.

## *The ceremonies of funerals in Japan*

Cremation is the norm and usually takes place as soon as possible after the death. Funeral ceremonies can be many:

- at the hospital before the body goes to the person’s home;
- washing and clothing the body at home;
- putting the body into the coffin;
- leaving the home for the wake;
- the wake itself (nowadays this is the event most people can attend because it is in the evening);
- the family spending the night with the body;
- the funeral service;
- leaving the service for the crematorium;
- a brief service before cremation;
- placing the cooled bones into an urn (passing the bone pieces from one person to another with chopsticks);
- a service at the graveside (or in a Buddhist urn-keeping temple); and
- various 法事 (*hōji*)—Buddhist memorial services.

There is a lot of symbolism in funeral events in Japan. The spirit of the person is seen to be in the body until cremation, which is why family members eat a final meal with the dead person the night before the funeral.

## *Christian funerals in Japan*

Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. (Hebrews 2:14-15, NLT)

The fundamental difference between Buddhist and Christian funerals is that Christians believe and stress that the spirit of the person leaves the body at death to be in the presence of the Lord. The body is an empty shell. The person has already gone, transformed by the reality of Jesus’ victory over death. Therefore:

- Christians have a living hope as shown through their prayers, testimonies, and singing.
- Salt is not needed to purify the spirit.
- There is no need to put a knife, sword, or money into the coffin to help the spirit enter the next life.
- The coffin does not need to be nailed down to prevent the spirit from leaving before the cremation.
- Christians don’t worship the body or dead person, so incense is not offered and hands are not clapped before the coffin or photo. Money given at the funeral is marked as 花料 (*ohanaryō* is for the cost of the flowers), not 香典 (*kōden* is money

*As Christ’s ambassadors we are called to come alongside those who mourn—to reveal the compassion, love, and reality of Jesus.*



to worship the dead before they become a spirit).

- Christians don't offer flowers to the dead person (献花 *kenka*) but can show solidarity with other mourners by putting a flower on the coffin or on the body (if the coffin is open) while remembering the person.

Funeral flow charts in English and Japanese, model prayers, and an example of how to explain a Christian funeral can be seen and downloaded from a folder in my Dropbox.\*

### Compassion and "compromise"

The difference between Buddhist and Christian funerals should be explained at every opportunity. However, as Christ's ambassadors we are called to come alongside those who mourn—to reveal the compassion, love, and reality of Jesus, but not to be enforcers of correct behaviour. God can defend himself. Grief affects people in different ways, and if a Christian does clap their hands in worship, one should not run up to rebuke them.

I conducted a funeral in the town hall of a small, rural fishing village, where most of the funeral arrangements were made by members of the local neighbourhood community. They reluctantly agreed to a Christian funeral because the deceased man was a professing Christian. But they insisted that the large flower arrangements from businesses should be placed inside the

hall. After much negotiation a compromise was reached and these 献花 (*kenka*) were still placed in view, but outside the town hall.

God does provide a "way of escape". In another city, a very new Jesus-follower did not want to attend the funeral of her mother-in-law. "My antagonistic and overbearing husband will insist that I worship her [my mother-in-law] in front of everyone! I feel that I will be forced to give up my faith in Jesus." We assured her of our prayers. When she returned from the funeral we asked what had happened. "It was wonderful," she replied, "just before the time when I was expected to offer incense before the coffin, my baby started to cry and my husband said, 'Take that kid out of here now!' which I gladly did. God answered!"

### Be careful

- When one is in charge of a church, funerals take precedence! Many years ago, a young pastor had to leave his church because he did not return from his honeymoon to conduct a funeral. This sounds extreme, but in the case of a funeral one needs to drop everything and give full attention to preparing well and conducting the ceremonies with care.
- Make sure that each ceremony is started and finished with deliberate care. Non-Christians expect that funerals be conducted "properly".

- Dress appropriately: black suits, shoes, and ties with white shirts for men; black dresses or skirts and blouses for women. There should be no colour at all in one's outfit if non-Christians are present.
- Spend time with the grieving family. Not much needs to be said. Just being together, trying to be Jesus to them, is sufficient.
- Don't call the undertaker before the person is dead. (I did this once, not realising that, when life-support machines are turned off, it can still take a while.)
- There may be strong pressure from a non-Christian family to have a Buddhist funeral for a Jesus-follower. This can be avoided (and the preparation for the funeral immensely helped) if the Christian, while living, writes out a "funeral will" stating that they desire a Christian funeral, giving Scripture passages to read and hymns to be sung.

When I received the phone call from Mrs. M's husband I was not in a good situation. I was depressed and in agony, having just fractured two ribs by slipping on ice. That evening, I fell into a roadside ditch on the way to their home—more pain. Yet God sustained me and ministered through me those seven days. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, God's grace and love are sufficient! Six months later, I had the joy of baptising Mr. M, who continues to serve Jesus. **JH**

1. "Japan's population falls for eighth straight year but number of foreign residents rises," July 5, 2017, The Japan Times, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/07/05/national/social-issues/japans-population-falls-eighth-straight-year-number-foreign-residents-rises/>
2. 北海道新聞 March 12, <https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/171267>
3. "Funerals in Japan," July 5, 2015, <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/jg00039/> (Accessed May 8, 2018).

\* For more practical information on holding Christian funerals see the author's documents in this Dropbox folder: <https://bit.ly/2HNMoSn>

Photo provided by author

A South African, **Dale Viljoen** is in his 40th year of ministry in Hokkaido serving with OMF International. He married Karen Harless after his first wife's death and continues to be amazed by God's unconditional love.

# Funeral pastors

## Filling a need among grieving non-Christian families

Funeral Pastors Squad (*Otomurai Bokushitai*) is an NPO which connects volunteer pastors and unbelieving Japanese households for the funeral of a family member. It is an alternative to the Buddhist monks who have taken a dominant role in Japan's funeral scene for the past several hundred years.

Several factors have combined to cause a reduction in the percentage of "proper" Buddhist funerals in Japan: Japanese society is aging, families have fewer children, and the non-regular employment rate is higher than ever. Along with these factors is a weakened local community. According to a survey, the number of remains cremated in Japan without any funeral ceremony was 16% of the annual 1.2 million deaths in Japan in 2013–14.<sup>1</sup>

The welfare system in Japan provides benefits to needy households. In addition to monthly living expenses, the cost for a funeral is covered by the system if someone in a needy household passes away. As might be expected, this coverage is minimal. For example, these usual elements of a Japanese funeral aren't covered: a picture of the deceased, flowers, acknowledgement card, and honorarium to the monk/pastor. The coverage is only for a coffin, coffin transportation, cremation fee, and an urn. As a result, these families have no choice but to omit all "unnecessary" items, so all they get is a lone coffin in the room without any ceremony or ornaments, though these things are regarded as necessary by Japanese people.

Most Japanese people believe that religious workers (usually Buddhist monks) will chant a mantra at the funeral ceremony, regardless of their financial situation. However, the reality is different. Those who can afford it will receive a funeral visit by monks; meanwhile, tens of thousands of households have to give up inviting monks when funeral service providers

inform the family of the local "average donation." On top of losing their loved one, the lack of minimal courtesy stuns the family. We can imagine that many blame themselves for their own economic situation and inability to afford these expenses.

This is a heart-breaking situation. However, we can also see this as an opportunity for Christians to serve people, in the absence of monks.



### Starting a funeral service

This is the reason we started the Funeral Pastors Squad in Fukuoka with 25 local pastors, in cooperation with one local non-Christian funeral service provider.

According to a report by the partnering funeral company, four out of ten families who were informed of the NPO actually invited volunteer pastors. It is a far higher acceptance rate than we expected.

Our member pastors believe in justification by faith and conduct themselves with wisdom. While the families are all non-Christian, and sharing the gospel is beyond the limits allowed as an NPO corporation, the pastors try

their best to comfort the family based on love, without compromising their faith. They hope and pray these families will become interested in the Bible.

I have attended most of these funeral ceremonies. Families welcomed the pastors with open arms. They personally opened the door for the volunteer pastor, held the pastor's hand with both their hands for a handshake, sang along in the hymns (even though it was probably their first time to do so), and prayed together with us. Most of all, they listened to the sermon attentively and eagerly. They leaned forward during the sermon, gazing into the pastor's eyes as if searching for the answer to their inner question about where the spirit of their loved one is now. Some family members showed not only gratitude but also interest in our faith. One lady, at the funeral itself, said that she was willing to be baptized and actually started visiting a church. Another old lady interjected during sermon, "*Kamisama erai*" (God is awesome)! She told us her hope is to become a Christian and have her funeral ceremony in the Christian style.

I believe the common thinking that "a Christian ceremony is fine for weddings but not for funerals" is being proved less accurate.

### A historical perspective

Let's take a quick look at the history of religion in Japan. Buddhism, publicly introduced to Japan in the 6th century, was not actively involved in funeral ceremonies for the lower classes until the Middle Ages. Before that time, dead bodies were dumped in fields, at riversides, on hills, and at the seaside without burial.

Buddhist monks were assigned by the Emperor, the highest priest in the Shinto faith (historically the two faiths were intertwined, though how this worked is difficult to explain in this

short article).<sup>2</sup> A monk's status was like a bureaucrat. Monks prayed for the Emperor and his dynasty but not for the personal relief of people.

Meanwhile, Shinto priests were required to maintain ceremonial cleanliness to prevent any misfortunes supposedly caused by uncleanness. Therefore, Shinto priests didn't assist people in times of death. Buddhist monks were also required to maintain cleanliness to prevent any

uncleanliness 'infecting' the Emperor, the highest priest.

Against this background, Buddhist reformers started to conduct funeral ceremonies for people regardless of their social status. This became a turning point for Buddhism in Japan.

### A turning point for the gospel?

Let's turn our eyes back to the present time when volunteer pastors are

receiving sincere gratitude from grieving people who aren't fully served by religious establishments. Therefore, we may be witnessing history repeat itself. With this turning point, we hope that the gospel will spread all over Japan. **JH**

1. Survey results regarding funerals without ceremonies (February 2015): <https://www.kamakura-net.co.jp/newsttopics/pdf/20150201.pdf>; Statistics from the Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare comparing population statistics (births, deaths, marriage, and divorce) 2016 and 2017: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/suikai17/dl/2017gaiyou.pdf>
2. A short explanation of the historical intertwining of Shinto and Buddhism: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/honji-suijaku>

Resources for the historical information (books in Japanese):

- Kenji Matsuo, *Soushiki Bukkyō no Tanjō* 葬式仏教の誕生 (The Birth of Funeral Buddhism) (Heibonsha, 2011), 40-67; 92-109, 159
- Kenji Matsuo, *Kamakura Shin Bukkyō no Tanjō* 鎌倉新仏教の誕生 (The Birth of New Buddhism in the Kamakura Era) (Kodansha, 1995), 50-60

Photo by Karen Ellrick

*Nobuyoshi Ishimura* is the administrative director of NPO Otomurai Bokushitai and president of Olive Yama Sōsai (Christian funeral service provider). He is a member of Momochi Symphony Church in Fukuoka Prefecture.

## Blast from the past

### From 60 years ago...

And if I make great sacrifices, giving up financial security in a good-paying profession plus the comforts of a Western home and friends, all for the sake of people whom I feel are unworthy and ungrateful (may God forgive the thought); and if, besides, I give my health to be wasted by amoeba and malnutrition in an exhausting climate—but fail to **have** and **give** love—I've missed the whole point, the whole heart, of being a missionary for Jesus, and all my sacrifice counts for nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:3 contextualized for a missionary serving in Japan)

"The Missionaries Best Weapon ... LOVE" by John Schlosser, Vol. 6 No. 3, Summer 1958 of *Japan Harvest*

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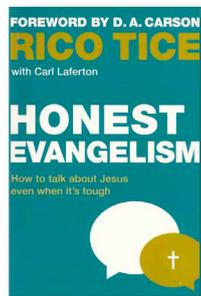
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# Books on evangelism

## Honest Evangelism: How to talk about Jesus even when it's tough

Rico Tice (*The Good Book Company, 2015*). 105 pp.

Rico Tice, associate minister at All Souls, Langham Place, London, and founder of Christianity Explored Ministries, has written a book that will help every believer experience the joy that comes from finding lost people and bringing them to Christ. Tice knows that evangelism is hard, and he shares his struggles with it. Evangelism is often painful in a world that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. Tice reminds us God's power. Nothing we do or say can give spiritual sight,



but we can have hope because God is the one who turns on the lights in people's hearts (2 Cor 4:6). The second half of this short book is packed full of practical help. "Two life skills I've found to be essential in witnessing are these: ask questions, and chat your faith" (p. 59). He shares two sets of three words to remember as we proclaim Christ (you need to read the book to find

out what they are!). We need to know what the gospel is, and we need to remember how to communicate it effectively. "You want someone to walk away after hearing your story having been struck by Jesus, not by you" (p. 80). "Witnessing is a long-term commitment to invest in a relationship, to pray tirelessly, and to speak the gospel over and over again, patiently and persistently" (p. 88). Tice reminds us that this is "the greatest work there is, because it's work that is eternally significant" (p. 100). The book includes a list of helpful resources (books on evangelism, the gospel, and apologetics, as well as books and resources to give away). JH

(Christianity Explored has resources in Japanese here: <https://www.thegood-book.co.uk/translations/japanese/christianity-explored-episodes-sd-japanese>)

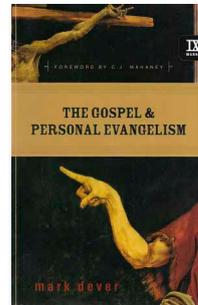
Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

## The Gospel and Personal Evangelism

Mark Dever (*Crossway Books, 2007*). 124 pp.

Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, and president of 9Marks, looks at questions about sharing the good news: Why don't we evangelize? What is the gospel? Who should evangelize? How should we evangelize? What isn't evangelism? Dever wants to help churches develop "a culture of evangelism...an expectation that Christians

will share the gospel with others, talk about doing that, pray about it, and regularly plan and work together to help each other evangelize" (p. 17). Evangelism is "telling the good news about Jesus, and doing it with honesty, urgency, and joy, using the Bible, living a life that backs it up, and praying, and doing it all for the glory of God" (p. 107). We don't fail when people don't respond; "we fail only if we do not faithfully tell the gospel at all" (p. 112). He has a helpful word to pastors (and missionaries!) in the appendix. JH

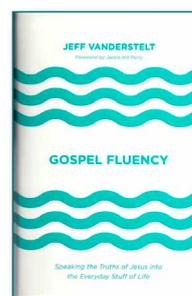


Reviewer rating is 4.5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

## Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life

Jeff Vanderstelt (*Crossway Books, 2017*).

Jeff Vanderstelt, lead teaching pastor at Doxa Church in Bellevue, Washington, and leader of the Soma Family of Churches and Saturate resource ministry, shows us how to speak the gospel fluently. He reminds us that we need to be immersed in the gospel and we need to love the gospel. As we speak Jesus to others, we must do it



with grace, wisdom, and love, all of which we can receive from Jesus in limitless supply. "Gospel fluency is developed by being immersed into a Jesus-saturated community... [which] knows and speaks the gospel every day into everything, so that all parts of our lives grow up into Christ and are eventually fully transformed by and submitted to Jesus Christ" (p. 45). Jeff

reminds us that Jesus is the hero of our story, not we. He has excellent chapters on "listen and learn" and "show and tell." This book will help every missionary grow in gospel fluency! JH

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★



*Don Schaeffer and his wife Hazel serve with the Christian & Missionary Alliance and came to Japan in 1984. They have planted churches in Saitama Ken and served in mission leadership.*

# Remembering our prayers

*God always hears our prayers, and he always answers them.  
How, then, do we acknowledge his response?*



Today my kids and I read a story in Luke 17. Some lepers, ten in fact, are crying out to him—praying to him—for mercy. Jesus responds with a command, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” Without hesitation, they obey. On the way, they are all healed, but only one turns around to show worship and gratitude to Jesus. He remembered who had answered his prayer and his faith was increased because of this.

We need to remember our prayers so we can thank God when he answers. If we receive a delayed blessing and forget that we asked for it, we cannot obtain the full benefit. God’s response to my prayers often seems to be, “Hold fast and wait to see what I will do.” During that waiting period I can often forget my urgent prayers and then take it for granted when I do receive my request. I forget to go back and fall at Jesus’ feet and thank him.

Often, it is not circumstances that need changing, but my desires. I need to fully delight in him and then my heart’s desires will be his. My heart needs molding; my attitude needs transforming. I don’t realize the changes God has made in my heart in response to lifting my desires to him. The reworking is so slight and slow, I fail to notice and praise the Lord.

God had the children of Israel build monuments and altars to help them remember how the Lord helped them. Their children would ask, “What is that pile of stones by the Jordan River?” And their parents would have the opportunity to relate the story of the river drying up for them to cross. The stories would be passed down through the generations.

## How can I remember?

What can I do to make sure I remember my prayers so that my faith can grow by seeing God’s faithfulness? Sometimes, I remember through stories. The kids all know how God provided for the three of us plus our dog as we traveled around the United States during my fourth year of medical school. They know about our four-month wait for a house with a garden in Bangkok and how God fulfilled that promise. We recount these parts of our family history as a remembrance, as a monument, as a thanksgiving.

## Often, it is not circumstances that need changing, but my desires.

I also thank God as I am making a request. I try to model my prayers after Philippians 4:6: “with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (ESV). I thank God for his response before it comes, knowing that it will be the best decision for me.

Of course, I want to remember to thank him afterwards as well, so I sometimes write down my prayers. If I have certain strong desires that I am waiting for God to fulfill, I record them. This way I can see how God changes my heart and how he answers in amazing ways beyond my grandest hopes.

Pray, wait, remember, and praise—so our faith will increase as God does great and wondrous works. **JH**

*Rachel Cardin, mother of five and family physician, currently serves with a church plant in Ayutthaya, Thailand and provides support to her husband as he finishes his Ph.D. in Southeast Asian Politics.*

*Rachel is Ken Reddington’s niece.*

# Looking for a purpose . . . or maybe not

*Different bridges lead to Jesus*

“How do I justify my existence? What’s the meaning of life?” These questions haunted me for as long as I can remember and eventually, when I was in my early 20s, drove me to the Lord. So it was natural for me to include them in the cultural questionnaire I developed to use during my “Pickle time”.

## Does your life have a purpose?

Practical Culture and Language time (PCL), affectionately called “Pickle time” for short, is a two to three-month interval where OMF language students move from having daily Japanese classes to having class one day a week. On other days, we go out among people, learn how they think and communicate, take part in various church activities, and find our own ways to use the language more.

I wrote a cultural questionnaire for my Japanese friends, hoping this would help me learn more about their worldview, as well as be good language practice. When I brought the rough draft to my language teacher, she said, “You probably shouldn’t just ask what their purpose in life is. They may not have one and they might feel bad about it. Better to ask whether their life has a purpose, and if so, would they mind telling you what it is.”

Whether their life has a purpose? I had assumed everyone thought about why they exist or why they do the things they do. But after mulling this over, I realized I also have American friends who would say their life has no overarching purpose; they just want to eat, drink, and be merry as much as possible. I was curious how my Japanese friends would respond to the question.

## Asking the question

Away I went with my questionnaire. My first “victims” were a non-Christian acquaintance and one of her friends. When I got to the “What’s your life purpose?” question, the first woman replied, “To travel the world someday.” The second replied, “To speak English well someday.” We talked more about the English goal, and it turned out this was something that she really desired. But fearing her low language proficiency, she didn’t participate

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**If I am approaching evangelism solely from my own philosophically-centered worldview, I can easily miss what will actually speak to the hearts of my hearers.**

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in any classes and never practiced, not even on her own.

“So you really want to improve your English, but you aren’t actually doing anything about it,” I said. (It came out much softer in Japanese, I promise!)

“Yes, that’s right,” she replied, seemingly content.

My next “victims” were four non-Christian friends from the local gospel choir that I had joined last year. When I asked the purpose question, most of them replied, “Nothing.” Upon further discussion, however, the three who were mothers changed

their answer: “I hope I can raise my children well to reach age 20; after that, I hope I can rest.” The one who had no children replied, “I just don’t really have a reason for living, I guess . . . but I try to find ways to spend time with people, like in the choir.” We talked about this for a while and in the end agreed that building relationships and having a sense of closeness with people was an important part of what brought us joy in life.

Later, I had a discussion about these answers with a close Japanese Christian friend of mine. “I think we’re seeing the influence of Buddhism in these ladies’ outlook on life,” she said. “Buddhism doesn’t worry about meaning because they don’t believe there really is any meaning to life. They worry about form, about doing what needs to be done well, about serving a needed function faithfully and beautifully. Maybe it’s a fruit of Western philosophy and Christianity to think so much about *why* we do things or *why* we exist. Though, despite



the fact that I came from a Buddhist household, I always wondered about the meaning of it all.”

### What can I learn from this?

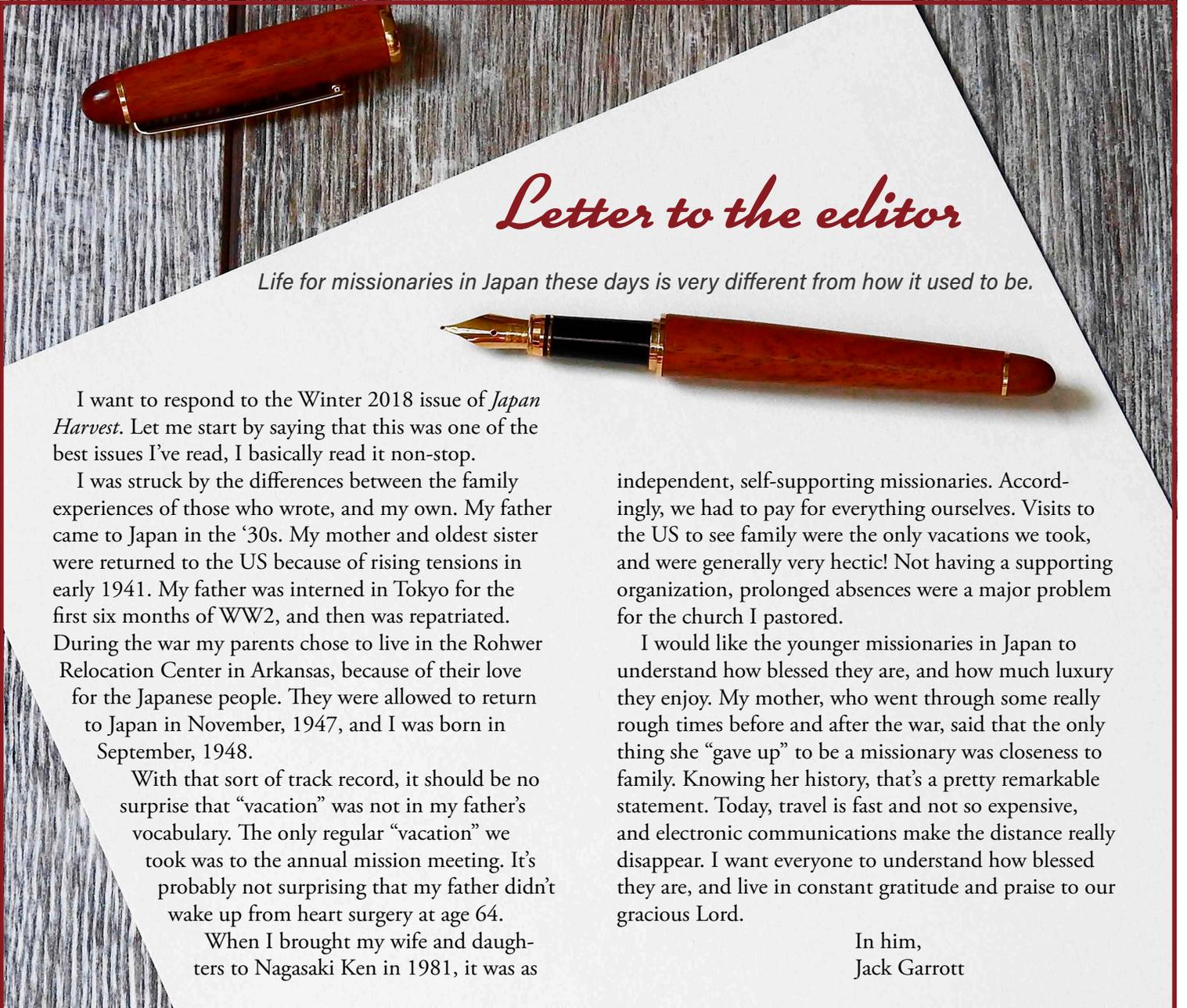
It seems that I need to spend more time listening to my friends, to discover the possible bridges from their hearts to Jesus, instead of assuming that I already know.

God really does speak to each of us in a way that we can understand. For me, this was through an intellectual search for meaning and purpose. For others, it may be through a heart search for relationship. For others yet, it’s a mixture of both. But if I am approaching evangelism solely from my own philosophically-centered worldview, I can easily miss what will actually speak to the hearts of my hearers.

In terms of longing for relationship, thankfully the Bible gives us a wealth of material to work with.

Jesus is not merely our reason for being; it’s through Him that we can enjoy an intimate relationship with God. Jesus delights to be close to us: “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3 ESV). This awesome, all-powerful, creator God desires above all for us to know Him, draw close, and be with Him, day in and day out. I pray I can share God’s desire for relationship more faithfully with Japanese people, and share Jesus in a way that makes sense to my friends and speaks to their deepest longings. I pray they can discover how good it is to have a relationship with Him and maybe, along the way, discover the purpose behind it all. **JH**

*Christina Winrich (US) serves with OMF and is currently studying Japanese in Sapporo. She can frequently be found enjoying coffee or sushi, though not at the same time.*



## Letter to the editor

*Life for missionaries in Japan these days is very different from how it used to be.*

I want to respond to the Winter 2018 issue of *Japan Harvest*. Let me start by saying that this was one of the best issues I’ve read, I basically read it non-stop.

I was struck by the differences between the family experiences of those who wrote, and my own. My father came to Japan in the ‘30s. My mother and oldest sister were returned to the US because of rising tensions in early 1941. My father was interned in Tokyo for the first six months of WW2, and then was repatriated. During the war my parents chose to live in the Rohwer Relocation Center in Arkansas, because of their love for the Japanese people. They were allowed to return to Japan in November, 1947, and I was born in September, 1948.

With that sort of track record, it should be no surprise that “vacation” was not in my father’s vocabulary. The only regular “vacation” we took was to the annual mission meeting. It’s probably not surprising that my father didn’t wake up from heart surgery at age 64.

When I brought my wife and daughters to Nagasaki Ken in 1981, it was as

independent, self-supporting missionaries. Accordingly, we had to pay for everything ourselves. Visits to the US to see family were the only vacations we took, and were generally very hectic! Not having a supporting organization, prolonged absences were a major problem for the church I pastored.

I would like the younger missionaries in Japan to understand how blessed they are, and how much luxury they enjoy. My mother, who went through some really rough times before and after the war, said that the only thing she “gave up” to be a missionary was closeness to family. Knowing her history, that’s a pretty remarkable statement. Today, travel is fast and not so expensive, and electronic communications make the distance really disappear. I want everyone to understand how blessed they are, and live in constant gratitude and praise to our gracious Lord.

In him,  
Jack Garrott

# Boundaries: Surviving cross-cultural life

*Defining and enforcing boundaries can help to prevent burnout in ministry*

*Boundaries... are conscious and healthy ways to protect ourselves from emotional harm.<sup>1</sup>*

Cross-cultural ministry has been defined as “the mission of God [that] seeks to enfold people of every nation, tribe, and language into God’s kingdom.”<sup>2</sup> It is no wonder that cross-cultural workers, entrusted with this huge task, quickly find themselves overwhelmed, stressed, and overwhelmed. How can we say no to so many important activities that are part of this Great Commission? Most of us are left with little energy or time for our families or ourselves, which eventually leads to burnout and leaving the field prematurely. Therefore, a fundamental aspect of cross-cultural ministry is setting good boundaries.

Boundaries are “guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone passes those limits.”<sup>3</sup>

The first step in setting good boundaries is to understand their purpose. Boundaries keep good things good. Boundaries function for us as a fence around our home does: it keeps bad things out and good things safe inside. Boundaries, like fences, tell us how far we can go and still be safe. They set limits on our time, activities, and energy. Without them, all kinds of things can get in and sap us of vital resources. And just as “good fences make good neighbors,” so also good boundaries build longevity in ministry.

Author and life coach Natalie Gahrman identifies the following essential steps in setting boundaries:<sup>4</sup>

1. Be self-aware: Identify weak or non-existent boundary areas. Create new boundaries that identify what people may do or say around you, remembering to be realistic.
2. Inform: Difficult as it may be, we should let people in our lives know what is and is not acceptable behavior and communication. This needs to be done kindly but clearly.

3. Request: Be specific in the things you want others to do and not do, explaining that such things are signs of respect or disrespect.
4. Follow-up: Encourage and praise others when they respect your boundaries.
5. Demand: We need to be clear about the consequences if our boundaries aren’t honored.
6. Consequences: If your boundaries aren’t being respected, you need to follow through on the promised consequences, but remember to pick your battles—decide what is worth fighting for and what is not.
7. Respect others’ boundaries: Don’t violate others’ boundaries. Respect others’ requests for limitations on behavior and communication.

The idea of enforcing our own boundaries and respecting others’ boundaries seems challenging at first, but setting up boundaries is a lot like the commandment to love others as we love ourselves. It isn’t about making selfish demands, but showing respectful behavior to others, as well as expecting it for ourselves. It is hoped that properly setting boundaries will not only enhance our ministries, but also help us to continue ministering fruitfully for many years. **JH**

1. Raymond Lloyd Richmond, “A Guide to Psychology and its Practice,” <http://www.guidetopsychology.com/boundaries.htm>
2. Ed Stetz, “Cross Cultural Ministry and the Mission of God: A Closer Look by Craig Ott,” April 24, 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/april/cross-cultural-ministry-and-mission-of-god-closer-look-by.html>
3. Ibid, Richmond
4. Nancy Gahrman “Surviving Work Overload,” June 6, 2011, <http://www.theprioritypro.com/?s=boundaries>



*Eileen Nielsen is presently a middle school and high school counselor at CAJ, as well as Member Care Facilitator for TEAM. If you are interested in meeting with her for counseling, you can contact her at [eileenpnelsen@gmail.com](mailto:eileenpnelsen@gmail.com).*

# Stories develop cultural understanding

*How to write prayer letters that help supporters understand Japan*

When my family and I were working towards coming to Japan, I heard other soon-to-be missionaries talking about their prayer letters. They wanted to write about their country of service in a way that caused their supporters to have a burden for it. That struck me as a good way to ensure that our prayer letters aren't just about us or even about our ministry. Instead, we can share about Japan in a way that our prayer supporters develop a burden for the country, and hopefully pray that Christ would be known throughout it.

How can we do that? Probably listing statistics isn't the best strategy, though it can be part of our answer to the question, "Why are you in Japan?" Loads of prayer points or photos most likely won't work either.

I believe that stories are a key. They slip in under people's radars and can make Japan seem real. Stories can humanize a nation that seems to have a reputation for being replete with robots, anime, and inscrutable people.

The best journalists tell the story of an eyewitness in the midst of a current event. Superb photojournalists find one person to characterize

what's happened and tell a story with a photo/s of them. Outstanding photographers "can do much more than capture striking images, . . . [they] build stories."<sup>1</sup>

Could you tell a story of an encounter you had with your neighbour about garbage or an interaction in your English class about families? Or could you relate a story about the local kindergarten your son goes to, or about how you got lost on the trains one day? Used in prayer letters, these stories will help your supporters understand Japan. They will help them grow to love the place and perhaps even persuade them to visit. But most of all, we hope that their prayers are enriched as they learn how to pray for us in our daily lives, learn how to pray for our friends and neighbours, and develop a burning desire to see more Japanese people love Jesus. **JH**



1. Alex King, "The world's best photojournalists share their most compassionate images," October 31, 2016, <http://www.huckmagazine.com/art-and-culture/photography-2/worlds-best-photojournalists-share-compassionate-images/>

*Wendy Marshall is the managing editor of Japan Harvest. She's learnt most of what she knows about writing from her international critique group, Truth Talk. She's Australian and works with OMF International.*

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# Three tips for protecting your family

*Steps you can take to protect your children from online dangers*

Increasingly technology is being developed with one demographic in mind: children. Tablets are marketed with kid-proof cases resilient enough to be tossed around by the youngest of users. App stores like Google Play and the iTunes App Store are filled with toddler games that provide enjoyable experiences. While there are benefits to understanding technology at an early age, parents must be sure to set healthy boundaries on the time children use this technology and set up strong defenses against the dangerous materials this technology could expose their children to. Three steps for helping you protect your children are: limit access, limit content, and have open conversations.

## Limit access

Minecraft, YouTube, and SnapChat have become standard vocabulary for many middle school children. Apps like these require an internet connection. Being able to limit access to the internet is parents' first defense. Many new home routers, including those made by Linksys, NETGEAR, and Asus, have parental controls built into their software. These settings can be configured to limit your children's time on the internet and also block certain apps and websites on any device your children may have connected to the internet at home. The benefit of restricting access at the router level is that it is harder for children to circumvent the restrictions compared to on-device parental controls. Router-level parental controls can be a great first line of defense alongside the on-device parental controls.

## Limit content

Limiting content through a filter is a way of protecting our children against exposure to unwanted material freely available on the internet. Another step you can take at your router level is to change your Wi-Fi router's DNS setting. DNS is like an internet phonebook with caller ID. It will not allow content you don't want onto the devices that use that router. To make the necessary changes, you need to access your administrative settings for the router. You can change it to something family-friendly like OpenDNS Family Shield, which restricts access to a long list of known malware sites, adult sites, and other sites that children should not access. (See the end of the article for more resources about how to do this, or contact the author for help). If you want to restrict other sites, you can add them to the list by creating an account on the OpenDNS site. OpenDNS Family Shield is free. It's been around a long time and has a great reputation.

If you are willing to pay a little and want to have more options, Covenant Eyes has been the go-to application for

many families for years. While best known as a filter for pornography, Covenant Eyes has great controls to set up special block lists and blocked times of day. It also sends a detailed report of all sites visited for parents to review. This gives parents a starting point for conversations with their children about what is being viewed.

## Have open conversations

Probably the most important thing parents can do to help protect their children from pitfalls on the internet is to have open conversations with them about what apps they are using, what they talk about with their friends, and what questions they may have about life. Never assume that your children will resist temptations online or that they are too naïve to understand things they see. Ask good questions and listen to get to the heart of what is going on. Be a parent that can read beyond the smiley faces and hashtags.

Assume they are being influenced by technology. The internet has become the meeting place for many kids in today's generation. And while we may not completely understand it ourselves, as parents we need to be willing to enter their world and find out as much as we can about what is going on. This will allow us to ask questions that will help us shape our children for the future, so that they can make wise decisions and handle anything that the world throws at them in a biblically-sound manner.

It is never too early to put proper boundaries in place for your family regarding the internet and the use of technology. Using these things can help you preserve the time you have with your children to shape their hearts in meaningful conversations and tech-free times together. **JH**

## More resources:

- **OpenDNS Family Shield:** <https://www.opendns.com/setupguide/#familyshield>
- **FTC: Protecting Kids Online:** <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/protecting-kids-online>
- **Protecting your kids online takes a lot more than tracking their devices, Washington Post:** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2016/09/08/how-can-parents-protect-their-children-online>



*Jared Jones lives and works in Takasaki, Gunma. He's a church planter for the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He's been in Japan since 2009 with his family. He and his wife have five children.*

# The Japanese Mind

*The book The Japanese Mind is full of fascinating insights about Japanese culture*

Being a slow reader and owning more books than I could possibly hope to read in a lifetime (over 7,250 at last count), I hardly ever reread a book. But one book I have read multiple times is *The Japanese Mind*.<sup>1</sup> My Japanese wife has also read it many times. We keep going back for its valuable insights into Japanese culture and the way Japanese people think. There is a plethora of good books on Japanese culture, but I've yet to find one as insightful and thought provoking as *The Japanese Mind*.

As its title indicates, *The Japanese Mind* sheds light on that most inscrutable of entities—the Japanese psyche—from a Japanese perspective. Many books on Japanese culture are written by non-Japanese authors, but this book contains reflections of Japanese people on their own culture. It is a collection of 28

essays written by cross-cultural communication students at Ehime University and edited by their professors Osamu Ikeno and Roger Davies. Each essay is based on a word or phrase that captures one aspect of Japanese culture. These include *aimai* (vagueness), *giri* (social obligations), *gambari* (trying one's best), *nemawashi* (the practice of obtaining consensus before holding a meeting), *shūdan ishiki* (group consciousness), *soshiki* (Japanese funerals), and *uchi and soto* (insiders and outsiders).

This organisation makes it easy to dip in and select a topic that interests you. Alternatively, it is rewarding to read from cover to cover. Each chapter includes questions relating to Japanese culture and cross-cultural issues. The book is suitable for both beginners wanting an introduction to Japanese culture and for those desiring to deepen their knowledge of the culture.

To get the most out of the book, I recommend reading it with others and discussing it with them. If possible, read the book with a Japanese person and get their thoughts on the matters it raises. The last time I read it, I discussed its contents with a teacher on the language-learning site Cafetalk.com,<sup>2</sup> which was most helpful. Also, JEMA member Anne Crescini regularly runs a great free online course based on the book through the RJC Academy website (academy.rjcnetwork.org/japan-102). The course provides a forum for students to discuss the issues raised by the book: each week, students write their impressions on three

or four selected chapters and then Anne and other students comment on these reflections.

You could think up questions about how each point relates to the gospel and church life. For example, how should we reconcile the Japanese preference for ambiguity with Paul's desire to preach the gospel clearly (Col. 4:4)? Does the Japanese propensity to strive hard partially explain the popularity of cults that stress self-effort and does it have implications for the way Japanese Christians

live the Christian life? How far can Japanese Christians participate in Buddhist funerals? In what ways is Japanese group consciousness more biblical than the individualism of the West?

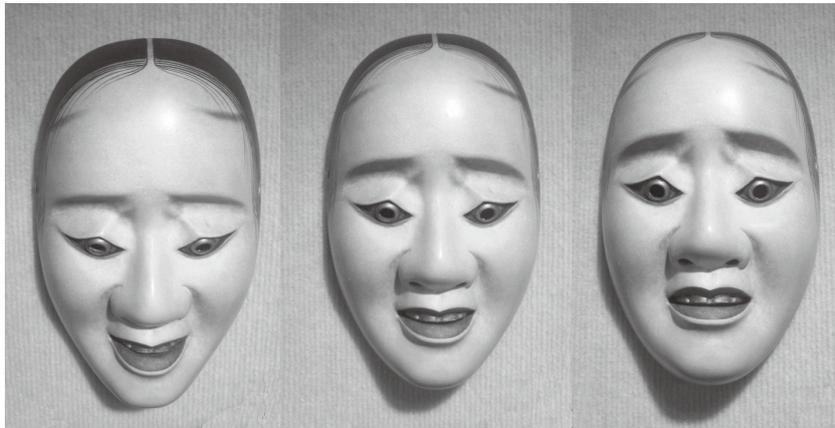
A follow-up book by Davies called *Japanese Culture: The Religious and Philosophical Foundations* was published in

2016.<sup>3</sup> It examines the religious and philosophical underpinnings of Japanese culture. After considering Shintoism, the book describes the various waves of external influences that have affected Japanese culture: Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Confucianism, and Western influences (including a brief mention of Christianity). While I didn't find this book as engaging as *The Japanese Mind*, it does provide useful background information on Japanese culture and how it is an amalgam of various influences. Again, each chapter ends with discussion questions.

I strongly recommend reading (or rereading) *The Japanese Mind* and discussing it with others. **JH**

1. Roger H. Davies and Osamu Ikeno (eds.) *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Tuttle, 2002).
2. For more information about Cafetalk, see p. 32 in the Autumn 2016 issue of *Japan Harvest*.
3. Roger H. Davies *Japanese Culture: The Religious and Philosophical Foundations* (Tuttle, 2017).

Image: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Psychological\\_Processes.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Psychological_Processes.png)



**Simon Pleasants** works as an editor in the Tokyo office of a scientific publishing company. Originally from Wales, UK, he moved to Australia in 1988. He helps maintain several Japanese-related websites, including *Reaching Japanese for Christ*: rjcnetwork.org

# Reaching out beyond the church walls

The church is God's ordained entity to bring the message of God's grace and salvation to the peoples of the world. The missionary/pastor can encourage Christians in this task. If the *uchi-soto* (inside-outside) barrier in Japanese culture is to be overcome, the pastor needs to plan prayerfully for people from "outside the church walls" to become involved in the church body.

Here's a way that could be achieved:

**1. Vision.** The pastor sets a course for the development of vision. This vision would include a deep conviction of the mighty power of the gospel. We know that the death of Christ on the cross effected a power that reaches to any person, with any need, in any culture. This vision would also understand the incredible potential for the Spirit's conviction of any heart. Paul wrote to the church at Rome, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16 NIV). This vision must carry a humble awareness of the potential for spiritual reclamation and soul harvest.

**2. Prayer.** The church would pray for: a sense of urgency and opportunity, divine guidance and wisdom, the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the community, and God's timing.

**3. Discipleship training.** Each believer needs to be trained in spiritual maturity. The congregation could be involved in discipleship training to prepare the congregation for a ministry to the secular groups in the local community. In the appendix of my book, I included a sample outline that the pastor could use for such training.

**4. Local community groups.** A church leader could go to the local city hall and community hall for lists of existing local community groups and clubs for the purpose of potential involvement of church members.

**5. Day of dedication.** This would be a day to challenge church members to consider joining a community group. There would be a time of prayer and a call to surrender to God's purpose through the church in the community.

## Purpose of community group involvement

The church must keep in mind why its members are getting involved in local community groups—to build relationships and look for open hearts that God has prepared. After such people have been found, then the message of God's love needs to be carefully and prayerfully expressed to the prepared heart. Such witness should be planned outside the group—at a coffee shop or in the Christian's home.

### *Uchi and Soto*

Written by JH staff

In Japan, there is a difference between how you treat people who you consider your inner circle of family and friends (*uchi*) and those who are outside of that (*soto*). This is true all around the world, but it is perhaps more pronounced in Japan than many other countries. Japanese generally find it very hard to join new groups and also difficult to accept new people into their already-established groups.

## Guidelines

The church should be aware that this ministry would likely be difficult and not have immediate results.

The initial purpose is not evangelism. The purpose is to build friendships and to develop mutual relationships within the group.

As the Christian meets the members of this new group, he/she will begin to hear of burdens, disappointments, loneliness, and dissatisfaction.

As confidence builds, the Christian can (as the Holy Spirit leads) share the love of Jesus and maybe a personal testimony.

Care must be taken in gender roles. A lady could invite another lady to a coffee shop or to her home, but should never invite a man, or vice versa. If a married lady is concerned about a male friend in the group, she could say (if her husband is willing), "Would you like to have a coffee with me and my husband?" Or, if unmarried, she could ask a friend to join them.

## Possible negative reactions

- This plan would cost money. The church could set up a fund for this new venture and offer a possible 30% of the club membership dues.
- It would cost time. Most Japanese are very busy and have little leisure time. However, the Christian could determine to dedicate two or three hours per month (or whatever time the club membership would require).
- It may seem too slow. It would take many months, maybe years for fruit. But it could eventually break down the *uchi-soto* barrier.
- The average Christian is often shy to talk about Jesus. But with the encouragement of the church and prayer of the people, that shyness can be overcome. The pastor could supply some tracts for witness, for example.

Remember, God is working to prepare the searching heart. When the heart is sufficiently prepared and the Christian is led by the Spirit to share Christ's love, the miracle of salvation can take place. God can still do his work in his way, even in Japan.

May our God give guidance to his people for his glory and the reaching of many lost ones across Japan for his kingdom. **JH**

An edited extract from *Communication in Community: The Christian Witness in Cultural Context*, 2013, by Stan Dyer. Published by Guardian Books in Ontario, Canada. Available at CLC Tokyo Bookstore.

**Stan Dyer** ministered in Japan with OMS International for 26 years in evangelism, church planting. He also taught at Tokyo Biblical Seminary. He served as Executive Director of OMS-Canada from 1990. He currently lives in Ontario, Canada.

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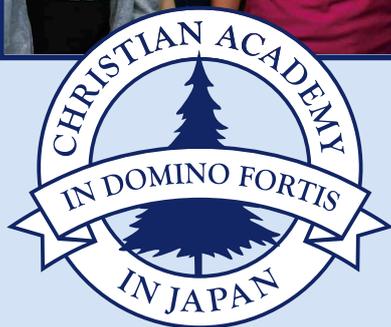
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