

A photograph of a cafe table with coffee, a cookie, and a vase of flowers. The table is dark with a woven texture. In the foreground, a white coffee cup with a ring handle sits on a white saucer with a napkin. A chocolate cookie is on the saucer. In the background, there is a tall glass of coffee, a small white bowl, and a vase with pink flowers. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The background shows a blurred outdoor area with cars and buildings.

JH
Japan Harvest
Summer 2019

*Engaging the
Community*

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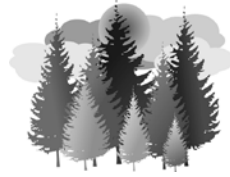
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August

Karuizawa Union Church Summer Conference

August 4-11, 2019
 Karuizawa Union Church
 See <http://www.karuizawaunionchurch.org>
 for more details



October



WIM Fall Day of Prayer PLUS

October 10, 2019
 Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo

November

CPI Pre-Conference

November 12-13, 2019
 Tsumagoi Resort Sainosato
 Kakegawa, Shizuoka

Church Planting Institute

November 13-15, 2019
 Tsumagoi Resort Sainosato
 Kakegawa, Shizuoka



January



WIM Winter Day of Prayer

January 14, 2020
 Christian and Missionary Alliance Chapel,
 Higashi Tokorozawa

March

WIM Annual Spring Retreat

March 4-7, 2020
 Megumi Chalet Karuizawa



Details about future JEMA events can be found on the JEMA website:

jema.org

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



Japan Harvest

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Engaging the community

In addition to being the managing editor of Japan Harvest, I help manage OMF Japan's blog and social media. In April, OMF's social media focused on the changes Japan had seen during the Heisei era (January 1989 to April 2019). We heard the perspectives of missionaries who have been here for the whole of that era. To write social media posts, I read many articles about the changes in Japan since 1989. It became clear that Japan has changed significantly in the last 30 years. The changes encompass many aspects of society, from technology to what the average household looks like. Women's roles have changed, and now more people die each year than babies are born. The country has gone from having a booming economy to struggling to find its way. All these changes impact what a Japanese community looks like as well as how we engage our communities.

So this issue's theme is timely. Not only do we hear about how JEMA members are engaging the communities where they live, but we also get different perspectives on contextualising the gospel. Our writers challenge us to think about what contextualisation means, observe how Jesus did it in one instance, and consider how to break through the secular barrier we face here.

This issue comes with news about opportunities for your church to get involved in community events surrounding this year's Rugby World Cup and next year's Olympic and Paralympic Games. Our awareness of human trafficking has risen in the last decade—one of our articles offers you an opportunity to learn how your church can make a difference in this area in your local community.

Every quarter, I send out two emails to the JEMA community asking for articles for the next season's issue. I always wonder what response I will get. We often receive exactly the right number of articles and usually a good variety. However, the large response to this issue's theme overwhelmed me. After I took a deep breath, I realised I had a good problem. We've squeezed as much as we could into these 40 pages, and we hope they will encourage, inspire, and equip you to continue reaching Japan for Christ.

Upcoming themes

Perhaps you've never noticed, but there is a list of upcoming themes below the editorial. I want to briefly explain the theme for this winter's issue, "Seize the day," which is about taking advantage of special opportunities that come our way. When we chose this theme, we were thinking especially about the international sporting events that are coming to Japan in the next two years, but the theme also includes other events, such as local festivals and unexpected crises. Please keep that in mind as you go about your ministry in the next few months. I will call for proposals for that issue at the end of July and look forward to hearing from you.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Autumn 2018: Thriving in Japan

Winter 2020: Seize the Day (submission deadline August 30)

Spring 2020: Behind the Scenes (submission deadline January 10)

Summer 2020: Ministering through Education (submission deadline March 31)

Japan Harvest News

Volume 70 No. 3

SUMMER 2019

Isaiah 52:7

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!"

Christian young adults strive toward peace

Christian Shimbun, February 24, 2019

Translated by Atsuko Tateishi, photos submitted by Christian Shimbun

The young adult version of the International Theological Symposium on the Great East Japan Disaster (ITS) took place in Tokyo for the second time on February 4, 2019. The original ITS was first held in 2012 in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011, and the young adult subgroup first convened in 2018.

Organizing the symposium

This year it was once again jointly organized by three student ministry organizations that cover a range of denominations—Aoyama Christian Fellowship (ACF), Kirisutoshu Gakusei Kai (KGK) and Student Christian Fellowship (SCF). The theme for this year's gathering was "Shaloooooooom!!" (based on the Hebrew word for peace).



Fujiwara

Atsuyoshi Fujiwara, a professor at Aoyama Gakuin University, was instrumental in establishing the young adult division of the ITS. He said, "Non-Christians affected by the 2011 disaster thought of all Christian relief workers simply as Christians, no matter what church or denomination they were from." He shared his hope that young

Christians would develop connections that go beyond organizational boundaries as they gathered to praise God, serve him, and eat together.



Ogawa

loving relationships abound within local churches. Ogawa encouraged panelists to share their experiences honestly, even if they were negative ones, with an ultimate focus on God, who can heal all wounds.

Panel discussion and lecture

A panel of four college and seminary students (one moderator and three presenters) discussed shalom within the local church. They candidly shared their views and experiences, which included discord in their own churches, strug-

gling in a cultic-church environment, a pastor being criticized by church members, and the ups and downs of a church selecting a new pastor. The students also talked about how to discern God's will and how they regard the duties of members within the church. The final question the panel addressed was about how to foster shalom in the church. In response to this the panel noted the importance of unity in worship, and the necessity of praying for the pastor and the church.

Following the panel discussion, Professor Fujiwara gave a lecture. He defined "shalom" not merely as the absence of war, but as a state where people enjoy peace of mind, stable relationships and finances, and good health. To realize shalom, he encouraged the audience to love both God and people, as well as forgive their neighbors, in line with the Lord's Prayer. He also reminded them to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, whose sole motivation is love.

The event concluded with Taku Noda of SCF praying for shalom among Christian young adults and within local churches. ■



Top 10 Reasons to Study at Tokyo Christian University

by Randall Short, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

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7. You want to study subjects like philosophy, history, linguistics, anthropology, and education without ignoring the most important questions you have about life, faith, and God.
8. You want to go to a school of "big learning" (the literal meaning of *daigaku*, the Japanese word for college) without getting lost in the system.
9. You want to get a college degree without taking on debt that will take years and years to pay.
10. You want to network with today's and tomorrow's Christian leaders in Japan, and to work with them to solve problems facing Japanese church and society.

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THINKING ABOUT CONTEXTUALISATION

By Kellie Nicholas

How can we make sure that we are faithful to God's Word, while communicating in a way that is helpful for Japanese people?

Until I recently embarked on some study related to contextualisation, I hadn't realised that there was debate surrounding whether it was a good thing or not. I naively presumed that considering the context you are in when sharing the gospel was a given, and that it was more about the "how" and "to what extent" rather than the "should we" question that needed to be answered. What follows is my attempt at understanding what contextualisation is and the principles that we can use to put it into practice in our lives and ministry.

One of the biggest challenges in thinking about contextualisation is arriving at a definition. Since the term was first used by liberal theologians, it is understandable that evangelicals have been wary and, in some cases, opposed to the term. If you are interested in reading more about the history of the debate, Andrew Prince, in his book about contextualisation, gives a good

summary and highlights the main players.¹ Much of the discussion is about where we should start when considering contextualisation—the Scriptures or culture—and what principles we should use when putting it into practice.

In its simplest form, contextualisation is about how we understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular setting. There needs to be a balance between careful study of the Bible and also the culture it is being spoken into. The definition that I have arrived at is: Seeking to communicate the gospel in a way that is faithful to the Scriptures, meaningful to those who receive it, and that encourages challenge and critique. In this way, contextualisation feels a bit like a balancing act of carefully considering the Biblical text in its original context, taking into account our own biases, and then seeking to express it in a way that those who hear it can relate to.

Faithful to God's Word

As people who seek to share the good news with people in Japan, we want to be faithful to the Word of God and this is also where we need to start in contextualisation. If we haven't worked hard at understanding a Biblical passage in its original context and trying to discern our own personal biases, then any attempt at contextualizing it to our ministry to Japanese people will be futile.

I have been greatly encouraged as I have read through the book of Acts and seen the various ways that the good news is presented to different audiences. The speeches in Acts by Peter, Stephen, and Paul show us that there is "a gospel core, centred on the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the need for repentance, and the availability of forgiveness of sin."² While these central truths are non-negotiable, the way that we present them will vary depending on the people and situation

that we are in. I particularly love the way Paul shares the core message in Acts 17 with people from a non-Jewish background, helping them to understand God's character, relationship with creation, and desire for relationship with them.

Meaningful to our audience

We want to proclaim the God's good news in a way that is meaningful to those with whom we share it. There is no room for compromise of the message, but it must be communicated in such a way that can be understood by those who hear it. In order for people to hear, understand, and accept the gospel, we must, first of all, establish common ground.

In Japan, this means we need to work hard at understanding the language and culture so that we can relate and communicate in a way that is appropriate while seeking common ground with those we minister to. In Acts 17:22-23, Paul respectfully points out the Athenians' religiosity and observes their altar to the "unknown god". Rather than ridiculing their beliefs, he uses these things that are obviously important to them as a means of connection. We must also engage with Japanese culture and religion, attempting to understand their basic assumptions and worldview, so that we, too, might be able to present the gospel in ways that resonate with the hearts of Japanese people.

From the variety of speeches that are found in the New Testament, we can conclude that there is not just one way to do this. When Peter, Stephen, and Paul address Jews, their speeches included references that the Jews would have understood. Peter (Acts 2) talks about how Jesus fulfils the Scriptures, Stephen (Acts 7) highlights how Israel

has a history of rejecting God and those he has appointed, and Paul (Acts 13) explains how Jesus is the fulfilment of the Davidic promise. From this we can see that the message of the Bible is constant but the presentation depends on the situation.

It may also be helpful to use terms that already exist in Japanese but give them new meaning in light of the gospel. In Acts 17, we see Paul using language and categories with his Greek listeners to convey biblical revelation in a way that they can understand. Just as Paul uses the Greek word "Θεός" (*theos*) in Acts 17, Japanese use the word "神" (*kami*) for God. Although the word "神" already represents the many gods of Shinto, Christians have bestowed on it the biblical meaning of the "one true God". This may also be the case with selected objects and elements of general revelation that can be used as a bridge in order to communicate the gospel. Obviously, care needs to be taken so that misunderstanding does not occur when the original meanings of the terms are read back into the Bible.

Open the way for critique

Finally, the gospel must be able to critique the culture that it is speaking into and call those in it to be conformed to the image of Christ. The pressure to make the good news accessible and understandable to people should not lead to the watering down of the demands that the Bible makes on those who would follow Jesus. Both Peter and Stephen challenge their listeners to repent of the way they have failed to respond to God. The gospel will, and must, challenge and critique our cultures and point us towards Christ-like discipleship.

We must also remember that all cultures have both positive and negative aspects. God's Word does not condemn culture outright, but it must be the measure by which any activity or way of thinking is judged. We see an example of this in Acts 17 as Paul affirms his audience's religiosity (v. 22–23), the work of their

poets (v. 28–29), and their sincerity (v. 23) while critiquing their misdirection (v. 27) and ignorance (v. 30).

With this in mind, it would seem that those who put their faith in Jesus Christ do not necessarily need to be dislocated socially and may be able to remain within their own culture and community. For a Jew to become a follower of Jesus, they were not required to reject everything that was connected to their Jewish culture. Gentile believers (Acts 15) were also to remain within their communities with some restrictions placed on things they were unable to participate in (v. 20). For Japanese believers, there will be tensions regarding things like family altars, visiting shrines, and participating in festival celebrations. Again, we see the balancing act that is required in thinking about contextualisation. We need to preach and live out the distinctive demands of the gospel, but there may be many aspects of the culture that can be retained or adapted.

Although there are many challenges involved in contextualisation, I think that faithful and meaningful communication of the gospel cannot be achieved without it. We face the challenge of trying to communicate how to live a life of faith in the place that God has placed us, Japan, and teaching others to do the same. Hopefully, as we continue to read God's Word and listen to what it says, we will be challenged to understand it in its context and seek to share it in a meaningful way to Japanese people that they may become followers of Jesus. ■■

Edited version of an article that originally appeared on CMS Australia's website on 29 October, 2018: <https://www.cms.org.au/2018/10/thinking-about-contextualisation/>

1. For a historical survey: Andrew J. Prince, *Contextualization of the Gospel: Towards an Evangelical Approach in the Light of Scripture and the Church Fathers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 37-71.
2. Prince, *Contextualization*, 110.

Kellie Nicholas is a CMS missionary (Australia) who has been serving in Japan since 2008. She works as a KGG (IFES group) staff worker in the Kansai Region, helping Japanese university students to meet Jesus and grow in their relationship with God.

Contextualisation: seeking to communicate the gospel in a way that is faithful to the Scriptures, meaningful to those who receive it, and that encourages challenge and critique.



LEADING JAPANESE PEOPLE TO THE WELLSPRING

By Michele C. Fisher

Lessons from Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman help us better share the gospel with Japanese people

While reading the story of Jesus pursuing the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 recently, I was struck by the similarities between her and Japanese people. She puts up labels to distance herself from Jesus, and many of our Japanese friends respond similarly to the gospel. This might leave us uncertain about how to proceed, but by following Jesus' lead, we can look past the labels with grace and share truth. We can help our friends overcome what seems like an impossible barrier by addressing their thirst

As we meet our friends where they are at, let's look beyond the labels of identity and, with love and grace, share the identity of Christ.

and leading them to the wellspring of living water, so that they will never thirst again. So what ultimately drew the woman to drink the living water? And how can we use Jesus' example to minister to Japanese people?

Jesus pursues the woman where she is

The scene begins with a weary Jesus sitting beside Jacob's well in the noonday sun (John 4:6). Then, as the woman comes to draw water, Jesus engages her in conversation: "Give me a drink" (4:7 ESV). We are reminded of at least one similarity that he and she have: they both need water.

Those of us in ministry can easily find similarities between us and those we are seeking to reach. Many of our relationships happen naturally at our neighborhood community events, at our children's school functions, in pursuing our personal hobbies, at our jobs, or at our favorite shops or restaurants.

Of course, we can keep our relationships on those functional levels, but that isn't what Jesus did. He pursued the woman right where she was at. For most of us, this is what we want to do. It's the reason many of us have left our passport countries and moved to Japan—we want to pursue the Japanese right where they are.

Hiding behind labels

Then comes the Samaritan woman's response: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (4:9). She puts labels on both Jesus and herself, seemingly trying to discredit their common need for water. She states the obvious to distance herself from Jesus by drawing cultural, religious, and gender lines. So far, Jesus is merely trying to connect to the woman in a natural way.

I'm sure this is starting to sound familiar to some of you. Maybe you've tried to connect with a Japanese person

in a natural way, only to have them put labels on both you and them—pointing out that they are Japanese and you are not—seemingly trying to discredit something you have in common.

Moving from external to internal needs

The woman's response doesn't stump Jesus. He answers her: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (4:10). Do you see what Jesus does here? He ignores the labels and keeps pursuing her with truth and grace. He moves from the external, obvious connection and starts to show the woman her spiritual need, which she can't ignore.

I think we can learn a lot from Jesus' example. We shouldn't back down because of the differences between us and our Japanese friends we're seeking to reach in Jesus' name. Yes, there are

cultural and religious (and sometimes gender) differences, but ultimately we have to move beyond that and show our friends their spiritual need, which can only be met in Jesus.

Misunderstanding

The Samaritan woman seems to miss the underlying truth in Jesus' statement. She says to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" (4:11).

She didn't understand Jesus' teaching, and our Japanese friends are often just as perplexed. In a land where Christians are such a tiny minority, it should be no surprise that our friends are confused after hearing the gospel.

Focuses on Jesus' identity

Jesus, wanting to reach the woman's heart, digs deeper. He tells her, "Go, call your husband, and come here" (4:16). The woman answers him, "I have no husband" (4:17). Jesus responds, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true" (4:17, 18).

The woman has deeper labels she (and likely others within her community) has attributed to herself, but which she does not disclose to Jesus. But being God, he knows them anyway. Our friends, too, have deeper labels, ones that don't appear on the surface, but that we can only learn about by pursuing and deeply loving them.

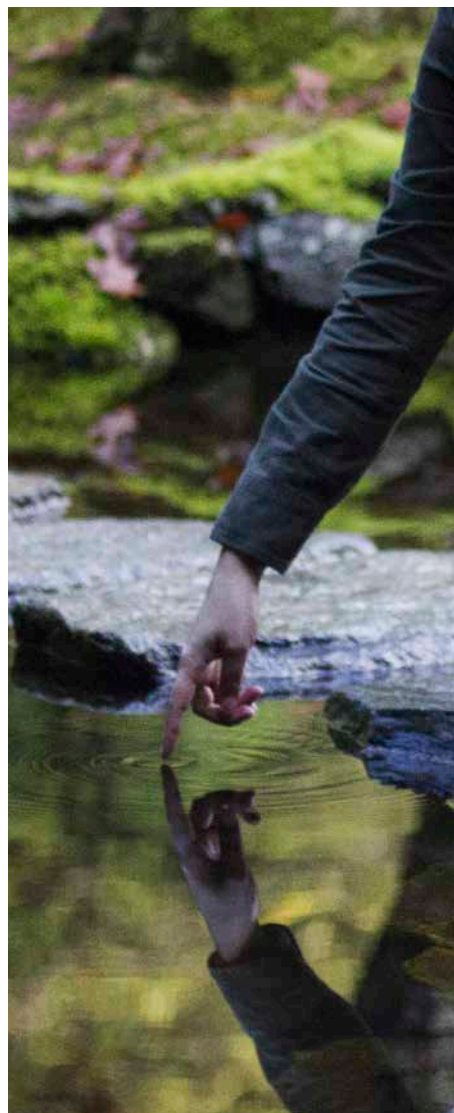
Once again, Jesus doesn't focus on the label. He doesn't use his omniscience to judge the woman. Rather, he uses it to show that he knows her deeply and that no matter what label she places on herself, true or untrue, his identity is what must be made known. Jesus shows that his identity can overcome her shameful identity. He offers her a solution to a lack she doesn't even seem to know she has. Later, she can say: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (4:29).

In Christ, we too have the solution to the deep spiritual needs of the Japanese people. While it is easy to get distracted by the labels that our friends present, such as "But I'm Japanese, you're a foreigner," let's not. The labels may be true, but they aren't a barrier.

You know the ending of the story. The Samaritan woman drinks the living water, after Jesus lovingly and graciously pursues her. He meets her where she is, connects in a natural way, and shows her her need for the Savior. He gently leads her to turn her eyes to him, the living water; and away from herself, her culture, and her labels of identity.

Let's do the same. As we meet our friends where they are at, let's look beyond the labels of identity and, with love and grace, share the identity of Christ. May God use us to bring many Japanese to the living water. **JH**

Michele C. Fisher and her husband, Ethan, are missionaries with JEMS and have served for five years alongside a Japanese pastor and his wife in Gifu City. Prior to Japan, they served at Lakeside Church of Chicago.



Blast from the past

From 60 years ago...

The most fruitful sphere of service in Japan is among T. B. patients," said Mr. Akira Hatori. I understand that of the 26,700 PBA radio listeners who wrote in for the Bible correspondence course, about half are bed ridden or hospital patients. Why is it that the almost 700 T. B. hospitals in Japan have such tremendous potentialities for evangelism? Because most of these patients were previously exceedingly busy, too busy for religion, but now the hectic round of life has come to an abrupt standstill and they find themselves in hospitals, WITH NOTHING TO DO, but to rest. They are bored with weary, seemingly endless days. They have time to think. Suffering and sorrow has prepared their hearts to listen to the Word of Life.

"Hospital Evangelism", by Cornelius Verwey, Vol. 7 No. 2, April 1959 of *Japan Harvest*.



MAKING SPACE FOR TRANSCENDENCE IN SECULAR JAPAN

By Brett Rayl

Japan is one of the least religious nations in the world. How does this influence how we do ministry?

Yūki Kawauchi enjoyed a surprise win at the 2018 Boston Marathon. He became the first Japanese man to win in Boston since Toshihiko Seko in 1987, the same year Kawauchi was born. He had not been expected to win and part of his success was likely due to his resilience in difficult weather conditions. After he won, he said this in an interview:

「瀬古さんが最後に優勝した87年に生まれたので運命を感じている。」

“I feel destiny [*unmei*] because I was born in the same year that the previous victor, Seko-san, won.”¹

Few are lying awake at night wondering, “Is this all there is?” The rhythms of the urban company life allow no space for such pondering.

In the moment of his greatest personal triumph amidst the most difficult of circumstances, Kawauchi looked up and out for answers to explain his victory. His marathon experience created space for transcendence.

Secularism in Japan

Secularism, in the form of indifference or rejection of religious considerations, is growing around the world. In Europe and North America this is notable because there are conversions out of religion—for individuals and institutions. People who grew up in religious homes are walking away from their faith in university. Historic church buildings are being converted into dance clubs and condominiums and cities increasingly embrace a secular agenda. Many Christians in the West feel the pressures of

secularism from the culture as well as from within themselves.

However, the most secular countries in the world are not found in the West but rather in the East.² China and Japan are listed as the populations who feel the least religious in the world.³ This may seem strange in a place like Japan which some groups have listed as 68% Buddhist⁴ but if you ask the average Japanese person on the street,⁵ they will likely tell you that religion plays no real importance in their lives. It's not that Japanese are atheists. Far from it! Most Japanese believe in spiritual things (like ghosts and spirits) and are quite consistent in participating in religious festivals and rites. However, religion is irrelevant to their daily lives.

Charles Taylor, a respected philosopher and winner of the 2008 Kyoto Prize for Arts and Philosophy, offers vocabulary for secularism helpful for understanding the (non)religious experience in Japan. People in Japan,

Modern Japanese society is a crushing secularism that seeks to suffocate God-longings in human hearts.

especially urban Japan, live out a form of what Taylor describes as “exclusive humanism”⁶ within an “immanent frame.”⁷

However, Taylor’s story of secularism in the West ties secularism closely to individualism, but in Japan the story is different.

In Japan, exclusive humanism is expressed collectively. It’s one of the things that Westerners love most about Japan but have no idea how to practice themselves. It’s why Japan has so little crime, why things run so efficiently, and why the streets are so clean. In Japan, one is not an individual with an identity who chooses to participate in a community. Each person is a part of a community in which they find their identity. Exclusive humanism in the West looks like extreme individualism. Exclusive humanism in Japan looks like extreme collectivism.

The immanent frame is bolstered in Japan by a modern technological society. Rural communities are rapidly dissipating as urban migration continues. Within the city, the only thing that really matters in society is success. The safest means of achieving success is to get a company job and serve that company faithfully. In so doing, a person will bring honor to their family and the blessing of security. Churches have struggled to grow in Japan in large part because churches do not have businesspeople as members. Businesspeople are not in the church because they have never heard the gospel. They have never heard the gospel (in part) because they work incessantly and any semblance of free time is spent on numbing entertainment to help them get through more work. This is a grim depiction, but I’ve heard even more grim versions from Japanese friends who actually work in these companies. There is no space for transcendence.

Within this pressing, immanent frame, people never even think to ask transcendent questions. The old gospel presentation questions like, “If you were to die tonight, where do you believe you would spend eternity?” or “In your personal opinion, what does it take for a person to get to heaven?” are not only under-contextualized—they

aren’t even intelligible. Few are lying awake at night wondering, “Is this all there is?” The rhythms of the urban company life allow no space for such pondering.

The rhythms of the company are actually “secular liturgies,” to quote James K.A. Smith.⁸ These liturgies express worship in the form of exclusive collective humanism; worship is expressed all day and everyday. Religious devotion to companies. Walking the labyrinth of department stores. Catechizing students in cram schools, aspiring to good scores on entrance exams. All for the good of society and to secure a place. There is worship in all of it. Underlying everything is a stressed but persistent cultural nationalism. Imperial Shinto indoctrinated a population to worship the State—“a magnified tribalism, the glorification and deification of the collective Japanese self.”⁹ Now, while the State is no longer officially worshipped, worship continues directed towards the collective Japanese self. The real religion in Japan is being Japanese.

But worship is not meant to make us look to others for meaning. Worship is meant to make us look up and out, “that [we] should seek God, and perhaps feel [our] way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27 ESV). Modern Japanese society is a crushing secularism that seeks to suffocate God-longings in human hearts, “yet he is actually not far from each one of us” (continuing v. 27). God has not gone missing. Reformed missiologist J.H. Bavinck poses the question we must ask to minister in this context: “What have you done with God?”¹⁰ Where is God in secularized Japan?

Making space for transcendence

How does one preach the gospel in secular Japan? It must begin with making space for transcendence. Here are two examples of people seeking that space:

A Japanese young man expresses his love for black gospel music. When asked why he loves this music even though he

is not a Christian, he answers, “Because when I hear it, I feel something.”

A Japanese non-Christian counselor expresses her newfound interest in religion to a Christian counselor she meets. She explains that many of her conversations with clients are so deep and personal that they even feel spiritual. She wants to know more about Christianity.

Sports, art, travel, counseling, nature, community, and more can create space for transcendence. They beckon us to look up and out, stirring a longing inside of us that cannot be satisfied by anything in this world. The secular liturgies of the immanent frame numb the human heart. But there are God-longings in all of us. As Augustine famously stated, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.”¹¹ **JH**

This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared on Medium (<https://medium.com/@brettrayl/making-space-for-transcendence-in-the-secular-east-74bbd24c601c>).

1. “川内、瀬古以来の偉業「87年に生まれたので運命を感じている」/マラソン,” Sanspo.com (Japanese website), April 17, 2018, <http://www.sanspo.com/sports/news/20180417/ath18041710550007-n1.html>
2. Oliver Smith, “Mapped: The world’s most (and least) religious countries,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/maps-and-graphics/most-religious-countries-in-the-world/>
3. Ibid.
4. Joshua Project, “Country: Japan,” accessed May 8, 2019, <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/ja>.
5. That Japanese Man Yuta, “What Japanese Think of Religions (Interview),” YouTube Video, 7:28, January 2, 2018, <https://youtu.be/7gZHUFtuzdg>
6. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 19.
7. Ibid., 542.
8. James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 27-56.
9. Henrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1956), 258.
10. J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1993), 253.
11. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.

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RETHINKING EVANGELISTIC EVENTS

By Simon Pleasants

Evangelistic events may be more effective if they are held in public places and are based more on building community

We'd done it again—the church was packed with people from our local community, many of whom had probably never stepped inside a church before. But come Sunday, only the regular churchgoers were in the morning service; no one from the previous day's bazaar turned up.

Unfortunately, this experience with the bazaar was far from bizarre—many evangelistic events I've experienced in Japanese and overseas churches have had similar outcomes.

Four common problems with evangelistic events

The bazaar had the following four traits that, in my experience, often characterize evangelistic events and activities run by Japanese churches.

Held in a church building

For church members, the church building is the natural place to hold

evangelistic events since it's convenient, familiar, and free (if you own the building). But most Japanese people tend to be wary of entering a church, even when it's not for a religious service. They often complain that churches have “high thresholds”. To get a feel of what it's like for them, imagine how you would feel walking into a Jehovah Witness Kingdom Hall. I've never done it myself, but I think I'd be wondering *Is it okay for me to be here?* and *Where's the nearest exit in case I need to make a quick escape?*

I've encountered this hesitancy to enter a church through the twice-monthly English conversation classes my wife and I have been running at our church for about five years. The classes are cheap (¥500 after two free lessons), there's no Bible study involved, and there is no shortage of people in the neighbourhood who are eager to learn English from a native speaker—but it's been really hard to

get people from outside the church to come to the classes.

Direct stepping stone to the Sunday service

There's usually nothing between an evangelistic event and the Sunday service—no gentle ways to get more involved. But that chasm is often too great for the average Japanese person. Again, I've encountered this in English classes—students who have been coming to them for years can't seem to take the next step of coming to the worship service. If the “threshold” to the church building is high, the one to the worship service is stratospheric.

Offer bait but no hook

Almost all evangelistic events entice with some kind of bait. Examples include English conversation, cooking classes, music concerts, Hawaiian dancing, and Christmas decorations and atmosphere. People tend to come for

the bait, but because there's no hook, they don't come back.

Tend to be large scale

Many evangelistic events tend to be big events such as concerts or bazaars that the whole church gets behind (admittedly, class-based evangelism is necessarily smaller in scale). Large events require a lot of planning and preparation as well as many helpers on the day. They can also be a bit impersonal and it can be hard to have meaningful conversations.

Four solutions to these problems

Here are some ways to overcome these problems.

Neutral territory

As much as possible, evangelistic events should be held on neutral territory such as cafes, restaurants, shopping centers, and karaoke boxes. This will make it much easier for people to come, and those who do come will feel more at ease.

Multiple stepping stones to the Sunday service

Evangelistic events should be planned as part of a broader strategy that will allow people to take gradual steps towards attending the Sunday service. This means always have something else that you can invite them to besides the main service.

The hook of Christian fellowship and community

In addition to bait, including a hook with an evangelistic event will bring people back. I think one of the most powerful hooks for Japanese is that of Christian fellowship. People are attracted to the unique community that can only be found in the church, especially since many Japanese people are lonely.

Small in scale

Doing small evangelistic events is easier on church people as there is less planning and work involved, and they are more personal, making it easier to connect with visitors.

Two examples of such evangelistic events

Here are two examples of evangelistic events that satisfy the above criteria when used as part of a larger evangelistic strategy.

Informal social events

Informal social events are a great first rung in the ladder to get people connected with church. It's much easier to invite non-Christian friends, workmates, and family members to a movie or a pizza lunch than an event at church. And both church people and visitors feel more relaxed.

While such events could be considered pre-evangelism since they don't involve any formal Bible teaching, they play a vital role in an evangelistic strategy. As Graham Orr notes, Japanese people are generally more open to learning about Christian beliefs once they feel accepted by a group of Christians and feel like they can trust them.¹ Also, the conversation often naturally turns to spiritual things when Christians are in the majority.

There are different ways such events can be run. At our church, we have a notice board where anyone can pin a note about an upcoming social event. The note contains information such as the organiser's name, what the event is, the meeting place and time, the maximum number of people who can come, and any comments. People can then sign up for it by either adding their name to the notice or talking to the organizer.

The important thing is that anyone can organize an event and anyone (including non-church people) can

join an event. The event can be something as low-key as sharing a meal at a family restaurant, going to karaoke, eating *obento* in a park, or visiting a zoo or museum. Or it can be something more adventurous such as climbing Mount Fuji, spend-

ing a day at Disneyland, or seeing a *kabuki* performance.

We've been doing this for about four years at our church and had some really good times together. Those who have participated have been very positive about it. Its biggest benefit has been strengthening fellowship between church members, since it provides opportunities for them to spend extended time together. But non-Christian family members have also come to several events and enjoyed them. The main problem we have found is that, while members are often happy to join events, they tend to be hesitant to initiate the events themselves.

Small groups held in public places

Holding small groups in public places such as cafes, restaurants, or karaoke boxes has several advantages over holding them in a church building. The biggest is that it is easier for those who are just testing the waters to join since they don't have to get over the hurdle of entering a church. Small groups in public places can also be easier to get to since they can be held at various locations during the week that are convenient for people to join (for example, near a major train station). You may even be able to make new contacts through curious people asking what you are doing. And you can combine the activity with a meal or refreshments.

One downside is that it won't be as quiet as in a church and the surroundings can be distracting. Praying in a group is particularly hard to do in public. Obviously, it's important to find a place that is reasonably quiet and private.

I've been to some small groups run by other churches and came away inspired and excited about the possibilities, though we haven't tried this at our church yet.

These are just a couple of ideas. I'd encourage you to think up other ways of doing evangelism that is on neutral territory, has a hook that will bring people back, is small in scale, and is part of a broader strategy that culminates in the main worship service. **JH**

1. Graham Orr, "How three cultural dynamics impact returnees," Japan Harvest, Spring 2019.

If the "threshold" to the church building is high, the one to the worship service is stratospheric.

CREATIVE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

By Greg and Asa Swenson

Using an English café, music, radio
taisō, and the venues readily available
to them, this couple is cultivating
redemptive relationships

As ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are called to proclaim the Word of God as we each do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission. However, just as the Lord himself took on flesh and “dwelt among us” (John 1:14 ESV), so he also sends us out to the nations to live out the gospel we preach. When Asa and I came to Japan as career missionaries almost a decade ago, we desired to serve as incarnational ministers of the gospel, but we didn’t know what that would look like. Over the years, the Lord has opened avenues for engaging the community and cultivating relationships with the aim of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Here, we share some of the avenues we’ve pursued.

Grace English Café

During our first term, we partnered with a church in Chigasaki, Kanagawa. We became involved in various outreach initiatives to engage the community, including gospel choir singing, English classes, Musikgarten, and volunteering at our kids’ local schools. During that time, we dreamed of launching an English café ministry that would be relatively casual and low-key, but would include a time of singing

contemporary worship songs in English and a short Bible message. This dream wasn’t fulfilled until our second term, when we moved to Kokubunji, Tokyo, in 2014.

The café, which we run at our home, provides a loosely structured, casual environment for Japanese to hone their English conversation skills with native speakers while enjoying refreshments. There is 30 minutes of mingling and chatting over coffee and snacks, followed by an hour of loosely structured program. After the program concludes, attendees are free to linger to chat more.

In the program portion, we focus on a particular topic or theme with the aim to consider the topic in the light of the gospel. The topic could be anything from a philosophical question of life like “Where did I come from?” to a cultural element or a seasonal occasion

such as Christmas, New Year’s, Easter, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, cherry blossom season, or *setsubun* (February bean-throwing festival).

The program consists of an icebreaker, music, a short message, and a small-group discussion. During the icebreaker, each person briefly introduces themselves and responds to an icebreaker question that is related to the topic of the day. For example, once when the topic was Children’s Day, we posed the question, “If you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your child self?” Then, after formally highlighting the topic of the day, we introduce the group to a Christian

hymn or worship song related to the theme and sing it together.

I (Greg) then give a 10-minute message, sharing a biblical perspective about the topic. While the rest of the program is in English, Asa usually translates what I say into Japanese, since we feel it’s important for everyone to fully grasp the message.

We then transition into a small-group time to discuss follow-up questions. We cluster people according to their English level and each group has at least one native speaker who is a believer to facilitate the discussion. These small-group discussion times often foster deeper conversations about heart matters, opening up opportunities to talk about the gospel.

The English café has limitations, but we’ve been encouraged by it as a ministry tool for cultivating redemptive relationships with people in the community. While few have professed faith, several pre-Christians have been coming for a long time, and we believe the best is yet to come.

Musikgarten

Welcome to Musikgarten class! You will find moms and tots sitting in a circle with soothing rocking music or little ones echoing a tonal pattern. You may see them dancing with colorful scarves or playing a singing game. Mom and babies are simply enjoying each other, immersed in quality music. Though the class is for newborns to three-year-olds, there is usually a sense of calmness and order. That’s the magical thing about Musikgarten classes.

Musikgarten is an early childhood music education program based on the Montessori method.¹ We use

People are
longing for
a community
gathering.

very simple tools like rhythm sticks, jingles, and high-quality backing music. We emphasize focused listening and teaching rhythm patterns, but the most important aspect of teaching is to promote bonding between mother and child through beautiful music. You don't need a music degree to teach; if you love music and children and have a heart to reach your community, the program is designed to equip anybody to become an instructor.

The community fostered by this program can be used to introduce the moms to the love of our heavenly Father and to what Christ has done in redeeming us from sin. There are opportunities to show that, through Christ, the Holy Spirit gives them strength as parents day by day. If you consistently communicate the Bible's message, birthing a church from this foundation is a natural progression.

Japanese moms often raise their children with little help from their husbands. For some moms, the stress and loneliness can result in depression or even to abusing their children. Society also now encourages young mothers to send their babies to daycare, so they can pursue their careers—the result is that they let others have a big part in raising their children. How should Christian churches respond to this trend? How can we help moms treasure the precious time with their little ones during this brief, yet formative period of their lives?

Both the Old and New Testaments have examples of the importance of the godly influence of mothers on their children (e.g., Moses, Samuel, and Timothy). An authority on child development, Dr. Montessori, discovered that the most crucial period for spiritual sensitivity is the two-to-three-year-old age range.²

Japanese churches often miss or ignore the need for ministering to this critical age group and their mothers. It may be because there isn't enough space at church or there are no qualified personnel, or perhaps because of the lack of a good program for ministering to them effectively. However, target-



ing this age group may be more critical than you think. If you want to reach the young generation for your church with the gospel, reach out to them when they are still very young, right after birth (or even before). Don't wait until they are old enough to understand Bible stories. They are observing the world significantly; unfortunately, the world that most babies absorb is one without Christ.

Back in 2011, I (Asa) was working at the church with very little space. Yet there was a lady who had a burden for moms and tots. But she was not sure what she could do, so we introduced a Musikgarten program. We were overwhelmed by the positive response from the community—the church didn't have enough space for all the moms' bikes. We shared a short devotional at each class and church members followed up faithfully. Moms started to be drawn to Christ and became followers of him. Some of them also caught a vision to lead the Musikgarten ministry themselves and took my place.

After we moved to a different city, God kept bringing me wonderful

Christians (young and old) who had a heart to reach out to their community and share the love of Christ through music. It has been a privilege to train Christians—especially young mothers—to lead this program and to see them flourish as beautiful instruments that foster God-centered communities where they live.

As of 2019, the Musikgarten ministry has spread to Chigasaki, Tokorozawa, Kokubunji, Yonezawa, and possibly to Tsukuba.

I'm praying that more communities will join the list. I have a dream that one day every town of Japan will have a Musikgarten class (or similar ministry). Then, at the earliest stage of their life, every child will have access to a ministry that soaks them in the love of Christ and beautiful music, and have a strong community that loves them dearly and supports them joyfully.

Musikgarten can be easily adapted to music therapy for seniors, developmentally delayed children, or people suffering from stress. You may lack a large space or a music degree, but if you love Christ, children, and music, you may want to consider starting a music ministry for the sake of fostering a local Christ-centered community.

Radio calisthenics

If you've lived in Japan for any length of time, you've probably encountered the cultural phenomenon of *rajio taisō* (ラジオ体操 or radio calisthenics), the 10-minute exercise program broadcast daily at 6:30 a.m.



on NHK radio. Although probably most people don't engage in *rajio taisō* regularly, it is part of the DNA of nearly every Japanese.

Following, my wife's example, I began participating in the daily exercise routine in our homes in Chigasaki and Kokubunji. Then one day, I discovered a group doing the *rajio taisō* exercises in a nearby park. When I approached one of the members in 2017 to inquire if new people could join the group, he was most welcoming.

I have participated regularly ever since (except for when I've been away on home assignment or for some other reason). While there are limits to how well you can get to know people during a 10-minute exercise routine, I have been able to learn the names of the other 10–15 participants, and having the daily face time with them has helped me to feel like a regular as well. Moreover, on the last day of the month they usually have a snack time after the exercises, which has fostered a sense of community.

Though my relationship with most of the participants is still at the acquaintance level, one of the ladies, Mrs. M, has become something like an adoptive mom to me. Shortly after I joined the calisthenics group, I learned that she had lost her husband a couple of months earlier. It was hard to see her struggle with her sorrow and loneliness, but it gave Asa and me opportunities to open our hearts to her by having her over for tea or going out to lunch to hear her story.

Only God knows whether we will gather a spiritual harvest among the *rajio taisō* group, but I believe the relationships I've developed are significant. When I announced our special Christmas outreach events, several of the members responded with alacrity. And Mrs. M and others have begun to open up with a level of trust that goes beyond an acquaintance level.

Christmas outreach . . . at a shrine?

We love this urban-rural community (*tokai-inaka* 都会田舎). We're just half an hour away from downtown Tokyo, but you meet very active farmers here. While holding freshly picked vegetables from the nearby veggie stand, neighbors chat on the street until dusk. This is a rural community in many ways. In Japan, if there is a farming community, there must be a Shinto shrine to do rituals according to farming tradition. The shrine grounds are not only for religious practice but also a place for the community to gather.

While we were hosting various meetings at home, space was limited, and in our area there was limited availability of rental rooms for special events or gatherings. Our rental house was immediately behind a small shrine and little park. The city's community centers (*kōminkan*) clearly stipulate that they are not to be used for religious activities. So when our (non-Christian) neighbor suggested we use the shrine's office (*shamusho* 社務所) for a Christmas mini-concert we wanted to host,

we started to give it serious consideration. We plucked up the courage to ask the caretakers about the possibility, and they had no problem with us holding a Christian event there. As a result, we have been using this venue for larger events since 2015. We have the greatest egg hunt on the shrine grounds!

We had never distributed flyers in this community until our 2016 Christmas event. We made several hundred copies of the flyer, but were not expecting a large turnout. However, the old *shamusho* was packed with people from near and far. We learned that you can throw a community Christmas party even if you do not have your own building or a modern community center to rent. People are longing for a community gathering. You may be short on space, but perhaps you can turn something like a restaurant, a pub (*izakaya*), a preschool (*yōchien*), or a wedding reception hall into a party room.

In our Christmas outreach, we decorate the *shamusho* with stars and candles. Sometimes we will invite one or more musicians and/or a speaker. We explain the true meaning of Christmas to everyone. We also encourage children from the community to participate by singing, performing a traditional dance called *sōran bushi*, or reading the Christmas story. We have a café table, a craft table, and an English conversation table for people to choose from. Strangers meet and become acquaintances.

These are some ways that God has led us to engage the local community and to develop redemptive relationships with the aim of sharing the gospel with people. **JH**



Kitamachi Christmas party at the shrine (2017)

1. "Montessori is a method of education that is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play." It is based on Dr. Maria Montessori's work in the early 20th century that combined experiential learning in a classroom designed to meet the needs of a certain age group. (<https://montessori-nw.org/what-is-montessori-education>)
2. 江島正子 Masako Ejima, モンテッソーリの宗教教育 [Religious Education by the Montessori Method], (Tokyo: Gakusha, 2001), 69.

Photos supplied by author

Greg and Asa Swenson have been serving as church planting missionaries in Japan with WorldVenture (JBF) since 2009 and currently serve in west Tokyo. Greg was raised in Japan as a missionary kid and Asa grew up in Kanagawa.

A café with a difference

By Judith Ricken

A café in her area turned out to be totally different to the author's expectations, and the people there have influenced her life ever since

Nagoya is known for its café culture. In most cafés, some people chat with their friends while others sit by themselves and study, read, or work on their laptops. But I've discovered a very different kind of café.

An unconventional café

Between my house and the nearest station, there is a café with a strange name: Nande Ano Toki Café (なんであのときcafe; <http://nandeanotoki.cafe>), which means approximately “Why at that time?” I had passed it many times until I finally had enough courage to enter. What a surprise—everyone seemed to know each other and they were chatting. Had I unknowingly stumbled into a private party? Apparently not, as someone quickly stood up and offered me their seat so that I got to share a table with a person I'd never met before. I had been planning to work on a short message for a missionary meeting, but I soon realized that would be impossible in this café. When the other customers asked me where I came from, I let them guess. As soon as they found out I was German, a man asked “*Wie geht es Ihnen?*” (How are you?)—probably the only sentence he could remember from when he learned German many years ago. Next, they wanted to know where I lived, when I had come to Japan, and so on.

A real community

“This isn't a café where you sit quietly by yourself and read or study,” the owner of the café, an elderly lady

named Ayako, explained. “Rather, it's a café where people talk.” My Japanese was still poor at the time, and I couldn't follow the conversations, yet I was entranced—this was a real community. Ayako runs the café together with her son, Takeshi, who is extremely good at drawing people into conversation. They have guitar lessons on Fridays, and every now and again they hold some kind of event: live music by a band, a calligraphy painter, or a private party. There is also a LINE group for people who attend the café regularly, and they produce a radio program as well, which has a podcast (なんであのとき放送局).

I started going to the café about once a week. As I couldn't speak much Japanese, I mostly took homework from my Japanese school and asked for help. People were very willing to help me, but they made sure they didn't do the work for me.

I slowly got to know the other customers and even more slowly started to understand something of their conversations. One, a mother of a person with *hikikomori* (someone who doesn't leave the house anymore), shared her struggles. Another had difficulty building trusting relationships: “As soon as I get close to someone, they suddenly don't want to see me anymore,” he explained.

Everyone knows that I'm a missionary, and they sometimes ask my opinion on matters like this. I've been able to share about the gospel and Christian values on several occasions.

Graduating from language school but not the café

In the following spring, my graduation from Japanese school drew near. But I wasn't the only one who was worried about exams. One lady's son was graduating from middle school. Would he pass the final exam and get into high school? I felt the entire



community sympathized with the mother's concerns and cheered her son on. When he passed his exam, several people went to his graduation ceremony and congratulated him.

The café held a graduation party for those who graduated from middle school, high school, or university, and I was invited too. It was one of the most moving evenings for me since coming to Japan. There were six of us graduates, and we stood in a line to receive a thank you certificate for coming to the café. Personal memories were written on them like, “On your first visit, you ordered curry and rice and complemented the food, which encouraged me.” Mine said, “We don't really know what missionary work is, but please keep coming after graduating from Japanese school.” We were then congratulated and celebrated and had to give a short speech. It was all very moving. Japanese school had been really difficult for me, but here were people who had helped me with some difficult grammatical problems and had thought about the meanings of different *kanji*. And now they were celebrating my graduation with me. I felt part of them, welcomed and valued.

I still go to the café as often as I can. The first time I entered the café I could never have anticipated that it would become an *ibasho* (居場所, a place where you belong) for me. **JH**

Photos supplied by author

Judith Ricken came to Japan for the first time in 2013 with the German Alliance Mission. She is currently engaged in student ministry (KKG) in Nagoya.



Thinking *outside* the box



Since most Japanese will never walk into a church building, we need to go out among them to share the good news about Jesus Christ

By John Edwards

Missionaries and Japanese believers are doing a good job of seeking to reach the spiritually lost through outreaches held in church buildings and at Christian camps. However, I'm concerned about the many Japanese people who will never enter a Christian gathering place to hear the gospel. Inspired by the way Jesus initiated conversations with the lost (such as Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman at the well), I've endeavored for the last 15 years to take the gospel to unbelievers where they live out their lives.

English conversation groups outside of church

Churches have long used English teaching as a service and outreach to the local community, as we do at our church. But I also go to English conversation groups that don't meet in church buildings and aren't sponsored by Christians. These groups are held on neutral ground such as bars, cafés, and community center rooms. I pray for opportunities to talk about my faith, but I do not force the topic. The owner of the café where we meet asked one of our current interns many questions about her faith and Christianity. The owner also assigns participants to my

table when she finds out they are interested in Christianity. Last month, one regular sat at my table and started out with, "How do I become a Christian?" She wasn't ready to become one, but she wanted to know practically what it looks like to become a Christian.

For me, there are great benefits in joining English conversation groups. First, I don't have to prepare (except to pray). Second, I get to meet a lot of working adults (especially men), graduate students, and others who are often not available during the day. Third, I can take my non-Japanese-speaking interns (short-termers) to participate and they can learn about Japanese culture directly from Japanese people and have opportunities to talk about their faith. Nearly everyone asks, "What are you doing here in Japan?"

Other ways to serve the community

There are many other ways to serve the community besides English classes. My wife and I volunteer an hour a week at the local community center for children (*jidōkan*). We mostly just talk and play with the children. Out of that, we've been asked to participate in a couple of special events. A missionary

in a neighboring community has been asked to give an Easter presentation at his local *jidōkan*.

A colleague was helping farmers in her community. When a big job came up and the farmer was ill, she called me to see if our interns could come and help out in the fields for a day. Another couple serves their community by helping with seaweed harvesting and oyster farming. Working side by side with unbelievers gives us opportunities to show as well as to tell the gospel.

Engaging in hobbies and activities

Sports, music, dance, and art are just some of the many hobbies that Japanese people engage in and that foreigners are welcome to join. Four months ago, I started attending Toastmasters (an organization that helps people improve their public-speaking skills) in Sendai. Through my speeches, and in conversations before and after meetings, I've been able to talk about my faith. This group also gives me opportunities to interact with Japanese people working in business and education.

My wife likes to walk, and she discovered that one of the local moth-

ers wants to walk to stay fit. These walks have given her opportunities to learn about our neighbor's life and to talk about Jesus. Another missionary I know finds tennis circles to join. He also likes hot springs and has made friends and enjoyed conversations while having a good, hot soak.

Being intentional in everyday routines

My wife will tell you that I am a person with routines. It's just my personality. I've been able to take this quirk and discipline it to engage unbelievers. I do the same things daily, or weekly. I run the same route every weekday morning at the same time. I stop by the same kindergarten and daycare center. The teachers usually open the sliding door so I can greet the children. We have to move from our current rented house this summer. When I've informed people on my route, they ask: "Will you be moving far?" and "Can you continue to come here even if you aren't in the same community?" After over five years of jogging, I know people and they know me.

I call our local McDonald's "my office" and I usually go there on Tuesday afternoons to read or prepare a message. Before going, I pray: Lord, send someone for me to talk with and give me courage to start the conversation. And he does. In March, I caught the eye of a mother and her young daughter. "Hello," I said, in English. The mother asked if I spoke Japanese and I told her I did and gave her my business

card. She saw the photo of my wife and me, our mailing address, and the name of the church we work with on the card. She knew the church and asked if I knew a Japanese woman who lives in that area (who isn't a believer). When I said I did, she really opened up.

While in McDonald's, I deliberately look around from time to time. Whenever someone is going to sit at a table next to me, I look up and greet them. Often that leads to a conversation, which frequently includes an inquiry about why I'm in Japan, and I can sprinkle bits of the gospel into my reply.

Sharing the gospel while learning the culture

I often take our interns to cultural sites in Sendai. The cheapest and most efficient way to do this is to take them myself. However, the Sendai Tourist Information Desk offers some cultural tours and experiences for a fee. I frequently choose some of these so that I can develop deeper relationships with the staff and so I can hear (and let the interns hear) about Japanese culture directly from Japanese people. On one walking tour in Sendai, we went to a little shrine. I had done this tour on my own a couple months before to help the Information staff take promotional photos (they needed foreign-looking faces) and to see if it would be a good tour for the interns. The second time I took the tour with the interns, a new staff member was leading the tour for the first time and didn't know much

about this shrine. So I interjected a few facts I had heard the first time I took the tour. One room contained statues of the Chinese zodiac animals, and the guide started to look up our birth-year animals. One of the interns learned that she was born in the year of the sheep and started talking about how she really is a sheep but has a Good Shepherd. For several minutes, I translated for her. That guide became Facebook friends with all of us! She has since moved to Tokyo, but she still follows me and I sprinkle bits of God's Word onto my Facebook page along with family news and Japanese cultural tidbits I'm learning.

For my benefit and the benefit of our interns, I attend a Japanese-language tutoring group at Tōhoku Gakuin University. Our interns have befriended their tutors, and some have even maintained a relationship for months after leaving Japan. Our summer 2018 interns have a group video chat nearly every week. A colleague of mine attends a community Japanese tutoring group in Tokyo and invited his tutor to church, and he came.

A plea

Many of the ways I've discovered to engage the unreached have been wonderful accidents (God-given opportunities, to be more precise). The simplest way to engage the unreached is to greet people. But to do that we must be in the places where unbelievers are. We missionaries can do many things to engage the unreached. The temptation is to do much of the above within church walls or campground boundaries—my church has English classes and cultural seminars at church. However, my plea is that we strive to do some of these things among unbelievers—realizing that many of them will never walk into a Christian gathering place without first coming to know a Christian personally. **JH**

Box image "LHR out-of-the-box" by Flickr user Antonio Valente

John Edwards and his wife Susan have been missionaries in Japan since 1993 and have been with SEND since 2002. They live in Sendai, where they lead the D House internship ministry and cooperate with Tsubamesawa Church.



Sports, music, dance, and art are just some of the many hobbies that Japanese people engage in and that foreigners are welcome to join.

Equipping churches to build community

Your church can help prevent human trafficking by identifying the needs around them and the gifts God has given them

By Pamela Duhrkoop

Loneliness and hopelessness are rampant in our world. Many are looking for love, seeking to feel welcomed and needed by someone else, or simply looking for a better life. Those looking to harm others can exploit these vulnerabilities. By creating a protective community for the lonely and broken, the church has a special opportunity and a unique calling to share the hope of Christ.

In 2010, One Mission Society created a ministry to prevent human trafficking called HOPE61.¹ There are an estimated 24 to 45 million victims of human trafficking around the world. If we add the number of traffickers and buyers, there could be over 150 million people involved in or affected by human trafficking in some way.

HOPE61 began in Japan in 2018. Our main goals are to educate people about human trafficking in Japan and empower churches to reach out to vulnerable people in their communities.

Each church, no matter how small or financially poor, has a wealth of assets provided by the Lord.

There are two root causes of human trafficking: sinful hearts that need to know Jesus and vulnerable people who need protection. The church has the answer to both.

We know that salvation through Jesus is the only answer to the problem of sin. Traffickers, buyers, and even victims are slaves to sin. We cannot

hope to change them or their situation without first introducing them to Jesus.

The church community is also the answer to the problem of vulnerability. HOPE61 has identified eight vulnerable groups that the church can focus on:

1. People who are uneducated academically, biblically, or about human trafficking.
2. Immigrants and refugees.
3. Victims of abuse and people with unhealed trauma in their lives.
4. Addicts of porn, gambling, alcohol, drugs, etc.
5. Disabled and mentally ill people.
6. Children in general, but especially orphans, foster children, and teens who have run away from home.
7. Homeless people and others in poverty.
8. People who are lonely, socially isolated, and lacking community support.

This last group is where the church can have the most impact. Social isolation is one of the biggest risk factors for becoming involved in human trafficking as a victim, trafficker, or buyer. Our relationships with others protect us and shape the kinds of decisions we make. The other seven vulnerabilities are almost all linked in some way to social isolation or a paucity of positive relationships. An isolated person is susceptible to attack. Whereas a person in community and with good relationships with others has a circle of protection around them.

No institution or group is better equipped to provide this kind of protective community for vulnerable people than God's church. Instead of traffickers coming into their lives

and exploiting them, the church can come into their lives to support and protect them. Our prevention strategy is twofold:

- relationship evangelism to meet a person's heart need, and
- social ministry to meet their felt needs.

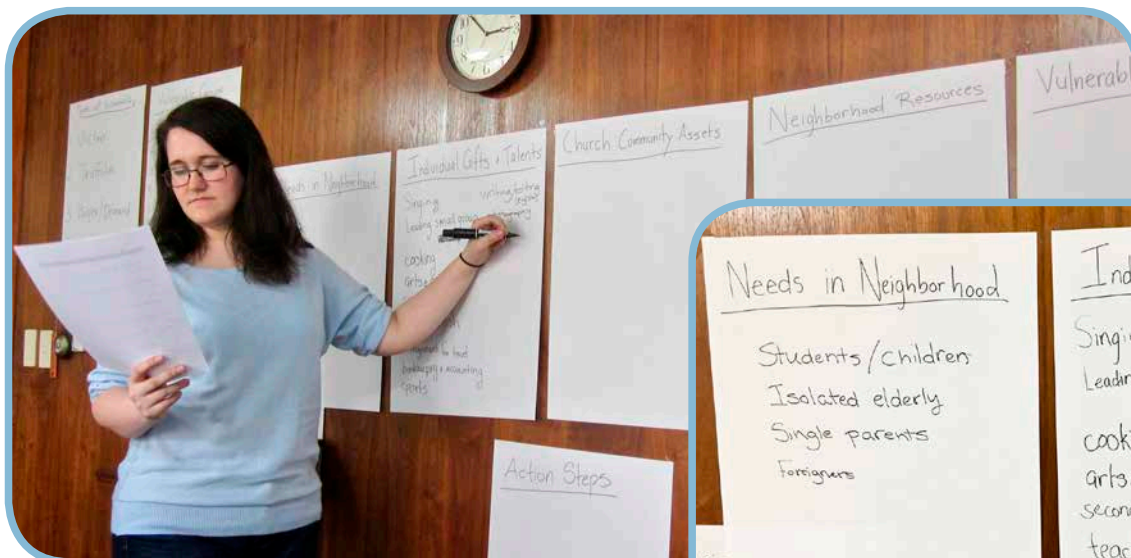
The church is an incredible asset for Christians. God has given us a community of people equipped by the Holy Spirit with gifts, talents, abilities, experiences, and resources. He has given us these things not just to benefit us, but also to share with other people, like the groups mentioned above. These gifts can be used to build bridges into our communities, to make connections with people who are in desperate need of the gospel.

The question we hear most often from churches is: "What can we do?"

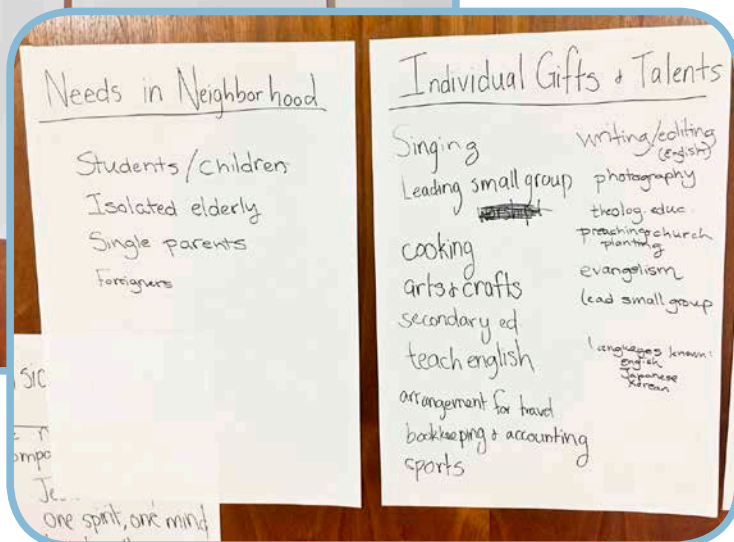
We respond with: "What are your strengths?" Use what God has given you. Don't look at what you lack—instead look at the strengths and assets God has provided you with as individuals and as a church community. Each church, no matter how small or financially poor, has a wealth of assets provided by the Lord. How can you use those things to serve God and your community?

One-day training

The bulk of the one-day training that HOPE61 does with churches focuses on this process of discovery. We spend the morning educating the church about human trafficking, how it occurs within Japan, and what our biblical response should be. Then in the afternoon we help the church create their own plan of action. We do this through a process of asset mapping and ministry development. Asset mapping



HOPE61 training: asset mapping in action



is cataloguing all the assets (gifts, talents, and resources) within a community. It helps the church locate all their assets and social networks in a visible and tangible way.

Three main categories of assets are examined:

1. Assets and abilities of individuals in the church (as assessed by a church survey).
2. Assets and abilities inside the church community—current church ministries and social networks church members have in the wider community.
3. Assets located within the community—e.g., non-profit or social service organizations, schools, hospitals, and police or fire departments.

Once the church has catalogued their strengths and assets, we ask them to consider what vulnerable groups live in their neighborhood. They then create an action plan for how they can strategically use their unique strengths to meet the needs and start building relationships with them. Belonging to a protective community and being introduced to Jesus are key to preventing human trafficking and a wealth of other social problems.

We walk the church through how to get from point A (the asset mapping and action plan) to point Z (carrying out the action plan), and all the steps in between. The asset map helps a church see opportunities for action and know where to best focus their energies or where they could potentially have the most impact. Change in

a community occurs when people work together, through the Holy Spirit's power, to share God's love with their neighbors in word and deed.

Who can prevent human trafficking?

Everyone has a role to play in sharing the gospel and in preventing human trafficking. Because each ministry plan is based on the church's unique assets and their community's unique needs, each church will have a different ministry plan.

These are three examples of action plans that churches have or could come up with:

Church A has a basketball court and is near several schools. They plan to start a sports ministry for local kids. As they build relationships with the kids, they plan to tell them about Jesus and educate them about human trafficking in age-appropriate ways.


Church B is in an industrial area, where many immigrants work in factories. The congregation has several language teachers and an immigration lawyer. They plan to offer language classes at church along with free legal advice and assistance for those who face labor abuses.

Church C is near a children's group home. One church member is a gifted teacher, and she has a friend who works at the group home. They hope to use that contact to offer tutoring services.

The church also decides to offer support for children graduating from the group home—such as help them look for housing, seek to enter college, or start a job. A couple decide to explore adoption, and they become advocates for foster care and adoption within the Christian community.

You don't have to be a trained professional or have years of experience to change your neighborhood, and by extension, your world. By befriending a lonely person or approaching someone you might not have talked to before, you can prevent human trafficking and share the love of Christ.

Ask yourself: What is God asking me to do? Where do my strengths lie? What opportunities has he put right in front of me? Then step out boldly in faith to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, because surely he is with you and will provide all you need.

If you are interested in receiving training with your church, in English or with Japanese translation, please email Pamela at: pduhrkoop@onemissionsociety.org 

1. For more information about HOPE61 see: <https://www.onemissionsociety.org/hope>

Photos supplied by author

Pamela Duhurkoop grew up in Japan as a missionary kid. She received a Master degree in criminology from Portland State University and returned to Japan in 2018 to work with One Mission Society's human trafficking prevention ministry, HOPE61.

Japanese paperwork: frustration or opportunity?

When hours “wasted” on paperwork is time spent building relationships.

By Levi Booth

I sipped on my canned coffee—Kirin’s Fire Blend—and looked at the clock through the glass doors. 8.57 a.m. Three more minutes until the doors opened and I could get into the warmth of the Nakamachidai Community Centre.

I pulled out my phone and re-checked the website to reassure myself that the room we wanted—the biggest one—was indeed available to book for our Christmas party. A lady came round the corner to wait with me. I greeted her with a smile, hoping I was covering my feeling of slight concern.

“Please let her not be after the same room,” I prayed.

The doors opened as the clock chimed for nine, and we both walked to the counter to book our rooms.

It still confused me that in a country like Japan—with bullet trains and automatic toilet seats—in order to book a room for the community centre you needed to go *in person* to fill out a *paper* form.

Every. Single. Time. It didn’t matter if we were booking the same room, for the same time slot, for the same regular event. You could check online to see which rooms were available, and you could provisionally book rooms over the phone. But to make it official you had to go in person and fill out, from scratch, the exact same form.

Changing a booking meant filling out a whole new form. Making a mistake whilst filing out a form required the use of our *hanko*, official stamp, (because obviously you can’t just

throw the form in the bin: it had to be stamped as incorrect and then stored for . . . reasons?). And because we only had one *hanko*, writing the wrong date could lead to a game of, “Who has the church *hanko*? And can you come to the community centre?”

There were a lot of groups using the community centres, and so they had pretty strict rules for room bookings. We were only allowed to have two bookings at any one time and were not only allowed to book more than a month in advance. Given how weeks and months overlap, this created a bit of an administrative nightmare for us. Even alternating our church meetings between two local community centres,

All that time we had “wasted” filling out the same paper form thirty times was actually time we had spent slowly, almost imperceptibly, building trust with the community centre staff.

we couldn’t always guarantee getting a free room.

And trying to secure a room often meant getting to the centre for opening time exactly one month ahead. People who showed up in person were given priority over those who phoned in to book. And if more than one group sent a representative to book the same room? Well in that case—and I give you my word that this is true—they decided who got the room by a game of Rock-Paper-Scissors.

I was therefore quite relieved when the lady who had come in with me was after a different room (my Rock-Paper-Scissors game is not, as the Japanese say, “strong”). It still didn’t detract from the tedium of having to make the 20-minute bike journey that wintery morning, but the greeting of the centre staff did.

The lady behind the counter saw me and shouted in informal Japanese: “Levi! Long-time no see! How are you? Did something happen?” I started to explain that the church now rented a room elsewhere when another staff member came from behind the partition. “Hey! I thought it was you. How’s it going? I guess you’re busy with prep for Christmas?”

I said that, yeah, it was a bit busy and that’s why I was here. We were hoping to book a room for our Christmas party. They confirmed if the room was available, then gave me the booking form to fill in. I sat at the counter to fill it in but they started to question me about our Christmas party.

“So what will you have in your party? Are you going to dress up as Santa again? Do you want us to put up a poster for it?”

The final question stunned me. “A poster?” I repeated, like I was practising my pronunciation. “I thought you weren’t allowed to advertise for religious events in the centre?”

I had been told this quite firmly when I had first started booking events at the centre over a year earlier and had asked, with first-term missionary enthusiasm, about putting up a poster for an Easter event.

“We know you are a Christian group, and that’s OK. You can use the rooms. But religious groups are not allowed to promote their groups within the centre. And also no handing out flyers just outside the centre, please.” The Japanese was formal and polite, but the tone was firm and felt a little bit cold.

But over the following year and a half I had been back to book a couple of times a month. And over time I went from viewing the booking procedure as a frustration to be got out of the way, to seeing it as an opportunity to get to know the community centre staff.

I would hang around after handing in the form and chat to them. I got a card for the library and asked them for book recommendations. I asked if there was any way that our church group could help them, and they suggested we start a Mums and Tots group with stories and songs in English and Japanese. I agreed to dress up as Santa for their Christmas party. They convinced me to take part in the centre’s annual

karaoke contest (I came in last place by a significant margin). After a while I would just pop in to say hi, if I was in the area.

Let me clarify that this was not a one-man mission. As a group we shared the room booking responsibility—mostly because it was such a time-consuming nuisance—and together we got to know the staff.

We hadn’t changed anything about who we were as a church group, or what sort of events we did. But now the staff had not only dropped the formal Japanese but were offering to put up posters to advertise our Christmas party.

I felt I should make clear that it was not just going to be games and music, but that we would have a talk about the meaning of Christmas.

“That sounds fine to me. Let me just check with the head of the centre.” She popped round the corner and after a couple of minutes came back with the centre head. “Ah, Levi! A party eh? Sounds like fun! Posters are fine. But

send a PDF to me. We’ll print them here: don’t want you wasting money!”

As I cycled home, I reflected on how our relationship with the community centre staff had changed over the previous eighteen months. If it was possible to book online, we would have certainly saved a lot of time, but now I could see how all that time we had “wasted” filling out the same paper form thirty times was actually time we had spent slowly, almost imperceptibly, building trust with the community centre staff.

I am still bemused and often annoyed by the need to fill out paper forms in Japan, especially the repeated ones. But I am learning to see them as ministry opportunities, not just administrative annoyances. The frustration of Japan’s paper-based systems is real, but so are the friendships we can make through them. **JH**

Photo by Karen Ellrick

Levi Booth (UK) works in Kanto with OMF, making disciples of Jesus through sports, especially Ultimate Frisbee. He reads a lot, writes a little, and also enjoys baking, trekking, good coffee, and bad action movies.



BRING CELEBRATION INTO YOUR COMMUNITY

Sports fever is coming to Japan, and Open Crowd Festivals can help your church ride the wave and connect with your neighbours

By Marty Woods

When a major sporting event comes to a country, the whole nation wants to celebrate. The Rugby World Cup later this year and Tokyo Olympics 2020 gift the church across Japan with unique opportunities. Japanese people will be looking for ways to celebrate. How can the church be at the centre of the celebrations?

Over the last couple of decades a team of people from the Global Sports movement have been at a variety of Olympics and World Cups, experimenting with creative community engagement.

What is an Open Crowd Festival?

Open Crowd Festivals (also called Community Festivals) is one of these strategies we've used—an opportunity for local Christians to run a free celebration in their local community. An Open Crowd is a group of people who genuinely welcome strangers into both their lives and their friendships. It forms when unfamiliar people become connected and a caring community builds. It's a distinct event in a local community that lasts about three hours.¹

At the heart of these festivals are local Christians working together to love and serve their community in a safe and inclusive atmosphere. People can quickly feel as though they belong.

At each Festival we seek to build a culture that shows what God's kingdom looks like. A place where kindness, hospitality, and generosity are evident. Alongside this is a commitment to it being not a

one-off event but part of a long-term transformation strategy.

Why run a Festival?

The power of an Open Crowd Festival is that everyone—but children in particular—are seen and valued for who they are. Strangers quickly become friends. Over three hours people move from disinterest to enjoying community. In this setting we naturally make friendships that can lead to introducing people to Jesus.

Celebration comes from the human spirit. As our spirit meets God's Spirit we move from the head to our heart. It has been said that, "The more the Holy Spirit has of you the more you have of yourself." We are trying to create a setting where we can more fully be ourselves. Jesus taught in Matthew 22:2 that the kingdom is like a wedding feast, a celebration, a party. It is a call for the child inside of us to be welcomed, to live in awe and wonder, and to have fun.

What does a Festival look like?

At an Open Crowd Festival, children are the stars. We celebrate, cheer, and

Who is behind Community Festivals?

Fusion International and the Global Sports movement

Community Festivals were initiated by Fusion International, a Youth and Community Christian organization that began in Australia in 1960. They teamed up with the Global Sports movement in 2000 at the Sydney Olympics. Since then, they have been working together at major sporting events. Their goal—making disciples in all nations for Christ in the world of sport and play. The Global Sports movement makes resources available at:

<http://readyssetgo.world>

make them feel special. But everyone belongs and everyone is welcome. We seek to create celebration everywhere—through music, balloons, clowns . . . anything that says "celebration".

We make it a priority to keep everything free-of-charge for guests. That is true of God's love so we keep



generosity, kindness, and hospitality as our core values that express this love.

How does faith-sharing take place?

Often guests ask the organizing team why they are doing this. This is an opportunity for faith-sharing. Sometimes it is more intentional with a welcome team that is sharing faith as they talk to people on the edges of the festival.

Yet the reality is that these Festivals don't change anything. Commitment does. You need to build a team of disciples at the heart of your Festival—people who love God, love each other, love their community, and are confident to reach out. We emphasize that it is the life of the team that builds the community. This is what happened in the early church. People were attracted

by how much the believers loved one another.

Where can we hold a Festival?

Jesus in John 4 went to a well, the centre of that Samaritan community. That's where we need to be. Whenever possible, run your festival at the centre of your community, e.g., public grounds, parks, or schools. If you can't do this, then the front of your church may be a possibility.

Festivals in Japan

All cultures love celebration. Hence Japanese churches that run festivals are seeing new people come to church. Examples include Hongodai Christ Church, Shalom Sports Academy in Ibaraki, and the Church of the Good Samaritan Church near Osaka.

For example, Hongodai Christ Church in Yokohama has run Open Crowd Festivals for two years. The relationships are now strong enough to have someone sharing a testimony/story and inviting people to respond. We are looking this summer at following up three consecutive months of Festivals with a family-friendly church service in the park

Our strategy

Over the next 18 months we are seeking to reach one million Japanese through Community Festivals in 500 communities across Japan. We have a goal that each of these 500 communities seeks to reach 2,000 people from within their community.

Local Japanese Festival teams, alongside 100 teams from across the world, will train and empower local churches across Japan. We will help them move into the heart of their community using the excitement generated by the Rugby World Cup, the Olympics, and the Paralympics.

Each overseas team coming will do online training and come into communities to work alongside local churches. More details are here: <http://olympicsmission.com>

Festivals are just the start of the invitation to connect with the church. For someone to be counted in the million people they need to be invited to participate in next steps.

and an invitation to a three-day Kids Holiday Club.

Commitment to reaching out

If you are interested, we have teams across Japan who can visit and train your church/mission organisation. We run training in the morning and early afternoon and then run a mini Festival so you get a taste of what it is. Let us know at mart.woods@gmail.com.

Don't miss this moment! **JH**

1. See <http://fusionyac.org/ocf/resources.php>

Photos supplied by author

Marty Woods heads a global Community Festival network operating in 80 countries. Marty and his wife Jenny left Australia after the Sydney Olympics, moving to Athens, Germany, London, Paris, and now Yokohama.

Everything you need to run a Festival is available in Japanese at our website: <http://opencrowdfestivaljapan.com>

An overview in English of Community Festivals: <https://readsetgo.world/en/resource/CommunityFestivalGuide>

More videos and resources: <https://readsetgo.world/en/library/readsetgo/811e8abd-5dc2-45fa-90f3-567dff1cf294>

(You can check out these links more easily in *Japan Harvest's* online version of the article at: <http://www.japanharvest.org/bring-celebration-into-your-community/>)



Community connections and coffee

By Kelly Baughn

A church launched out of a café

SonRise Café opened in October 2009 as a vehicle to meet and get to know people living in the Oyama area of Itabashi Ward, with the goal of eventually launching a church. My husband and I, along with Owen and Sarah Ames, started the café. But over the last 10 years the SonRise Team has included various TEAM missionaries. All of us are thankful for how God has enabled the café to be a “lampstand” in our community.

SonRise Café allows us to create neutral ground. It is a warm, friendly space that is inviting to all. It is non-threatening while still maintaining a Christian presence through the staff, the interior decorations, and the free reading materials made available. Community connections and outreach have happened naturally and gradually just by the mere presence of the café.

Local vendors know us well. For instance, our kitchen manager, Mahoko, has established friendships at a local roaster where she buys our delicious coffee beans, the bakery where she buys bread for our original panini sandwiches, and with the “Uber Eats” bicycle delivery personnel who deliver food, drinks, and desserts to online customers.

By being members of the local Happy Road Association (商店街), we take part in seasonal promotions, and relationships have deepened. They have used the café to air Happy Road TV programs at Christmas with Mahoko and missionaries being included in the panel of stars. Every December, we take

“No one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light.”

— Luke 8:16 NASB —

part in their Christmas campaign with SonRise Singers being invited to sing Christmas carols on Happy Road.

SonRise is also a hub for ministry. Japanese Christian performers take part in Friday Night Live concerts and Japanese Christians join missionaries in outreach to the homeless of the Ikebukuro community. Discipleship classes and one-on-one Bible studies take place during café hours, and group Bible studies after hours. We’ve hosted English classes and monthly workshops (including crafting, cooking, music, and English café). All of these events have connected us with dozens in our community.

SonRise Church was launched out of the café and is held on Sunday mornings when the café is closed. The relaxed atmosphere of the café matches our style of worship. This has attracted many who were first introduced to the message of Christ or the concept of church while living overseas.

I wonder what “lampstand” God may be calling you to create as a place for Jesus to shine and connect with the lost in your community. “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24 ESV). **JH**

Café photos supplied by author
“Heart made of coffee beans” photo by Flickr user Marco Verch

Kelly Baughn and her husband Steve have been church planting missionaries in Japan with TEAM for 23 years. The current SonRise Team also includes Steven and Kyehee Taylor, David McClanahan, Noriko Snow, and Jeff and Kelly Pagaragan.



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Pearls and the people of God

Brokenness that leads to grace and beauty

By Roger W. Lowther

Of all the gems, minerals, and precious metals of the world, nothing compares with the iridescent glow of Akoya pearls. With no cutting, chipping, or polishing needed to bring out its natural beauty, these perfectly shaped spheres (真珠) are incredibly valuable. Thomas Edison once described cultured pearls as an apparent “biological impossibility.”¹

Pearls embody an important part of Japanese history and culture. Revered as the “Pearl King” Kōkichi Mikimoto (1858–1954) almost single-handedly created the cultured pearl industry, at one point producing 75% of the world’s pearls. His pearls supplied the high-end jewelry market with necklaces and earrings, bringing great fame. His flagship store and name-sake Mikimoto is in Ginza, just a short jog from where I live. Soon after his discovery, others copied his techniques, and freshwater Biwa pearls farmed in Lake Biwa became nearly synonymous with freshwater pearls worldwide.

Pearls have an important place both in Japan and the Bible. Let’s consider this beautiful creation and the rich metaphors that have been created around it.

Beauty from brokenness

The birth of pearls is truly a miraculous event, as I learned from the museum and staff at Mikimoto Pearl Island in Toba, Mie Prefecture. Pearls form from brokenness. When something—a piece of sand, shell, bacteria, or parasite—damages cells in the mantle, the oyster responds by coating it with protective layers. In cultured pearls, this irritant is surgically inserted into the weakest, most fragile area of the oyster (its gonads) along with a small piece of mantle from another oyster that must be sacrificed in the process. Over two years, thousands of fine layers of nacre, made of organic and inorganic elements, create a shiny translucent ball lighter and stronger than concrete.

Damaged oysters create these objects of great beauty and worth. It’s fascinating, then, that

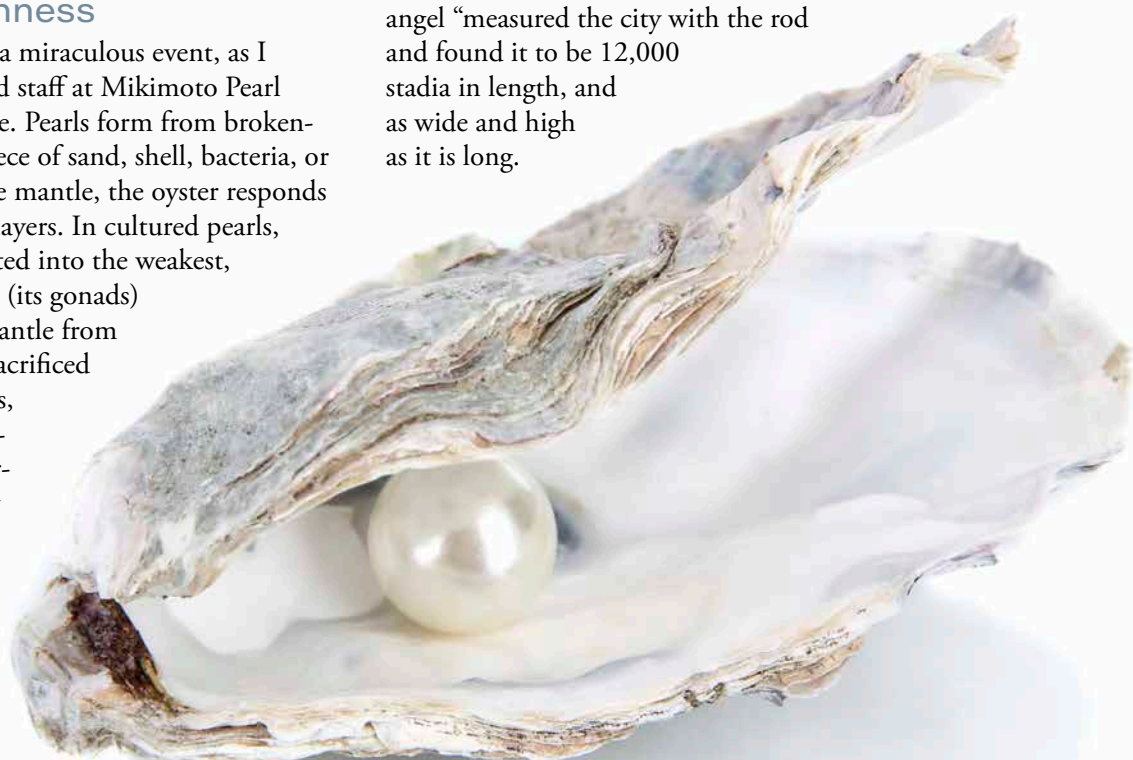
pearls—formed from brokenness and suffering—symbolize the perfection of the kingdom of heaven, for no one can enter its celestial city without first walking through its “pearly gates” (Rev. 21:21).

Pearls and the heavenly city

What if God created oysters to perpetually re-enact the gospel story? What if all pearls point to Jesus, the true oyster sacrificed that we may be changed from objects of wrath into objects of mercy (Romans 9:22–24)? Jesus was cut so that we may be washed in his blood and coated with layer after layer of God’s grace. The suffering of the Lamb created a gateway for us to enter the kingdom of heaven, which cannot be entered without accepting the message of brokenness. Through the metaphor in pearls, we can see God’s people displayed and glorified in weakness while covered in the beauty of God living eternally in heaven.

There are other pointers to the gospel surrounding the heavenly city. Consider the foundations decorated with 12 gemstones. When dug from the ground, they are nothing but plain dull rocks. Only through careful cutting, grinding, and polishing in the hands of an artist can these precious stones sparkle with gloriously rich colors. God delights in his handiwork by crafting beautiful gems out of broken pieces.

Like the 12 gates and 12 gemstones, the people of God can be considered to be represented by the number 12 in the measurements of the walls of heaven. The angel “measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.



The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick” (Rev. 21:16–17).

We, the people of God, are represented in the gates, foundations, and walls of heaven. We are the Holy City, the bride of Christ, eternally pointing to and displaying the glory of God through the gospel of Christ: “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God” (Rev. 21:9–11 NIV).

Through the pearly gates and the city of heaven, we see the final product of the gospel powerfully at work in our lives and a small glimpse of our beauty and worth in the eyes of God.

Pearls point us to Christ

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:45–46). Dare we imagine that we could be the pearl of great price? Is it possible that Christ gave up everything he had to purchase us? Can we imagine that pain and suffering ultimately points to the building blocks of heaven itself? “With your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

The pearls of heaven were purchased by the very own blood of the Merchant. The crowning beauty of heaven can be found in the Lamb who was slain, on the glorious throne of God. Rainbow light envelops this throne, bending and breaking the white light into all the colors of the rainbow (Rev. 4:3). The iridescence of the pearls also creates a rainbow effect, and is yet one more reflection of the Lamb’s broken beauty!

The more we recognize our own brokenness and the mercy God graciously surrounds us with, the more richly we can worship Christ and engage those who are broken and suffering in this world. Pearls not only give a picture of how this world will one day be redeemed into a thing of great beauty, but how we are more cherished in the eyes of God than we could possibly hope or imagine. Pearls, are perhaps the best metaphor for the bride of Christ and the people of God. **JH**

1. Recounting a conversation between Thomas Edison and Kōkichi Mikimoto: <https://www.karipearls.com/letter-from-thomas-edison-to-mikimoto-at-pearl-island.html> Accessed May 29, 2019.

Images supplied by author

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Why are Japanese people so honest?

You're far more likely to recover a lost wallet in Japan than in many other countries

I remember feeling completely stumped. During dinner with some colleagues, the conversation turned to how much more likely it was to recover a lost wallet (with money and credit cards intact) in Japan than in Western countries. Someone turned to me and asked, "Why do you think that is?"

I knew it wasn't because of a strong Judeo-Christian influence. Nor did it seem to be a particularly Asian trait, since there are many Asian countries where you'd be far less likely to see your wallet again. But I couldn't think of any convincing reasons for Japanese people's honesty. Interestingly, even the Japanese people present didn't have ready answers.

To investigate further, I asked eight Japanese teachers during some free-talk Japanese lessons on CafeTalk.com. All except one were either living overseas when I spoke to them or had lived overseas in the recent past. One teacher had become a Catholic as an adult, while all the others seemed to have had no significant Christian influence in their lives.

Without hesitation, all the teachers said that if they found a wallet they would return it immediately to the owner or hand it in to staff, the lost property office, or the nearest police box. They all said they would do that even if no one was looking (for example, if they found the wallet in a toilet cubicle). For all of them, it seemed like a natural and automatic response; I got no sense that they had to wrestle with their consciences.

While the teachers mentioned various motivations for returning the lost wallet, there seemed to be three main factors: the sense of shame they would feel if they got caught; sympathy for the person who had lost the wallet; and a karmic-like expectation of something bad happening to them if they took the wallet.

Shame

Almost all of the teachers mentioned that a big deterrent was the shame they would experience if they were caught taking the money. Since childhood their parents and teachers had taught them that returning a lost item is what everyone would do and that it was the right thing to do. This shows they feel a strong obligation to conform to social norms even when no one is watching. One teacher mentioned that the shame would not just be theirs alone, but that their greed would reflect badly on their parents, which differs from the Western viewpoint of just the perpetrator of a crime bearing the shame.

One teacher said that due to the strong desire to avoid getting caught up in the affairs of others, many Japanese people wouldn't even peek inside the wallet before hand-

ing it in. And some Japanese would even turn down their right to receive the money if it wasn't claimed within three months.

Sympathy

Understandably, many teachers said that a large motivation for handing in the wallet was sympathy for the person who had lost it. But while this featured prominently in the reasons given, it didn't come across as the top one.

Bad karma

For me, the most intriguing reason given was that the teachers felt like a god was watching and that if they did something like taking some of the money when no-one was looking, they would be punished by him later.

This belief is expressed in the proverb "The sun god is watching" (*Otentō-sama ga miteru*). This almost karmic belief came as a surprise to me, as I hadn't encountered it before, but most of the teachers mentioned it as a compelling reason for not taking the money. They had been taught this belief as children but seemed not to have outgrown it as adults (unlike Western children's belief in Father Christmas or the tooth fairy). While the god they spoke of was more like a karmic Buddhist deity than the Christian God, it's hard not to see it as a witness that God has left to himself in the collective consciousness of Japanese people.

Concluding thoughts

Insights such as these might not seem to be immediately relevant to your ministry, but they can be valuable for gaining a deeper understanding of how Japanese people react in different situations and the cultural values that guide their behaviour. That's important because to minister effectively to Japanese people we need to understand how they think.

Finally, the realization that you don't understand what was going on in some situation you have encountered personally or have heard about can be great opportunity to discover more. Look out for interactions or behaviours that don't make sense to you and then ask others, particularly those who have been in Japan longer than you and Japanese people (both Christians and non-Christians). **JH**

Photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wallet_on_ground.jpg



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Three tips for using social media for evangelism

Ways to easily share the good news in Japanese

A simple web search in English for sermons or devotionals can bring up over 50 million results. However, Japanese speakers have much less access to gospel content in their heart language. There is some great material out there in Japanese, but not many are sharing it. Also consider that many of the results of such a search in Japanese may not be evangelical, and it is easy to see how a Japanese person could be confused about the claims of Christianity.

Japan needs a unified voice of evangelical brothers and sisters in Christ sharing their stories and the compelling truths of the Bible on as many platforms as possible. Social media platforms recommend materials to users, not just based on what they like, but also on what is trending nearby. Wouldn't it be wonderful for the gospel to be trending in Japan? We have a wonderful true story to share, and YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LINE, and other social media platforms can help us.

Here are some tips for using social media so that you can be a part of helping the gospel spread among the Japanese.

A call to create

In a previous article (Winter 2018), we talked about broadcasting your outreach or service live online for the world to see. This is a wonderful start, and it will also be recorded for future seekers to view. But to begin building momentum and a social footprint in your community, you need to post regularly and across several platforms.

Consider using hashtags to begin connecting your work to others so that networks of truth begin to form. The more people that tag their testimonies and gospel seeds with the same hashtag, the easier it will be for others to search for that and hear the good news. The hashtag #impactjapan is one that's being used by gospel workers in Japan; #wave4Jesus and #seishonokotoba are two others—perhaps you know of others or want to start one of your own in your circle of influence.

A simple start may be to share a daily Bible verse on your ministry's Twitter account or your weekly Bible study could share a few nuggets of truth from the most recent meeting on their Instagram accounts and hashtag it. Another step could be using a common hashtag with your church members so that they can be involved in promoting the work to their networks of friends and family easily.

A call to curate

The call to curate is a call to engage with the content of other believers regularly and to share it with others. Seek out biblical truths in the Japanese language on social



media platforms and regularly like or upvote those materials, and in turn, share to your networks. Subscribe to YouTube channels that are sharing truth and take time to give a thumbs up. There is quality biblical content out there. A simple click can encourage those who are regularly creating content and sharing truth online. Take a few seconds to simply like and share quality materials. It's important, though, to make sure we know what we're posting before we share. Thus, sharing content from sources you trust can help if you don't have sufficient language to check, or the time to listen to a whole video. Interacting with content helps build momentum and means those materials are more likely to be recommended to others.

A call to saturate

The call to saturate is to post your content on as many platforms as possible. There are some great tools that can help you take your current social media ministry to the next level by automatically posting it on several platforms at once. One of the best free tools around is If This Then That (IFTTT). Signing up is simple, and you then connect to different channels you would like to be posting through. Connect your Twitter account and set up an IFTTT to Instagram. Instant double post. Facebook, Wordpress, Blogger, LINE, and many others have connectors on IFTTT. The call to saturate is a call to be regularly broadcasting the good news on as many platforms as you are able. Buffer.com and Hootsuite.com are similar tools that can help you saturate the internet for eternal purposes.

Using these tips, you can take your current social media usage to the next level and can also be a part of helping your brothers and sisters in Christ. 卍

Places to get started finding quality evangelical media in Japanese for sharing:

- Testimony videos: <https://movingworks.org/japanese/>
- On Facebook search for @7MEDIAORG, @OneHopeJapan, and @SeishonoKotoba.
- Lauren Horii (contemporary worship): <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNI013q6NJJGZd4wtZpfSSA>



Jared Jones has been serving and equipping the church in Japan since 2009. He looks for new ways to use technology and social media to spread the Good News. He and his wife Tara have six children and live in Takasaki, Gunma.

Managing stress naturally

Boosting your serotonin levels can help with stress

Ministry and personal demands sometimes seem never ending. Life leaves us drained, tired, and stressed. But God has created our bodies to produce natural hormones, such as serotonin. Serotonin, or the “happy hormone,” is a chemical in our brain that helps us stay balanced physically and emotionally.¹ Here, I consider things that reduce our serotonin levels and things that help to naturally enhance them.

The following deplete our serotonin:

- **Stress.** Stress can mean different things to different people. Any activity—even simply meeting someone new or falling in love—causes adrenaline, or the “emergency hormone,” to flow. Adrenaline keeps us on high alert, lowering our serotonin.
- **Cortisone.** Exciting and pleasure-seeking activities produce large amounts of cortisone, the “stress hormone.” Even seemingly benign activities, such as video gaming and riding a roller coaster can generate cortisone. Cortisone lowers serotonin, making us “unhappy, anxious, and less calm.”²
- **Passivity.** Under-assertiveness or a tendency to “grin and bear it” causes hostility and frustration, leading to high levels of stress. Christians particularly struggle with assertiveness because they fear they will be perceived as being selfish or aggressive.
- **Lack of sleep.** Insufficient sleep is a chronic problem in life, especially for those in ministry. “One of the challenges of ministry is that . . . we need to be with people when people are free to be with us. That may mean evenings and weekends. So it’s not easy to be in full control of our sleep patterns.”³

Here are some helpful hints to build up your serotonin:

- **Set boundaries.** Set boundaries between your ministry and the rest of your life. “Our body needs to ‘be told’ when there is an emergency and when there isn’t one. Therefore, be clear in your mind whether you are working or relaxing.”⁴
- **Avoid excess adrenaline.** Avoid generating too much adrenaline even for hobbies. “Too much adrenaline will kill you in the long run because . . . [adrenaline] is the high-octane gasoline or petrol of your body . . . high-octane engines don’t last very long. They are designed for short bursts of high speed and then they must be replaced.”⁵
- **Be assertive.** Exercise appropriate assertiveness.⁶ A rule of thumb for assertiveness is that if it brings healing rather than offense, you are being “correctly” assertive.
- **Get sufficient sleep.** Sleep is one of the most important ways we can fight the damaging effects of stress.



It not only produces more serotonin, but also “is a powerful stress reducer, . . . [It] calms and restores the body, improves concentration, regulates mood, and sharpens judgment and decision-making.”⁷

- **Take a walk in the sunshine.** We get vitamin D from exposing our skin to the sun, and vitamin D boosts serotonin levels. Physical exercise not only increases our serotonin, it also releases the other “happy” chemicals, dopamine and endorphins.⁸

When you need emotional help, it’s not wrong to go check with a health professional. But you can help manage your emotions by increasing your serotonin naturally. These steps will not just help you do better emotionally by increasing serotonin, they will also help you stay physically and spiritually healthy. **JH**

1. BrainMD Life, “4 Ways to Boost Your Serotonin,” November 1, 2016, www.brainmdhealth.com/blog/4-ways-to-boost-your-serotonin/
2. Brady Salcido, “Top 5 Strategies to Hack Your Happy Brain Chemicals,” March 12, 2018, <https://medium.com/@drbradysalcido/top-5-strategies-to-hack-your-happy-brain-chemicals-36473dd4b982>
3. Christopher Ash, “Pastoral Ministry and the Struggle to Sleep,” March 14, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pastoral-ministry-and-the-struggle-to-sleep/>
4. Quote from an excerpt from Archibald Hart, *The Anxiety Cure: You Can Find Emotional Tranquility and Wholeness* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999), <https://www.crosswalk.com/newsletters-only/live-it/manage-stress-so-it-doesnt-manage-you-859156.html>
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. “How to Rest Your Way to Less Stress,” accessed May 30, 2019, www.sleep-score.com/how-to-rest-your-way-to-less-stress/
8. Salcido, “5 Strategies.”



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Beware the curse of knowledge

I recently read some tips for writers by Steven Pinker, Harvard linguist and author of several bestsellers.¹ Number five was “Beware of the curse of knowledge.” For example, the word “*genkan*” is standard vocabulary in our family. But it’s nonsense to anyone who hasn’t lived in Japan. It’s hard to write about life on the mission field for people who’ve never experienced it.

Keep your audience in mind

One way to combat this is to keep your audience in mind constantly as you write. That is the reason why we periodically do surveys of our *Japan Harvest* audience. We want to know who our readers are and what their needs and preferences are so that we can refine articles accordingly.

Use examples and stories

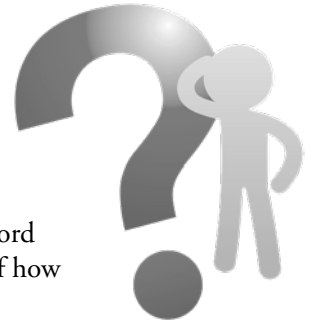
Pinker also advises us to “minimise acronyms and technical terms. Use ‘for example’ liberally. Show a draft around and prepare to learn that what’s obvious to you may not be obvious to anyone else.”²

The curse of knowledge plagues my teenagers as they’ve tried to explain a game to me. It’s often far more helpful if they show me an example of what they’re talking about.

Stories are also helpful. For example, FedEx has a story about one of their New York drivers whose delivery truck broke down and the replacement van didn’t arrive. She delivered some packages on foot but then persuaded a competitor to help her deliver the rest. FedEx uses this to help their employees understand the drive behind their guarantee that packages will arrive overnight.³

Use tangible language

An example from my own work would be trying to explain my work as a magazine editor. If I say, “I try to make people’s work shine,” it doesn’t give much clarity. If I say, “I will work to make sure the author’s words say what they want them to say,” that’s a bit clearer. If I go further and say, “I try to read it through first to get an idea of the big picture, its tone, and how it holds together; then I go more in depth, looking at structure and word choice,” that gives a clearer idea of how I edit an article.



It’s hard to imagine not knowing something, so writing about a subject you know a lot about is challenging. To avoid confusing your audience, use examples and tangible language. **JH**

1. Jessica Stillman, “A Harvard Linguist’s (and Bill Gates’s Favorite Author) 13 Simple Tips for Becoming a Great Writer,”

7 June 2019, <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/a-harvard-linguists-13-simple-tips-for-becoming-a-great-writer.html>

2. Ibid.

3. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick* (London: Penguin Random House, 2007), 257.

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The Vine Project: Shaping Your Ministry Culture around Disciple-Making

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne (Matthias Media, 2016). 355 pp.

Marshall and Payne, both from Australia, have teamed up to write one of the best books I have read on ministry. They show how to shape the whole culture of a church in the direction of disciple-making. The book builds on their 2009 work, *The Trellis and the Vine*, and gives a refined presentation of the ministry principles introduced there.

The process for change they introduce has five phases. First, we must sharpen our convictions to clarify what we



believe about disciple-making and ministry. This phase helps a ministry team think biblically about—why to make disciples, what a disciple is, how disciples are made, who makes disciples, and where to make disciples. The second phase is reforming our personal culture and making sure that we are demonstrating our convictions by how we live and minister to others. The third phase is loving, honest evaluation. This means

we examine everything that happens in our church to see how well it reflects our convictions. Phase four is implementing and planning new pathways for making disciples. Maintaining momentum is the last phase where we review and look at obstacles and how to overcome them.

Each chapter ends with discussion questions and there are application projects. This practical book will benefit every missionary team who works through it and puts into practice the wisdom that Marshall and Payne have so clearly and compellingly expressed. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Discipling in a Multicultural World

Ajith Fernando (Crossway, 2019). 284 pp.

Fernando, Youth for Christ's teaching director in Sri Lanka, gives us the fruit of 40 years of faithful discipleship ministry. Rather than offering a "how-to" manual, he gives biblical principles on discipling and shows how they apply in daily life and ministry. He presents discipling as a kind of parenting—something that is messy and inconvenient. Leaders must show that investing in others is a key aspect of ministry. Working in a largely Buddhist context, Fernando explains that we need to help new converts from

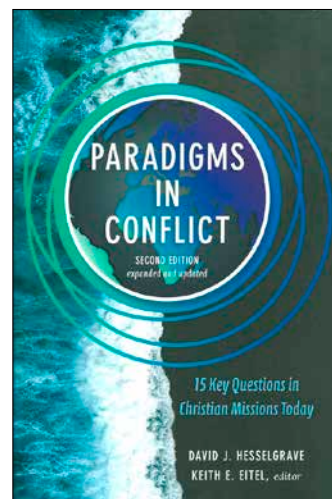
non-Christian backgrounds honor their families. He has an excellent chapter on preparing new believers for suffering and persecution. He encourages us to be patient with those we disciple. The last chapter on healing for wounds is a wise reminder that helping new believers grow and be fruitful involves being agents of healing. Every missionary will find much profit in this excellent work. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Paradigms in Conflict: 15 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today

David J. Hesselgrave and Keith E. Eitel, editor (Kregel, 2018). 378 pp.

This expanded and updated edition of Hesselgrave's 2005 work helps missionaries to think wisely as they face



complicated questions. Six missiologists have contributed short reflections on the issues Hesselgrave addressed in the first edition and they add another five issues that are now influencing missions. There was not much new material in the original chapters, but several of the updates are incisive, especially the ones by Christopher Little on holism, prioritism, and incarnationalism. Little's new chapter, "Is Creation

Care Mission?," is also worth careful study. This edition was published just after Hesselgrave's death in 2018 and is a trustworthy guide for missionaries working through difficult issues. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 4 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.

The purpose of prayer

Prayer is about spending time with God so that our minds are changed to be more like His

For the last couple of decades, I have preached on the cross of Christ every Sunday in March and then on His resurrection every Sunday in April. As I've looked at the events surrounding His death, I've been overwhelmed by His prayer in Gethsemane, which is recorded in Matthew 26:36–46, as well as in Mark and Luke. It's amazing that each of the synoptic gospels records this, since the disciples were asleep! How did they know what Jesus said? Because God really wanted us to know.

The setting

The Garden of Gethsemane (which means “oil press”) was on the side of the Mount of Olives, a half mile from Jerusalem on the way to Bethany. According to Matthew, Jesus told eight of His disciples to sit at the Garden entrance. He then took His inner three—Peter, James, and John—and went in. He asked them to stay awake and be alert and pray, while He went on further, “a stone’s throw” away (Luke 22:41 NASB). Then He began to pray—in grief and sorrow.

Jesus' teaching about prayer

Jesus had taught His disciples about prayer before (Matt. 6:5–13). It was not to be done for show nor with meaningless repetition. Prayer is done knowing that God already knows our needs. He then gave them (and us) a sample prayer (vv. 9–13). He taught us to pray to the Father, to end with “Amen,” and to make it a “praise sandwich.”

He also taught us to pray in His name (John 16:24). In John 17, Jesus was praying directly to God for others. But in Matthew 26, Jesus was praying for Himself. So, in a sense, this is our model for how we should normally pray.

The model prayer (Matt. 26:38b–44)

This prayer is quite different from most of our prayers. Yes, He did ask God for something; three times He asked for the “cup” to pass from Him (vv. 39, 42, 44). This cup was God’s plan for Jesus to suffer and die, taking all the sins of the world. As such, He would be separated from God (Matt. 27:46). Jesus was honest; He told God He didn’t want it to happen. There was a struggle in His soul—as a man on earth. Usually, our prayers would end there; we stop at asking for things. But Jesus went on. He added, “yet not as I will, but as You will” (v. 39), not just once, but all three times. He entrusted the results to God.

You see, the purpose of prayer is not to try to get God to change His mind. It’s really the opposite. Praying should be our spending time with God so that our minds are changed to His. That’s why this prayer is our model—Jesus

“**God doesn’t answer prayer because we pray persistently. We pray persistently because God answers prayer.”**

— Warren Wiersbe —



prayed until He was totally ready to do God’s will.

It was painful, of course. Luke 22:44 says that He prayed so hard, blood came out with His sweat! But after that, He was ready (Matt. 26:46).

How do we pray?

Are we selfish, only praying for ourselves—for health, happiness, etc.? That’s treating God as a servant. If we are really serious about prayer, we must be willing to give up what we want. We must be willing to allow God to change us.

We can do nothing to save ourselves, and the same is true after salvation. We must allow God to change our minds, our thoughts, and our desires. That comes from spending time with Him, meditating on His Word, seeing Him for who He is. Only when our hearts are changed can He give us what we want. That’s because we will have come to want what He wants (Psalm 37:4).

Prayer changes us

What does prayer do? As we pray, it changes the situation. It changes other people. But there is one more thing that it does—prayer changes us. I was “supposed” to be an architect—that’s what I studied to become. I prayed God would make me a good one. Then He gave me a burden for Kochi. I prayed He would send someone to Kochi as a missionary. And I became the answer to my prayers! By praying, God changed my heart to accept His will: to become a missionary to Kochi.

Prayer is not commanding God, telling Him what to do. Yes, it’s fine to be honest with God, telling Him what we are thinking and feeling, even what we want. But we must allow God to change us through prayer. The more time we spend with Him, the more He changes us. That is how it was with Jesus. **JH**



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

The priority of proactive church planting

Refocusing on church planting leads to significant growth

“Church planting is the most effective means of evangelism under the sun.” I first heard this statement 25 years ago at the inaugural JEMA Church Planting Institute (CPI). Is this true? If so, how should this affect our ministry and budget priorities in Japan?

Operation World lists Japan as the only large nation in Asia with a current decline in the percentage of evangelicals. One reason for this statistic seems to be that fewer missionaries and Japanese Christian workers are planting churches. Youth ministry, publishing, seminaries, and other ministries are, of course, important, but we need a return to the biblical priority of church planting. The fact that there are both indigenous and missionary church planting networks in Japan seeing consistent, healthy growth should encourage us to prioritize church planting.

Church planting is biblical

The biblical priority of evangelism and church planting for kingdom expansion is seen in Acts with the Christians going to new places proclaiming the gospel, baptizing, and starting churches. “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4-5 NIV). And the result of this was that “the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria . . . was strengthened . . . and grew in numbers” (Acts 9:31).

Tim Keller has written that church planting is both biblical and effective today for kingdom growth worldwide.¹ He shows why church planting leads to more conversions and growth, and how proactive church planting is actually the best way to help revitalize the existing church. For example, Keller teaches that older congregations generally have pressure to focus on their own needs rather than on reaching the lost. Church plants have less of this internal pressure and can focus on new, creative ways to reach non-Christians that are often difficult in an established church.²

Examples of growth in Japan

Today, even in Japan, we are seeing significant kingdom expansion through intentional Church Planting Multiplication (CPM) efforts. My research with multiple church planting network leaders in Japan shows that networks intentionally focused on CPM generally see steady kingdom growth in contrast to the overall 0.4% decline in evangelicals for the rest of Japan.³ Rev. Yoshia Hari of the Japan Church Multiplication Vision Festa has stated this in discussions I’ve had with him. John Mehn, CPI leader, gives examples of kingdom progress in his book *Multiplying Churches in Japanese Soil*.

An example of growth through CPM is Grace City Church Tokyo (GCCT)⁴ and their Grace Church Planting Network (GCPN).⁵ GCCT was the first Tokyo church

plant connected to Keller’s Redeemer City to City Church Planting Network.⁶ In 2010, after several years of leader selection, training, and evangelism, Makoto Fukuda and his team of Japanese and missionaries began worship in Tokyo’s city center with about 30 worshipers. By God’s grace, the GCPN was born and has grown to seven church plants with over 450 worshipers as of December 2018.

The Mustard Seed Church Planting Network in Nagoya and Kansai has seen similar growth through church planting since the launch of their first church plant in 2009. They are now planning to send out teams to plant in Yokohama, Chiba, and Tokyo.

What can we learn?

Common themes with other growing networks include outward-focused missional DNA, effective leadership development, zealous and biblically contextualized evangelism, and proactive intentionality.

These networks have struggles and weaknesses, but there are principles they are using that we can learn from. Granted, these examples have been graced by God with gifted leaders, significant resources, and are in large cities where there is often more fruit. But we also see the same church planting principles working effectively throughout Japan in the suburbs and countryside. There are many concrete examples of the kingdom expansion through intentional CPM throughout Japan.⁷

It is exciting that we are seeing a common thread of principles and progress that transcends denominations and mission groups, and includes both Japanese and missionary church planting. Let’s study these together at the CPI National Conference this November, as more than 500 of us gather to worship, learn, and pray for Japan.

Church planting is difficult, but it is good stewardship of our kingdom resources. May the Lord bless the Japanese church and our Japan mission groups with the Holy Spirit’s power for a church planting multiplication movement throughout this land. **JH**

1. Tim Keller, Center Church: *Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), Chapter 29. This must-read book will be out in Japanese in 2020.
2. Ibid, pp 359-361.
3. <http://www.operationworld.org/country/japa/owtext.html>
4. www.gracecitychurch.jp
5. www.gracecpnetwork.com
6. www.redeemercitytocity.com
7. For other examples from across Japan of significant kingdom growth through proactive church planting see John Mehn, *Multiplying Churches in Japanese Soil*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017), 77, 87-88, 105, and 113.

Dan Iverson and his wife Carol (US) planted Oyumino Church in Chiba in 1992. They retired from the now three-site church in 2018 and Dan currently serves as MTW Japan Director. They have 9 children and 27 grandchildren.

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