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Japan Harvest
Spring 2020

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THE
SCENES**

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May 11, 2020
Mustard Seed Christian Church Osaka



Kanto Prayer Summit

May 12-15, 2020
Okutama Bible Chalet, Ome, Tokyo



Kansai Prayer Summit

May 25-28, 2020
Nosegawa Bible Camp, Kawanishi, Hyogo-ken



August

Karuizawa Union Church Summer Conference

August 7-12, 2020
Karuizawa Union Church

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

jema.org

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



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BEHIND THE SCENES

This issue's topic is close to the heart of our *Japan Harvest* team. After all, it's our "behind the scenes" work that gets this magazine into your hands!

Late last year in Ikebukuro, my husband and I met a couple from one of our supporting churches in Australia. They were in Japan for a family holiday. One thing we learned from them was that their church finds it hard to understand my role as a missionary in Japan as an editor, writer, and social media manager. They want me to tell them stories of my work in evangelism or Bible studies, as if those are the only important things that I do.

I'm frustrated. Both my husband and I have primarily worked in support ministry for most of our nearly two decades in Japan. When we're in Australia, we work hard to explain what we do and why we do it. When we're in Japan, we fill our prayer letters with information about why our ministries are important to the overall goal of reaching Japan for Christ. But it's a hard message to convey.

I wrote about this on my blog recently and a number of people commented.¹ It's clear we're not the only ones who struggle in this way. Our mission's workers in our home countries have an even harder job of convincing people that their jobs of mobilization and supporting missionaries are legitimate.

One of my good friends was an Australian army chaplain. He tells me that the ratio of support staff to frontline soldiers in the US is fifteen to one; in Australia it's eight to one (facilitated by civilian contracts). Without significant support, the whole enterprise collapses. The comparison to mission work is clear: churches send missionaries into spiritual warfare. Mission needs people in support roles.

Another friend gave this example: "I watched an Andre Rieu Christmas special on TV last month [an entertainer who tours worldwide]. It was spectacular! The musicians were great, the singers top notch, and the costumes beautiful. But it would have been just 'very good' without the lighting technicians, and nonexistent without the roadies. To all you 'backstage' missionaries, 'You are the wind beneath their wings!'" So, with this issue we want to shine a light on the work that goes on behind the scenes that keeps the "whole enterprise" running.

A couple of years ago, "A Life Overseas" website published an excellent article, "In Defense of Second-Class Missionaries."² It helps readers imagine what a large church in our home countries might look like with only people in the sorts of roles that are considered A-list missionary jobs (church planters and evangelists). In a slightly tongue-in-cheek style, it outlines the missionary "class system" with A-list, B-list, and C-list jobs.

It shocks us to see that unspoken classification system written in black and white. But those of us who don't work in "A-list" roles are starkly aware of this thinking, and it can mean that we undervalue what we do. The article quotes a cross-cultural worker: "Yeah, I'm a missionary, but not a 'real' missionary. I live in a city and spend a lot of my time at a computer."³ A valued missionary colleague of mine commented, "I don't even make the C-list. Sigh. And I burned out trying to do church ministry instead of what I am gifted and called to do."

Missionaries in these sorts of positions find themselves emphasizing the "acceptable" work they do, even if it's not a major part of their work. For example, on our last home assignment, it seemed more acceptable for me to talk about my once-a-month Bible study with two ladies than the daily work I do at my computer for this magazine.

It's my heart's desire that this Spring issue will be a great encouragement to those whom God has gifted and called to work in support ministry. That, even though it isn't easy for some to see how the work they do contributes to reaching Japan for Christ, their colleagues value what they do.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

1. "Why are these stereotypes of missionaries so hard to change?," on the edge of ordinary, <https://mmuser.blogspot.com/2020/01/why-are-these-stereotypes-of.html> January 10, 2020.
2. "In Defense of Second-Class Missionaries," A life overseas: a cross-cultural conversation, <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/in-defense-of-second-class-missionaries/> April 4, 2017.
3. Ibid.

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Summer 2020: Ministering through Education

Autumn 2020: Strength in Weakness
(submission deadline May 30)

Winter 2021: Challenging Issues (submission
deadline August 30)

Spring 2021: Pastoral Care (submission
deadline November 30)

Japanese drama Bible app

Christian Shimbun, October 27, 2019

Translated by Grace Koshino

The *Japanese Drama Bible* is a free app in which the whole Bible is performed in the style of a radio drama. Over 150 actors portrayed the more than 1,300 characters in the Bible. It was widely discussed even before its official release; when the app was released in trial format on September 30, it was downloaded over 4,000 times. [It was officially released on Nov. 18, 2019.]

Before the official release, the *Christian Shimbun* spoke to B.J. Moon (President of the Grace & Mercy Foundation Japan) and Masako Uchino (Content Development Consultant).



How it all began

Moon explained how the project to create the *Drama Bible* app in Japanese came about. The project first took root in the US at the Grace & Mercy Foundation that was founded by Bill Hwang (a famous billionaire). Hwang is a Korean American whose parents are both pastors. Some time ago he began feeling an agonizing conflict between his faith and his billionaire status. One day, as he was listening to the radio in the car, he heard *The Word of Promise*, a dramatic retelling of the Bible produced in Hollywood. Something gripped his heart and gave him confidence. It was then that he made a decision before God to “help others . . . through the Word of God, and to use my financial assets for the Lord.”

As a Christian he knew the Bible, but admitted to being unable to read it regularly or to take its words to heart. He thought that there must be other Christians like himself who struggled with reading the Bible and he won-

dered, *What if there was a Bible that everyone could listen to?* This is how he came to establish the Grace & Mercy Foundation in the US ten years ago. Three years later the Foundation was also established in Korea and the *Korean Drama Bible* was released.

Initially there were plans to release a Chinese version of the *Drama Bible*, but three years ago, while visiting Japan, Hwang contacted Moon who was then pastor of the Tokyo Onnuri Christ Church. Through conversations with Moon, he learned that less than one percent of the Japanese population was Christian. He was shocked to learn that, despite Japan being a developed country, the spread of the gospel was very slow. Hwang decided to go ahead with the Japanese version of the *Drama Bible* first. Two years ago, the Grace & Mercy Foundation Japan was established.

Production of the Japanese version

As the project took off in Japan, a production team was formed. Uchino, the associate pastor at Onnuri Church, played a large role in development. Hiroshi Kawabata, a non-Christian

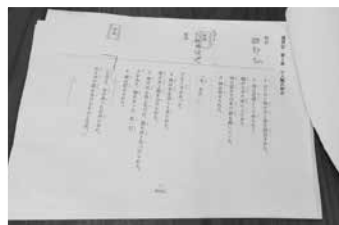
who had 40 years of experience as a producer for TV Tokyo was brought in as the director.

Both Christian and non-Christian professionals took part in the project. During production, it was necessary to provide guidance and advice to the non-Christian staff. Uchino explained the characteristics of each of the roles to the actors, as well as providing biblical and historical background, and geographical information. She prayed for each actor before recording.

“A lot of the actors did thorough research. Some even drew a family tree for the part they were going to act, or listened to sermons online,” Uchino recalled. “It is easy for one to disapprove and say, ‘it is being read by a non-believer,’ but it is my hope that the actors’ voices touch people’s hearts.”

The sound effects also play a large part in bringing the Bible to life. Kawabata also recruited a non-Christian sound technician. He used sounds that perfectly fit each scene and situation.

The app has already received positive feedback, and has inspired increased outreach from Christian groups to blind communities. Moon would like to see people gather just like they did in the early church to read and listen to Scripture together. ■



Recording took place from April 2018 till June 2019. To the left is part of the script for Genesis.



uest News

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, Your God reigns!"

Mission in Japan: from and to the world International churches gather again for worship

Christian Shimbum, November 17, 2019

Translated by Hiromi Kiuchi

With a goal of building networks between international churches across Japan, Ethnic Ministries Network Japan hosted their second joint worship event, a Thanksgiving Celebration, on November 4, 2019. The gathering took place at the Senkyo Church in Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, where the first gathering was launched the year before.

A team of Chinese, Brazilian, and Japanese musicians specially organized for this event led the worshippers with energetic music. The guest speaker was Takahito Iwagami, the General Secretary of the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA). Iwagami encouraged those gathered to attend the 7th Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE) scheduled for 2023. Attendees responded positively.

"At the 6th JCE, my perspective shifted from 'our worship' to 'God's worship,'" one attendee remarked. "I anticipate it will be broadened even more at the seventh congress."

Another commented: "Ministry in Japan will not happen without the participation of international believers." It is estimated there are as many international Christians living in Japan as Japanese Christians.

Iwagami preached from Acts 2:4-8, referring to Jesus' call for us to become witnesses to the ends of the earth. "This is to be done with the power of the Holy Spirit, which is different from our own strength," he reminded

the attendees. "The power of the Holy Spirit transforms us so that we can be a witness for Jesus. A witness for Jesus shares about Jesus' suffering, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. We go to worship weekly to receive his grace." Iwagami shared with the worshippers that Jesus lives within his witnesses. "God does not expect only powerful preachers and skillful ministers to work for him. He expects each of us to be his witnesses."

Here are some stories from various international church networks that were shared during the event:

Through discipleship and evangelism, Japan Chinese Christian Center (JCCC) serves through mission work in Japan and around the world. Last year this organization held nine conferences on Bible study and discipleship programs. They have also recently participated in disaster relief programs. JCCC aims to raise 800 Bible study leaders, 400 church-led Bible studies, and 200 missionaries.

The Japan Council of Philippine Churches reported on their own annual gathering, along with news of a special event aimed at Japanese mission held in the Philippines in 2018. They regularly cooperate with several mission organizations such as OMF International.

The Christian Nepali Society gave a report on how a church movement is increasing throughout Japan and shared their thoughts on Japanese mission.

In Hadano, in Kanagawa Prefecture, there are three churches sharing the same building: the Japan Holiness Hadano Christ Church worship in Japanese, the Brazilian Evangelical Holiness Hadano Church in Portuguese, and the Bolivian Evangelica Santida Church in Spanish. They shared their experiences of worshiping in the same building. They also are working to provide opportunities for Brazilian schools to interact with the local Japanese community.

There were testimonies about a Filipino church in Hachioji doing outreach in Yokohama and Shizuoka and a Filipino church in Kami-Itabashi expanding widely to become an international church, and also a personal testimony of a family that was transformed. ■



Worship led by a multinational team

SCAFFOLDING

Organisational member care

Member care “scaffolding” is about enabling missionaries to reach the heights and stay safe

By Janet Dallman

Have you ever watched Japanese workmen erect or take down scaffolding? If not, I recommend it sometime; it’s fascinating to watch metal poles being tossed up or down with great precision.

Scaffolding is crucial—it enables builders to reach the heights and stay safe. How much more essential then, when it comes to the scaffolding of member care? Kelly O’Donnell, a psychologist who consults for mission organisations, states that member care is “an embodiment of love . . . to make people more effective, efficient and enduring. It is the response to the Master’s mandate.”¹ It is crucial for every missionary and each mission organisation to consider, not only how to accomplish the Great Commission, but also how they fulfil the Great Commandment in relation to one another.²

This article seeks to examine the “scaffolding” of organisational member care from the perspective of personal experience of over 22 years in Japan with OMF and to provide a stimulus for reflection. Even if you aren’t with an organisation, do please continue to read and consider how you can get the care that you need.

PRE-FIELD MEMBER CARE

Looking back to before I arrived in Japan, I remember both good and not-so-good personal experiences in recruitment and mobilisation. On the plus side, I remember, back in 1992, the mission agency moving heaven and earth to get me to Japan for a one-month missions trip. However, on another occasion, a well-meaning individual suggested that my boyfriend (at the time) should go to Japan without me, and if, after completing a four-year term, I was still interested, he could marry me then. This did not go down well!

Pre-field member care can be very good or very poor. Lois and Lawrence Dodds, long-

time experts in missionary care, write that recruitment is key: “Ethical issues for missions begin immediately . . . in the recruitment, assessment and selection of missionaries. Choosing the right people is crucial to the survival and development of the person.”³

For those who work in the area of recruitment, you may like to ponder the following questions:

- How honest is my agency’s recruitment: do we “tell it how it is”?
- How are we helping candidates to examine their call and suitability to missions?
- How is member care practiced in regard to applicants in our agency?

ON-FIELD MEMBER CARE

My husband and I first arrived in Japan as long-term missionaries in March 1998. We were met at Chitose Airport, provided with lunch, and taken to our fully-furnished, rented apartment. This all demonstrated excellent member care. Further meals were delivered, and we were welcomed into the OMF language school community in Sapporo. Member care could not have been better. Although two years of full-time Japanese language and culture study didn’t *feel* like good member care at the time—anything but—I knew how valuable it was, and still is, as we acquired vital skills for service in Japan. This, too, was true member care.

Fast-forward a few years and my husband was struggling with depression. Medical care from OMF during a home assignment was excellent, and some individuals went out of their way to care for us. Yet others failed to understand the nature of depression, making unhelpful comments and demands. On one hand OMF’s member care meant the difference between returning to Japan and staying in the UK permanently; but at the same time poor communication and a basic lack of understanding led us to seriously consider





resignation! Member care was both very good and very bad.

These stories demonstrate both the indispensability of on-field member care and the potentially toxic results when that care is not what it should be. Williams says that missionaries “need ongoing care where they live and work, and this is most effectively provided by one’s colleagues.”⁴ This mutual care should involve everyone at every level and must be encouraged, initiated, and demonstrated by those in leadership.

All of us, whether member care is our specific role or not, need to consider on-field member care. The following questions may help you reflect:

- How well are we/am I caring for new missionaries, in welcome, orientation, and training?
- How well do we/I practice member care for other missionaries, personally and organisationally?
- How am I, or how should I be, receiving member care?

SENDING-SIDE MEMBER CARE

By this point in this article, it won’t surprise you to know that my husband and I have experienced both outstanding member care and inadequate member care during our four home assignments to date.

Continuing the story above when my husband was so unwell, I recall our arrival in the UK being followed almost immediately by a visit by a mission representative. Not only that, all our medical bills were met by the organisation. We were so grateful for their effort, prayer, and continued concern. What excellent member care! We might never have made it through without it.

However, there have been other times when we’ve felt either ignored (not seeing anyone from the sending side for months) or used (asked to speak here, there, and everywhere; or to represent the agency at too many events during home assignment). I recognise, however, how hard it can be to get this balance right.

O’Donnell and Williams say, re-entry can “be the most difficult part of any cross-cultural ministry. This is true of . . . a missionary who returns for a . . . limited

period, as well as the missionary who returns permanently.”⁵

Here are some questions to ponder as you reflect on sending-side member care for missionaries: (If you aren’t with an agency, perhaps you can consider how you might find care.)

- What has been most beneficial to you, in terms of organisational member care, in your home or sending country?
- When and why *haven’t* you experienced member care in your home or sending country?
- Ideally, how would you most appreciate receiving care during home assignment, and how could you communicate that?

The “scaffolding” of member care for missionaries is vital, extensive, and complex. All agencies must carefully consider the entire missionary lifecycle and how they will provide the needed care at every stage for each individual. If you are an independent missionary, you need to consider how to get the care you need. O’Donnell sums it up: “Missionaries need . . . all the supportive resources they can get.”⁶ He exhorts us, “It is not enough simply to send out strong workers into the fields. These workers must also be maintained and nurtured, and not only for their own sakes, but ultimately for the long-term impact on the people who are the focus of their ministry.”⁷

Member care “scaffolding” is about enabling missionaries to reach the heights and stay safe. **JH**

1. Kelly O’Donnell, “Going Global: A Member Care Model for Best Practice,” in *Doing Member Care Well*, ed. Kelly O’Donnell (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002), 25.
2. O’Donnell, 23–25.
3. Lois A. Dodds and Lawrence E. Dodds, *Selection, Training, Member Care and Professional Ethics: Choosing the Right People and Caring for Them with Integrity* (Liverpool, PA: Heartstream Resources, 1997), 1.
4. Kenneth Williams, “A Model for Mutual Care in Missions” in *Missionary Care: Counting the Cost for World Evangelization*, ed. Kelly O’Donnell (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), 46.
5. Marina Prins and Braam Willemsse, *Member Care for Missionaries: A Practical Guide for Senders* (South Africa: Member Care Southern Africa, 2002), 78.
6. O’Donnell, *Missionary Care*, 286.
7. *Ibid.*

Janet Dallman (UK) with her husband Peter, has been involved in church planting and caring for new missionaries through OMF for 21 years. She is OMF Japan’s candidate coordinator and pastoral and spiritual care coordinator.

Missionaries “need ongoing care where they live and work, and this is most effectively provided by one’s colleagues.”

SUPPLYING THE FRONT LINES

By Karen Ellrick

The mission field needs people who can serve in technological and other practical roles



As the last of our English and Bible students left our home for the evening, I felt my stress fade. I loved every one of those students and prayed for them to come to know Christ, but I always felt drained after teaching them. Then I turned to my computer to continue developing the database that helps us remember details about each of the growing number of people we were ministering to, and I felt a sense of satisfaction as I finished programming a new feature. Suddenly I noticed the irony and thought: *Why is computer work more fulfilling to me than people ministry? Am I a bad missionary?*

My husband Dan is a more typical missionary—gifted in people-related ministry like teaching, evangelism, and leadership. I felt the call to long-term missions just as strongly as he did, and I assumed I was giving up everything related to my previous engineering

and programming career to work with people the same way he was. But I still had a natural urge to solve “backstage” problems like how to keep track of all the people with whom we were building relationships. I gravitated toward nuts-and-bolts tasks like laying out event flyers, mixing audio for an evangelistic cassette tape, and building our ministry website. These tasks drew on my technical background, but all the while I thought they were just auxiliary to the “real ministry.” It took a few years for the Lord to get it through my thick skull that what I was doing *was* real ministry. He had gifted and prepared me to serve in missions in technical and practical ways—solving problems and developing resources to help churches, ministries, and other missionaries be more effective.

Once I finally understood, I gradually settled into that role as my main ministry over the years, and I love it.

But people like me are in short supply. The more I do, the more need I see. Think about the usual type of people who would seriously consider becoming long-term missionaries in countries like Japan that don’t need houses built or wells dug. Your first thought is probably a list like this: evangelists, teachers, counselors, and church planters—in other words, people who work with people. What about computer programmers, print or web designers, videographers, writers, editors, graphic artists, and the like? They tend to stay in their careers back home and send money to support those “people ministry” missionaries. Even conferences like CPI show the disparity—there are plenty of tracks and workshops about evangelism, teaching, counseling, and leadership, but have you ever seen a workshop about how to support ministries with multimedia, web outreach, or publishing? Evidently there aren’t

enough people interested in such topics. I pray for that to change.

SUPPLIES FOR THE BATTLE

An analogy that might fit is that of military strategy. Everyone knows about the soldiers who fight on the front line—they are directly involved in the battle. But they cannot do anything if they lack water, food, ammunition, fuel, and repairs for their equipment. The system that keeps the front line equipped and fighting in the right place at the right time is called logistics. Army general and US president Dwight D. Eisenhower famously said, “You will not find it difficult to prove that battles, campaigns, and even wars have been won or lost primarily because of logistics.”¹ I see ministries like mine as missions logistics, and the skills needed are very different from the missions front line.

For example, have you noticed that most small churches in Japan have poor websites, if they have a web presence at all? Don't blame the pastor—he probably longs to use the internet to bring people to the church so he can minister to them, but his gifts are in

front-line ministry, not web design or PR. Perhaps he bravely tried to use a web-building tool but got stuck. Or prepared for a neighborhood outreach but his simple black-text flyers didn't attract any attention. He needs people with different gifts to come alongside and help with the logistics. Most missionaries are in the same category—better at working with people than things. In addition, logistics is not where the typical pastor or missionary's heart is—they don't want to fight their computer when they could be out there impacting someone's life. But I know there are others out there like me who have no desire to be a Moses but would be happy being Aaron and Hur holding up Moses' arms. Perhaps they have not thought of that as ministry, especially as missions.

LOGISTICIANS NEED TO KNOW THE BATTLEFIELD

One might argue that with the internet, some of the technical resource building I have mentioned could be done without moving to the mission field (assuming someone else is handling the linguistic and cultural

issues). But the problem solver needs to be where the problems are in order to recognize them. Most of the time, the front-line people will keep doing things the only way they know how, not realizing there could be something better or easier. It's the problem solver who has the gifts to be able to observe and realize: *Ah, I know a way I can help with that!* or *That's a common issue—perhaps a new tool should be developed that many people can use.* The resources I make available to the Christian community in Japan (see <https://L4JP.com>) as well as help I've given to ministries individually all came about after seeing the needs firsthand. And I would not have known that *Japan Harvest* needed a designer if I hadn't been here!

MY APPEAL

Perhaps you're already in Japan (most readers of *Japan Harvest* are) and doing people ministry, but my personal journey of discovery resonates with you because God built you more for logistics. Don't let missionary stereotypes deter you from filling gaps using your gifts, solving nuts-and-bolts problems for others, or even shifting your primary focus if appropriate.

Or perhaps you have a friend or relative back home who came to mind while you read this, thinking that they might have shown an interest in missions but never pursued it because they are a techie, not a preacher. Encourage them to pray about whether their interest is actually a call.

Missions is a multifaceted ministry with many needs on the team. When we pray for more workers in the harvest, let's not just think of those handling the grain but also those who can drive the cart, build an irrigation canal, or design a better sickle. The entire harvest will benefit. **JH**

1. “Logistics: The Lifeblood of Military Power,” <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength-topical-essays/2019-essays/logistics-the-lifeblood-military-power> (accessed Dec. 21, 2019).

Karen Ellrick (US) and her husband Dan have been missionaries in Japan since 1996 and live in Osaka. Karen ministers through print design, web development, video/audio editing, etc. and is the designer for Japan Harvest.

The introvert/extrovert paradox

In the process of discovering this difference in gifts and roles, I've noticed that few popular personality tests differentiate between work and play environments. One might think that those in direct people ministry are the extroverts, and those who prefer physical/tech support roles are the introverts. But I have observed the exact opposite.

While it's true that introverts avoid recreational socializing, are content to travel alone, and enjoy solitary recreation like reading (my husband is a good example), they tend to be drawn to interpersonal interactions that have real meaning and vocational situations where they can make a difference in someone else's life. So introverts are often good in people

ministry, and many are visionaries as well, another quality of the missionary stereotype.

On the other hand, I'm categorized as an extrovert because I don't mind crowds or parties, I'm talkative, and I want a companion for travel or entertainment so there is someone to share the experience. But in work or ministry situations, I'm far better with things than with people—I'm not a good evangelist, teacher, counselor, or leader (though naturally as a Christian, I do a little of those things with the Lord's help when the need arises). Instead, my ministry sweet spot is at my computer, in the back of a church running the sound board, or on my knees laying carpet. Perhaps you too can relate to one of these paradoxical categories.

What do you have in your hand?

By Emerita Gonzales Sakai

Finding joy and reward in using unique giftings for ministry



In 1989, a young lady at my home church in the Philippines asked me if I would be willing to volunteer with Operation Mobilization's ship called *Logos II*, the replacement vessel for the *Logos* that ran aground on a rock off the coast of Chile the year before. I happily said, "Yes!" The decision was very easy, as the thought of free travel to Africa and South America with fellow Christians was a no-brainer.

I was one of thirteen Filipinos who were recruited that summer to join the largest of OM's summer evangelistic outreaches called "Love Europe." For my first full-month campaign in Tampere, Finland, I worked as the team bookkeeper—budgeting and allocating the meager team money for the month-long evangelism campaign and ensuring that there would be enough for the duration of the outreach program.

After that, I joined the OM Global Orientation Conference for new recruits in De Bron, Netherlands. While at the ten-day conference, I was asked by an OM senior finance officer if I would be willing to work in the OM central accounting office while the *Logos II* was being readied for service. The former accountant had retired and the officer had learned that I was a CPA.

The offer was very tempting, as the job called for financial accounting and auditing, which I had been doing before I joined OM. Watching fellow OM female missionaries do carpentry jobs on board scared me half to death, as I had never done any carpentry

or hard labor in the past. So it was easy to answer—I was very willing to work in the OM Central Accounting Office.

When the *Logos II* was ready to sail from Amsterdam in February, 1990, there was a call to board the ship. I felt, however, that God was asking me to "use what I had in my hand" to serve him. So I decided not to board, and remained in Belgium, where I served for two years. When the accounting office was transferred to the United Kingdom, I worked an additional year there. Though I initially only joined for two years, this year marks my 31st year of service with OMF working in accounting, auditing, and finance!

Three roles but one gift

I currently have three primary roles in OM. My first main ministry is with OM Japan as its Field Financial Officer. This ministry involves all the accounting functions of an OM office such as data entry, financial accounting, and budgeting. OM Japan currently has about 40 local and foreign missionaries plus 30 children based in the least-reached and mostly rural areas of Miyagi, Toyama, Hyogo, Aichi, Kanagawa, and Ishikawa Prefectures. The foreign missionaries come from South Africa, the Faroe Islands, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and the Philippines. Their foreign support needs to be processed and paid out on

a monthly basis, and I make sure it happens on time.

My second ministry role is the Area Finance Officer of Latin America. Overseeing each of the thirteen countries that comprise the Latin America area for OM, I supervise the finance officers and train them, since most of them are not accountants, to ensure that the accounting reports produced are accurate.

My third ministry is working with the International Audit Office. Currently, there are only three auditors in OM, but there are over 130 OM entities in over 120 countries that need to be audited at least once every five years. The OM International Audit Office aims to perform one internal auditing for one country each month, meaning we audit at least twelve countries per year.

Four reasons I enjoy what I do

In spite of the busyness and workload, there are several reasons why I enjoy what I do. The first is seeing over and over again that God abundantly provides for the needs of his people, and I am a living testimony of that! OM, just like many mission organizations, does not pay salaries. We work and live by faith. We depend on God to meet our daily needs. And I can

testify to God's faithfulness in providing for the needs of his people. I have seen it in the lives of others and have experienced it for myself.

After three years as the accounting manager of the OM International Finance Office, I was led to a decision to go into missions work long-term. The first step for me was to get a theological education. God led me to enroll in Prairie Graduate School in Canada. While I was studying for my Master of Arts degree in Theological Studies, there were several occasions when God provided for my tuition from people I didn't know. Each time the gifts came at the exact moment I needed them.

Just before I graduated, God gave the added blessing of leading me to marry my Japanese friend and schoolmate. God not only provided for my material needs but he also provided a lifelong partner. Throughout my time working for OM, I have seen the faithfulness of God to people who stepped out in faith to serve him either here in Japan or abroad. God hears our prayers, listens to our pleas, and provides for the needs of his people.

The second reason I love working for OM is the feeling of "heaven" that I experienced with my first OM Team in Belgium. We were a multinational team. There was unity, love, and respect shown among all the team members in spite of our diversity. This feeling of "heaven on earth" led me to continue being a missionary.

Although I wanted to be a Bible translator, God impressed upon me this challenge: "What do you have in your hand?" Thus I continued serving God by using the skills that he had already

I felt, however, that God was asking me to "use what I had in my hand" to serve him.

blessed me with as an accountant. And actually, accountants are in great demand in OM as well as in other mission organizations, although they work out of the spotlight.

The third reason I love serving with OM is the feeling of freedom through living a simple lifestyle and having limited money. We were a big team of about thirty people in OM in Belgium. Our resources were pooled and we had community meals, pretty much like the early New Testament church. All our support money was put in a common purse from which all the team expenses were taken. As a single person, I had monthly pocket money of 300 Belgian francs, which was about 1,200 yen (US\$10). All I could buy besides our community meals was a can of Coke and an order of French fries topped with samurai (chili hot) sauce each weekend. What a feeling of freedom it was not to worry about what to wear, what to buy, or what to shop for.

The last reason I love my job is that I am able to travel to Africa, South America, Europe, and the rest of the world for free! Two friends commented on my recent Facebook posting of a camel ride in the pyramids in Egypt. One friend asked, "Where do you get all the money to travel?" I simply replied, "I travel for free! I set aside

two days before an audit assignment for sightseeing and exploring." A second friend said, "I love your job! Please tell me how I can apply." The most rewarding thing about my travels is the opportunity to experience other cultures

and start friendships with people from different nations.

These are some of the most beautiful things that keep me going in my ministry as an accountant. Seeing God providing for his people, experiencing the love and unity in my team, reaping the benefits of a simple lifestyle, and having the opportunity of free travel overseas are just a few of the rewards of obeying God and putting to work the skills and giftings I have in my hand.

I want to end with a challenge to you to endure and keep on going for the Lord. May we have a greater hunger and desire to be used of God. He has called us to endure even when our work is not obvious, appreciated, or seen. The desire to be used of God, by offering him what I have in my hands is the secret to why I keep busy and am able to continue in my responsibilities. In addition, I am a pastor's wife, an adult Sunday School teacher, and a Bible teacher for Filipinos living in Takaoka, Toyama. To God be all the glory! **JH**

Emerita Gonzales Sakai is a Certified Public Accountant serving with OM for over thirty years. Originally from the Philippines, she married Nobuya Sakai, the pastor of Uchinada Bible Church in Ishikawa Prefecture, and is now a naturalized Japanese.



WHY BUSINESS MANAGERS ARE IMPORTANT

By Darwin Stoesz

Dealing with ministry expenses is part of ministry too

It was a hot and sweaty summer morning as I rode my bike uphill to my office. I went past the same houses, the same Buddhist idols that I always do. As I biked, I asked myself, *What am I doing here in Japan? What significance is it to be the business manager for a mission organization?*

One of my responsibilities as business manager is to approve payment for reimbursements for ministry expenses. In May 2016, SEND Japan set a goal called Engage Kanto 5/30 Initiative which is: “To actively engage in the startup of five new reproducing church-

es in Kanto by 2030. To accomplish this goal, we will cooperate with existing churches and deploy thirty SEND disciple-makers to this initiative.”

Last year, the Engage Kanto leaders initiated a church planting team that went to minister to a church at Otsuki Gospel Church for their first Group-in-Training ministry event.

One of the participants said, “The church we went to does not have a pastor and is kept going by its members. It is in a small valley town that has very few Christians. Our event was designed to be an encouragement to the members and transition to an outreach event if any non-believers came. The church member we were working with was hoping and praying non-Christians would come, but was not very confident they would.”

The participants submitted expense claims for their travel and some food.

The expenses were not that significant, but nevertheless there were expenses. The ministry could not have happened if someone did not pay for the travel to get there. Overseas donors gave so that these missionaries could go to this remote town and teach other believers how to plan for an outreach.

In the end nearly ten people came, including one non-Christian who had never been there before.

When I write “Okay to pay” on ministry expenses like this I am a part of the ministry. I know that biking uphill to my office was worth it as I am, in my role of business manager, just one part of seeing the gospel being shared, and believers being discipled. **JH**

Darwin Stoesz and his wife Karen (US) have been career missionaries with SEND International since 2008. They have two children. Darwin serves as SEND Japan’s business manager.

By Peter Dallman

Food ladies

Giving thanks for Japanese Christians who faithfully serve in the background

It was the end of the first week of our mission’s two-week training course on preparing for home assignment.

I walked into the kitchen where three Japanese ladies were helping to prepare food for the following week. Chopping boards were out, piles of vegetables were being prepared, and each lady wore an apron and a head band. They were members of a church a couple of hours away by train that OMF had started some years ago.

I had three small white envelopes in my hand containing money for their travel expenses. They were helping

us greatly by making food for the course participants.

Many of you will know that this kind of payment is very normal in Japan—companies contribute to their workers’ travel costs and churches commonly give visiting speakers money for their service as well as for the cost of travel. For OMF to give this money was totally in line with Japanese culture.

The next day the same three small envelopes were put back into my hand. The ladies said they were grateful we had thought of it, but they didn’t need the money; they were just happy to serve.

They said “It’s all OMF’s money, so we don’t need it.”

I thought, *What a great Christian attitude.* And it reminded me that so often behind our big events, our programs, and our ministries in Japan are many ordinary but extraordinary Japanese Christians who serve us and our Lord faithfully and sacrificially. I invite us all to stop for a moment and give God thanks for the “food ladies” in our lives and ministries. **JH**

Peter Dallman, with his wife Janet, has served in Japan with OMF International since 1998. He has worked in church planting and welcoming new missionaries, and is now involved in training missionaries.

WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT HER?

By Judith Ricken

Working together with Japanese people blesses us all

My Bible college once offered a three-day course in accounting, saying, “Many missionaries find themselves involved in many things they were never trained for: a nurse wants to care for the sick, yet she has to deal with the finances of the hospital.” I remember thinking, *As I will work in a church, that won't be a problem.*

But in 2013 in the first year of my internship, discussing various matters during a meeting with other missionaries, it dawned upon me that many people from my team, besides their church work, do “behind the scenes” work. Among other things, they work with finance, clerical work, and accounting. Soon enough I myself was involved in the accounting of the church plant I was involved in during my internship.

In one of the meetings, a missionary from our team suggested we employ a Japanese person to do the accounting for our mission (German Alliance Mission or GAM), suggesting Hisako Nishioka. At that time, I had never met her or even heard her name. The discussion went on for a while. I heard that Hisako was a member of a church from our denomination, that she had done secretarial work for other missionaries before, and most importantly, had learned German from them. She was also fluent in English! It was decided to give it a go.

Soon Hisako came to the church on Tuesday mornings to work on accounting on the mission's behalf. Often that was the same time that I was working on the church's accounting. We sat in a tiny office, me working on a computer with a Japanese Excel program and not knowing much Japanese yet,

counting the words to figure out the columns. Opposite me, Hisako worked with a German computer, asking me sometimes what certain words meant. We didn't talk much, concentrating hard and working diligently on the numbers.

The first year, one missionary from our team taught Hisako many things about the accounting. This missionary is still ultimately responsible for everything, yet Hisako started doing the tedious daily work of putting in numbers, checking receipts, kilometers, etc. She also started helping with translating documents, visa application, and many other things. In short, we



found more and more work she could do. Her working hours have increased over time. First she had another job at a local school, but eventually she started to work full-time for us. She took over the accounting of our retreat center Nozomi no Mura near Karuizawa in Nagano Ken as well.

Hisako said she would prefer to do work connected with the kingdom of God than other work. This is a good job for her as she is partially deaf and she can work on her own and can communicate mainly through mail

and email. She is thankful that she can work for God despite her disability.

For legal reasons, we as missionaries are required to check the accounting once a year. Every year two different people are chosen for this work. The first time I did it, I was very thankful that the other person had worked in a bank before and knew what we were supposed to be doing. He explained to me how to check the bankbooks, how to find missing numbers, and where to look if you just can't find a certain receipt. But Hisako's work is faultless, and we are astonished each year how much effort she puts in and how exact and reliable she is in all she is

doing. I'm pretty sure that I still have not understood the sheer amount of work she is doing for us. Being Japanese, yet speaking English and German fluently, she is excellent for this job.

Two years ago, our chief accountant from Germany came for a visit, and he also wanted to see the bankbooks and our accounting and also confirmed our assessment that Hisako is doing a great job.

Last year according to tax regulations, we needed to make big changes in our payments and other things. A tax expert came in several times to explain the new system, and again Hisako proved a great help. She understood quickly what had to be done and could work with the new system. It can hardly be put into words how much she is helping the mission through her service. We are very blessed to have her working for us. **JH**

Judith Ricken is a GAM missionary who came to Japan for the first time in 2013. She works in Nagoya with KGG (student ministry). She reads a lot, enjoys hiking in the mountains, and is still learning Japanese every day.



WEARING TWO HATS



By Janet Dallman

What could be more exciting than enabling missionaries to be part of God's plan to reach Japanese people with the good news of Christ?

I regularly switch between two hats every day.

HAT #1 – CANDIDATE COORDINATOR (GETTING 'EM HERE)

Hat #1 concerns people who want to come as missionaries for one year or more. It involves liaising with applicants, sending countries, and OMF Japan. On any given day, I can be found making decisions on applicants' suitability, managing logistics for field-side visits or arrivals, or dealing with issues such as visas, health needs, and language and culture training. I also work on candidate policies and guidelines. The phrase "keeping balls in the air" is an apt metaphor!

"Getting 'em here" requires significant administrative work, field experience, spiritual discernment, and a good dose of common sense.

Wearing Hat #1 is simultaneously exciting, exhausting, and vital.

After all, what could be more exciting than enabling missionaries to be part of God's plan to reach Japanese people with the good news of Christ?

On the other hand, it can be quite bewildering and exhausting. At the time of writing, 32 (yes, thirty-two) accepted candidates hope to come to Japan with OMF in the next two years, while a further 13 individuals are working through the application process—completing forms, physical and psychological screening, and interviews. Phew!

Finally, this hat comes with substantial obligations. One pastor and former missionary says, "Better screening, training, and shepherding during . . . selection and preparation . . . may have helped to prevent . . . [missionaries] leaving (e.g. problems with children, conflict . . . , personal concerns, or poor

cultural adaptations)."¹ Furthermore, my master's degree survey of previous missionaries to Japan indicated that for respondents who served in Japan for between 0–10 years, "ministry mismatch" ranked first among ministry-related reasons for leaving Japan.² This indicates a fundamental need for honesty in missionary recruitment and for missionary candidates to apply careful thought to selection of agencies; otherwise, expectations go unfulfilled, disillusionment often arises, and departure may follow.

HAT #2 – PASTORAL & SPIRITUAL CARE COORDINATOR (KEEPING 'EM HERE)

Hat #2 is even more diverse than Hat #1. I coordinate both proactive and reactive care across Japan for OMF missionaries. Practically, I do things like collate prayer information, help missionaries pack or unpack, and look for accommodation for missionaries. I write guidelines and policies on subjects like home assignment, retirement etc. and lead spiritual retreats. I conduct individual care conversations, provide spiritual input, and even conduct marriage preparation classes. I could continue, but you get the picture!

"Keeping 'em here" requires knowledge of what's needed and what's available, flexibility, life and field experience, and spiritual discernment.

Wearing Hat #2 is also simultaneously exciting, exhausting, and vital.

After all, what could be more exciting than enabling missionaries to be part of God's plan to reach Japanese people with the good news of Christ?

On the other hand, it takes intentionality and grace to keep abreast of missionary needs and available resources, and deal with the ongoing sadness

and difficulties we face. Being flexible enough to care practically, spiritually, and administratively for missionaries while also caring for myself physically and spiritually is challenging, and I don't always achieve it.

Finally, caring for missionaries in Japan is vital and described by a missions researcher as "a Kingdom Stewardship Issue."³ After all, what good is it to "get 'em here" if we can't "keep 'em here"?

"All missionaries to Japan and the agencies with whom they work need to be intentional about building retention-boosting practices into their lives, ministries, and organisations."⁴ Although many of these practices are not difficult to address, "each requires intentionality and the will to place the important ahead of the urgent."⁵

Both Hat #1 and Hat #2 are about enabling missionaries to be part of God's plan to reach Japanese people with the good news of Christ. I close with two practical applications. Firstly, if you find yourself—or have chosen to be—in a role like one of these, know the truth that you are a vital part of God's plan to reach Japanese people with the good news of Jesus. Secondly, if you aren't in such a role, I urge you to encourage and pray for those whose exciting, exhausting, and vital calling it is to "get 'em here" and to "keep 'em here." **JH**

1. David Selvey, "The Truth of Missionary Attrition," Faith Ministries, <https://blogs.faithlafayette.org/2015/10/24/the-cost-of-missionary-attrition/>, (Oct 24, 2015).
2. Janet Dallman, "Factors affecting missionary attrition and retention in Japan" (Master's Member Care, Redcliffe College, 2019). (Available from the author on request)
3. James Nelson, "Four Ways to Improve Field Staff Retention," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 51, no. 4: 440-445, <https://missionexus.org/four-ways-to-improve-field-staff-retention/> (Oct. 1, 2015).
4. Dallman.
5. Nelson.

MISSIONARIES NEED HOLIDAYS

Maintaining mission properties is a vital ministry

By Wendy Marshall

Before my family came to Japan, I had never thought about where missionaries have holidays or why guest houses might be important. Vacations, holidays, and guest houses are not something missionaries talk about much back home—possibly we are fearful that people will think we aren't working hard enough. But once you are on the field, you soon discover that these places, and the people who work to maintain and run them, are very important.

A VITAL MINISTRY

We first arrived in Japan (Sapporo) in mid-December. We soon heard our colleagues talking about booking accommodation for their summer vacations. That initially seemed weird, but we soon connected the dots: of course, as missionaries we would need holidays. But where in Japan would we take them?

Since then, we've taken vacations in mission-owned facilities in Hokkaido, Tohoku, Nagano, and Lake Yamanaka. Not all of those are wonderful memories (I'll spare you the story of the huge camelback grasshopper nest inside an old house OMF rented in Otaru that terrified me at night). But we are very grateful for the various accommodation options that are available to us.

I don't need to persuade you that such places are important for sustaining ministry in this country. You may not be with a large mission organisation that maintains properties like these, but I wonder if you've ever stayed in one or been to a meeting at one. Or perhaps you own or have rented a cabin at Takayama near Sendai or at Lake Nojiri?

It goes without saying that such properties require upkeep. People who own their own cabins know that well. Some find it therapeutic time-out from ministry to do maintenance on their properties, but others of us aren't that way inclined. Our family certainly appreciates that we have access to properties owned and maintained by our mission.

During language school in Sapporo, we were required by our mission to visit other missionaries in our mission to familiarise ourselves with OMF as we sought God's guidance for the future. So one year after we arrived in Japan, we flew to Tokyo and stayed in OMF's guest home in Ichikawa, Chiba.

We've since stayed there more than a dozen times—often as we transitioned in and out of the country for home assignments, but also for one- or two-week training workshops we've attended. I even stayed there once last year when I fell ill while attending a prayer meeting at our headquarters and couldn't get home that night. We've also stayed in mission guest houses in Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE IN A TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR

Two couples in OMF Japan run our guest houses in Sapporo and Ichikawa. Their behind-the-scenes ministries are very much appreciated by all who have benefited from them.

Just before our family left for home assignment in mid-2014, we spent a couple of days at the Ichikawa guest home while we finished off some practical matters and caught our breath.

One matter was handing our car over to a young missionary family. They'd just moved to Tokyo and were going to borrow our vehicle while we were away for the year. We gave them our car the day before we left and

were planning to catch the train to the airport the next afternoon.

We were exhausted that weekend and took a rest after lunch in preparation for our overnight flight. But the sky grew dark as the time to leave approached, and we suddenly became aware of a big storm headed our way just as we were about to leave on foot.

There was no car available to get us to the station so the guest house managers grabbed handfuls of plastic bags and wrapped up all our suitcases and backpacks. They then insisted on walking with us through the torrential summer storm, sloshing through ankle-deep puddles and pushing against the acutely-angled rain. We walked past a car sales shop and I remember the customers and salesmen looking at us in amazement.

When we got there our intrepid guest house managers talked their way onto the platform without the necessary ticket and unwrapped our precious luggage, taking away the wet plastic bags. As we farewelled our soggy colleagues, the rain stopped and the sun came out!

What a farewell party! What love!

It pains me that people who serve in ministries such as these sometimes don't feel appreciated. It frustrates me that supporters back home sometimes don't see how vital it is for missionaries to take holidays, or know how important these guest houses are. And how the people who maintain them also have important ministries.

Let's do what we can to appreciate those who work behind the scenes to ensure their colleagues have affordable and restful places to stay. Let's spread the word among our supporters that vacations are important and so are the people who make them possible. **JH**

Wendy Marshall is the managing editor of Japan Harvest. She's Australian and has been in Japan with OMF International since 2000 with her husband David. She also does mobilisation for OMF using social media.

RED FLAGS

and surviving well

By Andy Meeko

It's important to take time for the long haul

“If any man saves alive a single soul . . . [it is] as though he had saved alive a whole world.”¹

With these words, the Talmud reminds us of the dimensions of our work. Yet with such grand dimensions come equally grand risks. With any ministerial calling come dangers, some easily recognized and others more sneaky. Day by day, month after month, we focus on the needs of people all around us, yet we are often oblivious to our own condition. Do you remember the Japanese fairytale *Urashima Tarō*? For years, Tarō was enchanted in an undersea fairyland, thinking it to be only a matter of days. Then, finally returning to his own world, he opened the mysterious box he had been gifted and the years caught up—he was transformed into an old man. Likewise, we easily get distracted and fail to see the changes within our very selves. There is a danger that we can go too far, and there may be no going back.

I have personally experienced significant burnout in ministry in Japan at least twice. Amusingly, “burnout” was not even an officially recognized condition in the therapy world until just last year. And even now, although the WHO acknowledges burnout,² the DSM-5 (the American Psychiatric Association’s manual that defines mental disorders) still delays, despite the Gallup Poll finding that 23% of employees feel burnout very often or always.³

Looking back at my burnouts I am still baffled. Of course, hindsight is 20/20, but while in the process, in the thick of ministry, I was totally unaware that burnout was building. This causes me to consider a crucial question: how can burnout, or other common mental and emotional ailments, be avoided? After all, these ailments have the capacity to derail ministry and mission, and even destroy lives.

Some years ago, I visited a communist country to evaluate the mental condition of a Japanese missionary couple. While there, the couple asked if I could also check on a trio of young American missionary women. The results came out quite shocking. The women were off the charts for risk of a mental/physical breakdown. While two of them were completely unaware, the third was already slipping over the edge; she had even begun to doubt the existence of God and the validity of the Christian faith.

During my years in Japan I have seen countless examples of mental, emotional, and psychosomatic problems, not to mention relational and spiritual meltdowns of people in ministry. I have seen irreparable burnouts, strange phobias, permanent chronic fatigue syndrome, anorexia, stress-induced loss of eyesight, as well as the usual assortment of anxiety disorders and depression. I could go on for pages.

What percentage of missionaries are giving continually from a nearly dry well?

It’s likely all of those suffering had a couple things in common. First, they all loved God and wanted to see his glory and kingdom advance here. Second, none of them anticipated ending up with such an affliction. Despite so many sad stories, the scenario gets repeated over and over again. We focus so much on the surrounding needs of others that we damage ourselves. It’s a hard balance to maintain between sacrificial love in action and self-stewardship.

The 2011 disasters

The most potent example of this I know was in the aftermath of the 3.11 disasters—the stage for my second burnout. It is unlikely that few involved had ever faced such frenzy to grapple with such overwhelming needs before. I recall one mission member-care supervisor who volunteered for but a single day. She told me it took her two days to recover. Meanwhile, I worked under that strain for ten months straight. My role was developing the Emotional-Care Department at CRASH. In the first weeks, we decided to split Emotional-Care into two divisions: Survivor-Care and Team-Care. I took on the Survivor-Care responsibility, and a colleague took the latter. However, after several weeks, my colleague had to step out for personal reasons and Team-Care faltered. Other people came and went, but Team-Care was never really what it needed to be. Very few involved in the relief effort had much training in trauma care, but one thing had been clear in my meager training: the safety of caregivers was top priority. At least half of the training had focused not on the care of survivors, but on caregivers. Without keeping caregivers safe, we merely multiply the number of traumatized people.

Looking back, I see a glaring slip-up. Though I oversaw the care of survivors in one of the most complicated disasters in world history and for over ten months was exposed to grief, stress, trauma, and danger far beyond the normal call of duty, I, like countless others, was totally vulnerable. During those ten months I received no real care from my relief organization, nor my field mission, nor regional mission office, nor international headquarters. Not even a phone call. I was completely on my own.

If you need some assistance please check our Tokorozawa Community Care Center (T3C) website, or refer others you think may need help: <http://newdaytoday.net/tccc> At T3C, qualified professionals provide assistance free of charge. We are highly motivated because our only reward is to see people who are suffering improve. The care is Brief Therapy, dominantly Cognitive-Behavioral, holistic, and at times Spiritually Directive. Many of those who come need only one session. Although for the general population we only take in those with depression symptoms, for the pastor/missionary community we assist with a variety of struggles.



By God's grace, I am a survivor. Yes, I did hit big-time burnout, which ran its course, and God strangely and mystically reignited my inner fire in a cathedral in Vilnius, Lithuania (that's another story). But I emerged with an acquired, let me call it, permanent fragility. I will likely never be able to push ahead full steam again. And I was left with the scourge of insomnia, which robbed me of energy (and sanity?) for around eight years. However, I believe my fate could have been much worse had it not been for one thing.

Are you emotionally fit?

Although in my case the environment of protection for a caregiver was missing, the personal protection component was robust. In the years preceding the 3.11 Disasters, I had been establishing the Tokorozawa Community Care Center with the goal of prevention/recovery from depression and training of community caregivers. Because I knew I would be surrounding myself with people struggling with depression, I was daily practicing habits to keep myself mentally and emotionally fit. It was definitely a God thing.

When 3.11 hit, I was in tip-top shape and ready to take it all head-on, month after month after month. I shudder to think of what might have happened had I been in poor shape to begin with.

Today, I wonder what percentage of those in ministry here are in a solid position for when a crisis hits (and we all know the Big One is coming). I wonder what percentage are actually in overflow mode, or just get-by mode? What percentage of missionaries are giving continually from a nearly dry well? So, where are you today? Do you have a sufficient environment of protection? If not, are you personally fit? Emotionally? Mentally? Spiritually? Do you know? When was the last time you took time to find out?

If considering those questions raises any red flags for you, then please do not delay. Drop stuff if you have to. Cut back. Take the time that you need. Try to get an idea of where you are. There are numerous screening mechanisms that can help. In minutes you can get a score on stress level, burnout, or depressive symptoms.

Maybe 2020 is a year not for just hindsight, but to see your "now" more

clearly and your vision for the future improved. "If any man saves alive a single soul . . . [it is] as though he had saved alive a whole world." The salvation of each life is a grand task with great ramifications. It changes a whole world. Jesus said that if we save our life, we will lose it, and if we lose our life for His sake, we will keep it. But in order to lose it for Jesus' sake, we must first have it, and that is the paradox. In that process, others, and even we ourselves, are saved, and I wonder if that be the pathway to saving a whole world. **JH**

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2. Karlyn Borysenko, "Burnout is now an officially diagnosable condition: here's what you need to know about it," *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlynborysenko/2019/05/29/burnout-is-now-an-officially-diagnosable-condition-heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-it> (May 29, 2019).
3. Ben Wigert and Sangeeta Agrawal, "Employee Burnout, Part 1: The 5 Main Causes", *Gallup*, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237059/employee-burnout-part-main-causes.aspx> (July 12, 2018).

Andy Meeko, D.Min., George Fox University (narrative therapy and spiritual direction in disability intervention), is a second-generation Japan missionary leading the JBF Innovative Team, and Director of NewDay-ToDay Publishing and Tokorozawa Community Care Centre (T3C).

By Andrew Imbrie (Tezuka)

When you are in doubt, reach out

Prior to my departure, during missionary training, we were taught a variety of methods related to self-care and stress management.” Satō^{*} confided, “However, under my breath I whispered to myself, ‘I don’t need this! I am OK! I have faith, and it should be enough!’” But one night on the mission field, “my heart suddenly collapsed. The fear, anxiety, and a great sense of despair hit me all at once. Yes, I had heard the term ‘burnout’ before. But I’d never thought that it would ever happen to me.”

When vulnerability leads to empowerment

In general, the pressures of Christian ministry are real. But for those who cross international boundaries, the challenges are even greater. The stress of adjusting to a foreign culture—its values, customs, language, environmental and relational systems—can never be underestimated. Those who respond to God’s call for ministry are often those who are the most passionate, diligent, and courageous. And yet we also can be the most prone to disappointment, discouragement, and burnout. It’s also very common that the higher our level of leadership/authority position is, the harder it is to be real and vulnerable with others. The more “spiritually mature” we think we are (or think we are perceived to be), the greater the hindrance is to reach out for guidance or support.

As Christians, we are often more prepared to share the testimony of our victories in ministry than our fears, doubts, and setbacks. Pastors often feel that they should present the ideal image of spiritual maturity, so they don’t

think it is appropriate to share their own personal struggles with anyone, especially with those whom they associate and lead. Missionaries fear they will disappoint their mission organization and supporters if they were truly candid about their debilitating anxiety, depression, or other mental health/family-related issues. It’s also not that uncommon for God’s workers to be caught in a loop—feeling an unbelievable amount of pressure to perform, while trapped in a deep sense of loneliness and disconnectedness. Others are bogged down with helplessness and even hopelessness due to grief from loss; unresolved emotional injuries; and lack of practical guidance, skills, and empowerment.

We all want meaningful connection. However, not all of us are willing to be vulnerable with others. As a result, we deprive ourselves of what we actually need the most: safe, trusting, and empowering relationships which can result in revelation, growth, and healing.

Tarō, a Japanese missionary who serves overseas, said, “I had previously served [God] with a lot of zeal as his servant because he is Holy God. But before serving him, I needed to let Jesus love me (I needed to receive and embrace his love), minister to me, and give me rest.” He said his counselor, “was easy to talk to, caring, and

“The way God will keep me to the end is through the wise counsel and correction of others who know me well.”

(Ken, a pastor & missionary in Japan)

professional, and most of all he was a committed Christian—which gave me comfort and peace. I somehow immediately knew it was safe for me to open up.”

The importance of member care ministry

Behind the scenes ministry, such as counseling/coaching or member care-related ministry, is an integral component of ministry. Anyone in ministry can benefit from this essential resource. We all need a trusted confidant, don’t we? We need those who can listen to the cry of our hearts, to discern and to guide, to keep us accountable, and to continue to propel us forward toward the Lord’s calling for our lives. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “By yourself you’re unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Can you round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn’t easily snapped” (The Message).

In Japan, there still are misperceptions and unspoken stigmas related to counseling or getting mental health care—even among Christians. Some believe that God is the only answer to their problems. Although it is true that God is the ultimate source of everything, he also provides people like Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy for the journey.

Competent helpers or professional counselors help validate one’s experi-

ence but also provide clarity and assist us to reframe our thoughts; they also can equip workers with practical skills. As Christian counselors, we position ourselves differently than the secular ones because we are committed to support in ways that are “Christ-centered, Biblically-based while being discerning and obedient to the gentle leading of the Holy Spirit.”¹

Tarō reflected on the counseling he’d received: “I realize some of my thinking and default mind-set was twisted and unhealthy. I needed to renew my mind.” He said his counselor had helped him through the sessions “to observe myself, my thinking patterns, and my situations from new and different perspectives. With his precise and spot-on advice, I knew where to start in order to be healed. I needed to start with God, but not in a way I had always done.”

How do I know when I need to reach out for help?

Each person’s experience is unique. What counts as serious threats to one’s well-being is different for different people. However, there are some warning signs that deserve special attention:

1. Being emotionally challenged. Emotions fluctuate. However, when your emotions become highly reactive (dysregulated) or under-responsive, it’s important to assess if there are core issues that you need to address. Notable emotions that deserve prompt action include: increasing irritability, fear, and anxiety; extended sadness; numbness and despondency; an unexplainable sense of guilt and shame; and feeling worthless, helpless, or hopeless.

2. Increasing maladaptive and obsessive thoughts. Thoughts powerfully influence emotions and behaviors. When you notice your thoughts are too preoccupied with either the things of the past or the concerns of the future, and you struggle to get yourself “unstuck,” you will want to seek a fresh perspective. Maladaptive and obsessive

thoughts can potentially distort how you see yourself and how you think others perceive you, as well as your perception of what could be the solutions to your existing concerns.

3. Debilitating physical symptoms. When we internalize our stressors, there will likely be physical manifestations. Signs of depleted energy, decreased or insatiable appetite, insomnia or hypersomnia, headaches, muscle pain, skin rash, and gastrointestinal complaints (e.g. ulcer, abdominal pain, etc.) are common physical symptoms of internalized stressors. Thus, it’s important to listen to these signs. Frequently, they are our most obvious indicators for considering assistance.

4. Social withdrawal or interpersonal deterioration. When one experiences the symptoms cited above, he/she will start noticing the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. One may show lack of energy and decreased interest in investing in relationship with others. Although it may not be obvious in the beginning, it will become more noticeable as thought patterns worsen and emotions feel unbearable.

5. Being doubtful, conflicted, and/or discouraged spiritually. When we encounter personal struggles—such as chronic pain, addiction, depression, or

We need those who can listen to the cry of our hearts, to discern and to guide, to keep us accountable, and to continue to propel us forward toward the Lord’s calling for our lives.

betrayal—we may pause and wonder why. We may have dialogues with God about our concerns, but we also may be reluctant to engage in a candid conversation with others. We hold on to the belief that “God has to do this or that in order for me to carry on his work.” But then, when God does not intervene in ways that we had hoped, we may get confused and discouraged spiritually. We may start questioning

the vision and the calling God has for our lives. When you find yourselves in a situation like this—feeling doubtful, having “lost track,” and are spiritually discouraged—do not wait any longer, reach out.

Testimonials

After his recovery from depression, Satō shared, “Christian ministers, such as pastors and missionaries, tend to be lonely ‘supermen.’ Upon deeper contemplation I realize that the ‘ordinary person’ whose life relies solely on God and simply being a transparent human is actually stronger than the superman? I want to be that ordinary person as I serve the Lord!”

Ken, reflecting upon his journey, said, “Having a professional, Christian, third-party (non-coworker) counselor who can give insight into some of the most turbulent areas of my life as well as tools for managing difficulties has equipped me to love my family, co-workers, and others I minister to in ways that would not have happened otherwise. I am indebted to this ministry.”

Tarō said, “I am not 100% healed or recovered yet, and I no longer have confidence in myself (my flesh), but my conviction of my calling is stronger than ever! My counselor said to me, ‘You are on the front line (in the mission) and I am in the back!’” Tarō reflected, “With such an encouragement, I do have full confidence in the Lord, and I feel I can get back up and serve God and people again.”

The “impossibility” begins with courage, humility, and surrender. Thus, when you are in doubt, reach out! **JH**

* Names in this article have been changed.

1. Siang-Yang Tan, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2011), 325-360.

Andrew Imbrie (Tezuka) is the founder of Life Design Counseling (www.thelifedesign.jp). He is a licensed clinical marriage and family therapist and counseling pastor who serves churches, pastors, missionaries, Christian leaders, and the Japanese community through counseling/coaching assistance.

Embracing the *grace of lament*

By Alan Steier

Wondering where to go when loss enters your life? You can be encouraged through the biblical practice of lament.

Over the past three years, my wife, Judy, and I have conducted several soul-care retreats in Japan, offering missionaries a chance to get away from the busyness of ministry, reengage with God in a meaningful way, and be encouraged by God's Word. One retreat session addresses an often overlooked reality of missionary life: ungrieved losses.

This topic doesn't usually make it into prayer letters sent to supporters. Nor is it usually discussed within mission organizations. This is a "behind the scenes" type of issue, which continues to impact people in profound ways, in both their personal lives and ministries, and it rarely receives the attention it deserves.

No matter who you are, at some point, you have experienced loss—whether the loss of a

family member or the loss of a dream, a valued possession, or a friend who has moved away or returned to his or her passport country. But no matter the depth of the loss, there is a biblical way to deal with grief: through the grace of "lament."

What is lament?

In his excellent book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*, Mark Vroegop focuses attention on this much neglected concept and practice.

What is lament? Lament can be defined as a loud cry, a howl, or a passionate expression of grief. However, in the Bible lament is more than expressing sorrow or talking about our sadness. It is more than walking through

the stages of grief. Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust.¹

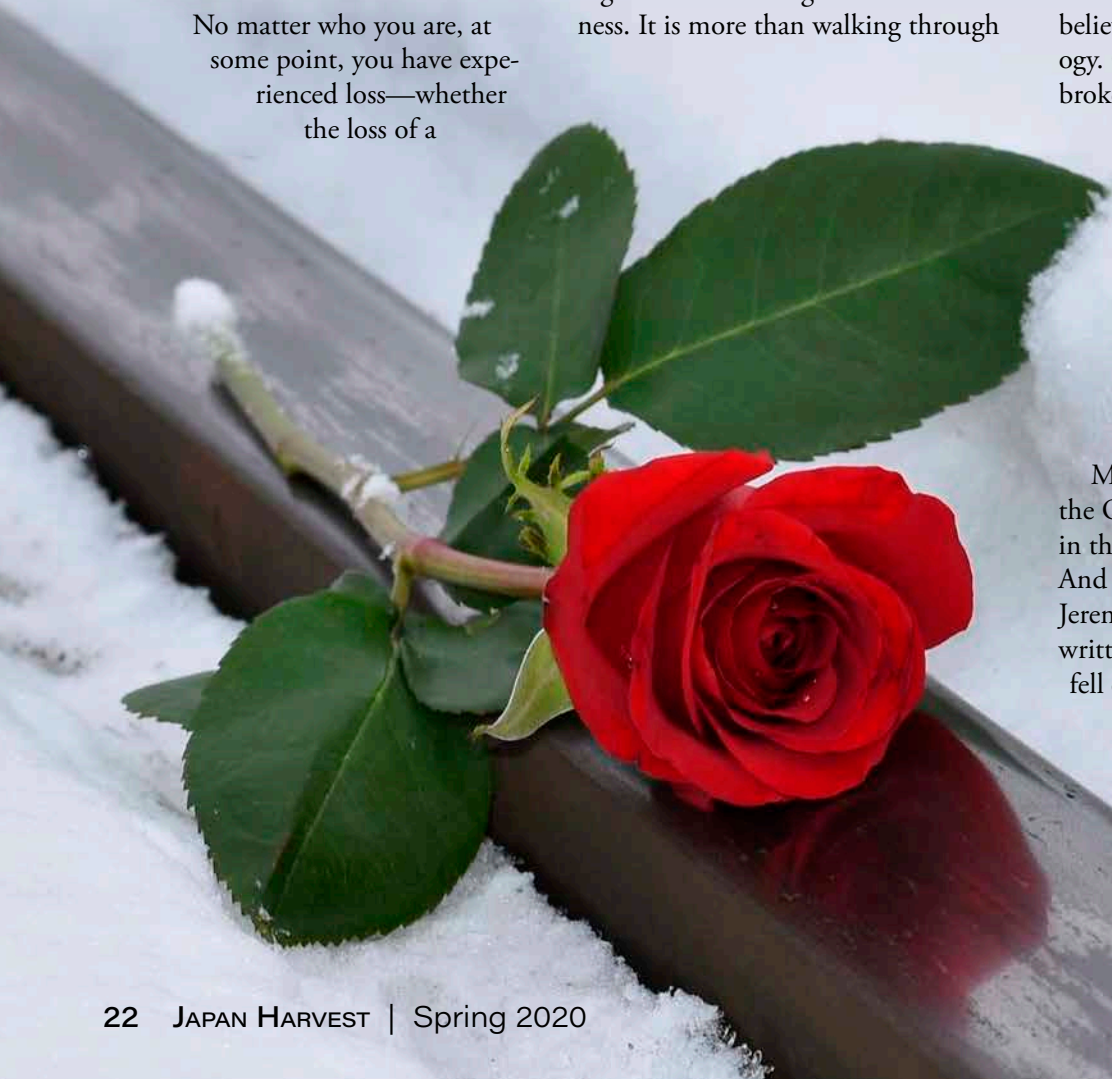
Lament doesn't try to quickly find answers to pain or loss; it doesn't seek to just get over it. Lament gives permission to the suffering person to wrestle with sorrow instead of rushing to end it.

The author calls lament "a minor-key language for my suffering."² The practice of lament—the kind that is biblical, honest, and redemptive—is not natural for us because every lament is a prayer. It's a statement of faith. Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness.

Biblical lament is rooted in what we believe. It is prayer loaded with theology. Christians affirm that the world is broken, that God is powerful, and that he will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian.³

Type the word "lament" in the Bible search engine BibleGateway.com (ESV) and you'll find around 60 entries of the word or its derivatives.

Many of the entries are found in the Old Testament, with the majority in the prophets (especially Jeremiah). And of course, right after the woes in Jeremiah is the book of Lamentations, written as the judgement of the Lord fell on Israel. If God devoted an entire book of the Bible to noting the lamentations of his people, then surely it must be



something to which we need to pay attention.

About one-third of the 150 psalms are laments. Among the four types of lament psalms, the majority are personal. But in the Bible we also find community laments (like Lamentations) and repentant laments (like David's in Psalm 51), as well as imprecatory laments where an individual or group expresses outrage and a strong desire for justice. The pattern of lament in the Psalms usually includes an address to God, a complaint, a request, and an expression of trust and/or praise.

How do we pray a lament?

So if biblical lament is a prayer, how are we to pray? What is the focus of our prayer when all we want to do is cry out to God—or give him the silent treatment? Using Psalm 77, Vroegop walks us through the steps of lament, helping us process our loss without losing our trust in God.

First, he says to pray your struggles (verses 1–6). The one in pain calls out to get God's attention. Grief is not tame. Lament is not a simplistic formula. Indeed, lament is the song you sing, believing that one day God will answer and restore. Lament invites us to pray as we struggle with a life that is far from perfect.⁴

The psalmist is honest, authentic, and raw, knowing that the Father desires honesty more than flowery words. We're not told why the psalmist is in pain, and even though his hand is stretched out in prayer, his soul refuses to be comforted.

Have you ever been in that much pain? So much pain that it reached to the very depth of your soul?

The rawest example of lament I experienced as a pastor came from news that the young adult daughter of a church member had been murdered in another city. Along with the shock of that reality came a flood of tears and wailing I have never forgotten. As I hugged the mother in her time of grief, the depth of her emotion flowed freely from the deepest part of her soul. There were no answers to be given. There was only the comforting presence of the Fa-

To cry is human, but to lament is Christian.

ther. While the ugliness of that violent crime was very real, so was the intense trust this mother had in her God.

Pray your struggles. He hears, and while he may not answer in a way you desire, keep praying.

Second, pray your questions (verses 7–9). We don't have to be afraid of questions that arise in our hearts and minds when grief has us by the throat. The psalmist wasn't afraid to ask God questions. And God is not afraid of our questions. He can handle them. We need not fear expressing what besieges our mind during times of sorrow and grief. It's okay to pray your questions.

Third, prayer turns us around as we remember (verses 10–15). Lament is a prayer that leads us through personal sorrow and difficult questions into truth that anchors our soul.

The entire psalm shifts with the word "then" in verse 10 when the psalmist begins to remember the Lord: "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High" (ESV). The right hand of God refers to the expression of God's power—the deeds and wonders he has done to save and preserve his people.

In verse 13 we reach a rhetorical question very different from the previous six: "What god is great like our God?" It's an important turning point, moving from honest questions to confident trust. While we may still be in pain, lament reminds our hearts of what we believe to be true. Remember as you pray, and keep turning to God. He may be "behind the scenes," but he's there.

Finally, pray the gospel (verses 16–20). Psalm 77 concludes with the ultimate moment that defined the people of Israel and their relationship with God: the exodus. They could do nothing on their own with the sea before them and the Egyptians behind them. Only God could come through for them, and he did. They were delivered by the action of their God.

For the Christian, our exodus event—the place where we find ultimate deliverance—is the cross of Christ.⁵ The cross shows us that God has already proven himself to

be for us and not against us. The cross points to the greatest injustice and reason to lament, yet it is the greatest outcome for the world—the salvation available through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

The last verse of Psalm 77 reminds us that God is our Good Shepherd. In the New Testament, that Good Shepherd is Jesus, the one who feeds, nurtures, and sacrifices for his flock. Even through the hard times, the shepherd is there for the flock, present with them in the harshest conditions of wind or rain or snow or cold or heat. He's there caring for and loving them. Ultimately this is our anchor: the gospel and the love God has for us. Lament can carry us through as we pray the gospel.

When in pain, let lament be your new language

If the music of your life right now feels more like it's in a minor key than a major key, know that he hasn't forsaken you; you can still look to him in faith. Don't give God the silent treatment. Frustration and discouragement might tempt you to stop talking to him. Your pain can instead be a path toward God, if you'll allow lament to be your new language.

When you find you don't have the words, read a psalm of lament out loud. Linger over it. Let it open your heart. Whatever you do, don't stop talking with God. Keep wrestling. Keep struggling. Keep embracing the grace of lament.⁶ **JH**

1. Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 28.

2. *Ibid.*, 17.

3. *Ibid.*, 26.

4. *Ibid.*, 33.

5. *Ibid.*, 37.

6. *Ibid.*, 38.

After time in Japan as a missionary, Alan Steier (D. Min.) was a pastor in the US for 22 years. He and his wife, Judy, have been with Barnabas International since 2012. They are the leaders of JEMA's Member Care Ministry.

Stay ready for God's promptings to share

By Shige Nakazawa

God can use all aspects of our lives to advance his kingdom, even tasks that do not seem directly related to missionary work

God can work in the most mundane situations when you're least expecting him to.

One of the multiple hats I wear is the role of property manager for a mission-owned guest house in Higashi Kurume, a little over an hour from where my family lives in central Tokyo. One day, I was there again to meet with a couple of contractors to get estimates for work around the house.

The second contractor who came that day was an 82-year-old plumber, Mr. Yoshida (not his real name). He was very comfortable with me and kept talking to me about plumbing, life and even some of his superstitious beliefs. As I was listening to Mr. Yoshida by his truck out in the driveway of the house, the Lord made it clear in my heart that I was supposed to share Christ with him and I had a sense of assurance that he would listen. I told my teammate Adam, who was standing next to me, to quickly grab the eCube from my backpack in the house. eCube is a gospel presentation tool that works like a Rubik's cube that I often use to share about Jesus. "There is something I want to share with you," I said to Mr. Yoshida.

After I gave him a simple but visually striking presentation of the gospel with this evangelism tool, he shared with me that he has a *mizuko* (an aborted child) from a previous relationship that even his wife of many decades does not know about, and how he, to this day, continues to offer to the *mizuko jizō* (the Buddhist guardian deity for the spirits of aborted children, which sometimes represents the spirit of the lost child itself) a bottle of milk heated to breast-milk temperature every single day. He said he considers his plumbing work in his old age a life sentence imposed by fate to atone for the guilt of taking the life of his unborn baby.

I sure hadn't been expecting this type of conversation when I was heading to the guest house that day. But sensing the Lord's hand behind this meeting with Mr. Yoshida, I told him the truth that making offerings to *mizuko jizō* would never blot out his guilt, but God himself has sent his Son to die on the cross to pay for it, so that he can be finally and completely forgiven. Having had no-one ever tell him about Jesus, he said, "I was wondering why that poor man had to hang on the

cross, but now I understand." That day, I presented the gospel four times to Mr. Yoshida to ensure that he understood. "This may sound presumptuous," I said, "but this probably is the most important message you have ever heard or will ever hear." He responded, "I think so." Although he was not ready to receive Jesus on the spot, he happily took the eCube.

TRAINING BELIEVERS TO STAY READY WITH eCUBE

While there are many different evangelism tools and approaches out there, I've been finding that eCube is a particularly effective tool and that Japanese believers can be trained to use it for evangelism. We did evangelism training using eCube one Sunday last year with the three small churches in our church network. We demonstrated how one might share Christ with an eCube, and then everyone practiced it in groups with their own eCubes. I was very encouraged to hear that soon afterwards three people were able to share Christ with their non-Christian friends, including a Japanese brother who shared with his close friends and a Chinese brother who shared with his girlfriend in China over Skype. At another time, I trained a for-



eCube demonstration (Japanese)
<https://vimeo.com/383915757>



mer boxing champion that I had been discipling how to use the eCube and he was able to share the gospel with one of his employees, a former world boxing champion, that same week.

While these evangelism opportunities have not yet resulted in any immediate, on-the-spot conversions, the training and the eCube's usability have enabled Japanese Christians to share their faith. I'm encouraged by this, given how difficult the average Japanese Christian feels it is to share their faith. Also, eCube communicates enough spiritual truth (via memorable images depicting the separation between a holy God and sinful man and Christ being crucified, etc.) to generate a spiritual dialogue. Such a conversation, whether through eCube or other means, can be the start of a person's spiritual journey or it can be meaningful input into the

journey they are already on. You can never gauge how open a pre-Christian is to spiritual things until you talk with them about Jesus, and eCube is a good tool that many can use to start that conversation. And, of course, there is great blessing for the believer who obediently engages in evangelism.

WHERE HIS SPIRIT LEADS

All Christians, no matter what their job is, should be prepared to share the great hope that we have been given in Christ. For this, it is extremely helpful that you have at least one way (ideally, a few) that you can use to communicate that hope with those whom God brings into your life. Evangelism is often a process, but that process must involve proclamations of spiritual truth, eventually leading to a salvific understanding of what God's grace did for us

in Christ (Col. 1:5–6). The Lord of the Harvest has wisely and intentionally put each one of us in a certain time at a certain place (Acts 17:26–27) to be his light to whomever he is pleased to work in, whenever and wherever his Spirit leads (John 3:8). Yes, it means even when you are doing chores that do not feel like real ministry, like getting an estimate for plumbing work at your mission's guest house. I encourage you to see your life in that light once again, stay tuned to God's promptings in your days, and stay ready to share. **JH**

eCubes are available through e3 resources. <https://e3resources.org>.

Photos submitted by author

Shige Nakazawa serves with ReachGlobal's Tokyo City team. He is married to Luann, a girl from the farmland of Iowa, a perfect match for a rice-fed boy from Tokyo. They have four children, ages 10 to 18.

HELP WITH A VISA EXTENSION

By Judith Ricken

How unseen office work is a great blessing

Last year in October I was talking to a graduate student, who was job hunting in Japan and as he said "I need to extend my visa for this," I suddenly remembered—I had to check when my visa was running out! With shaking hands I pulled out my Resident's Card and read "January 2020." Phew, still three months away. But I knew I needed to get started with the visa extension process, soon.

I had no idea how to go about this as I had never extended a visa before. I rang one missionary who said, "It's a long time ago since I did that because we have permanent residency now, but you can ask Hisako (who does our mission's finance work) she'll tell you what you need." I did.

The next day, I got an email from Hisako with a check list in German of what you need for the visa extension. It also explained where you need to go. There was a list of documents

from A-E and she wrote, "I'll take care of most of this, you only need to get document D from the city office." She also wrote the name of the document in Japanese.

So I went to the city office, pointed to the written *kanji*, and they nodded—"Go to the second floor, counter A." I went and about 10 minutes later had the document I needed.

One week later I got a big envelope with all the other necessary documents from Hisako. It had a detailed description of what these documents were, where I still needed to fill in something, and where it was not necessary.

With all these documents in my hand, I went to the immigration office. At the reception desk I said that I wanted to extend my visa. The worker there started collecting the necessary documents from different drawers. She handed them to me and said, "Please fill this out."

I gave her the documents I had brought with me, saying, "I already prepared all of this."

She told me I could go directly to the second floor where I had to pull a number. I got 2160 and saw the current number was 2005. I thought: Oh, a long wait!

As I sat down, the lady next to me said, "Look I have number 2011 but I don't need it anymore because I have already got everything done, would you like to have it?"

WHAT? "Thank you!"

Number 2011 was called soon after and I submitted all the necessary papers. I was out of the building about 20 minutes after I entered it—thanks to a kind lady and the preparation work of Hisako.

About a week later I got a postcard saying that I could pick up my new visa. I'm so thankful to Hisako—because of her help I could devote myself more fully to my student work and Japanese study. **JH**

Top 10 Reasons to Study at Tokyo Christian University

by Randall Short, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

1. You love Japan.
2. You want to build lifelong friendships with Japanese and international students from Asia, Africa, Europe, and America.
3. You want to live in the Greater Tokyo Area, the world's most populous metropolitan area.
4. You want to speak Japanese fluently.
5. You want to understand Japan, Asia, and the world.
6. You want to learn deeply and widely about Scripture, theology, church history, and Japanese religion.
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.

Come join us at Tokyo Christian University! What reasons do you have to go anywhere else?

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Spreading the light of God's presence

*Let's pray that just as the Olympic torch will pass through Japan,
God's presence will be felt in this land*

By Roger W. Lowther

*“Blessed are those . . . who walk in the light
of your presence, Lord” (Ps. 89:15 NIV).*

The Olympic torch is scheduled to journey through all 47 prefectures of Japan and 23 wards of Tokyo. At the time of writing, the plan is for the torch to pass within an hour of over 98% of the population of Japan, held aloft by a chain of some 10,000 people across the nation. The torch unites people from across Japan and around the world with the motto “Hope lights our way,” symbolizing the longing for a new era in Japan.

Thinking of the Olympic torch and motto, I cannot help thinking of the presence of God. In Exodus, God appeared to Moses as a fiery bush and to the Israelites as a pillar of fire, lighting “the way” through the desert. More than that, the Olympic torch also makes me think of the golden lampstand in the Tabernacle, perpetually providing light for the “bread of the Presence” (Ex. 25:30 ESV), a representation of the 12 tribes of Israel. Designed with flowering tree blossoms, the lampstand points back to God’s presence in the garden of Eden and ahead to his presence and the Tree of Life in heaven. Light from this lampstand was “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5 ESV), where “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:23, Is. 60:19–20 ESV).

The Olympic torch also makes me think of the day of Pentecost when the presence of God appeared as tongues of fire. Later, John the Apostle saw seven lampstands representing seven churches in seven cities (Rev. 1:20). The fire of the Holy Spirit has continued to move among the people of every language, tribe, and nation, covering the face of the planet with the light of the presence and knowledge of God. As the Olympic torch (“holy flame” in Japanese) is carried by 10,000 people across the nation, it makes me think about the thousands of people carrying the Holy Spirit through every city and region of Japan. As the traveling Olympic torch helps people feel the excitement that “the Olympics has come to me,” it makes me long for people to feel the even greater excitement that “God has come to me! The church has come to me!” This is a big deal for the unreached people of Japan.

All these things lead me in worship of Christ. He is “the true light, which gives light to everyone” (John 1:9 ESV) and the

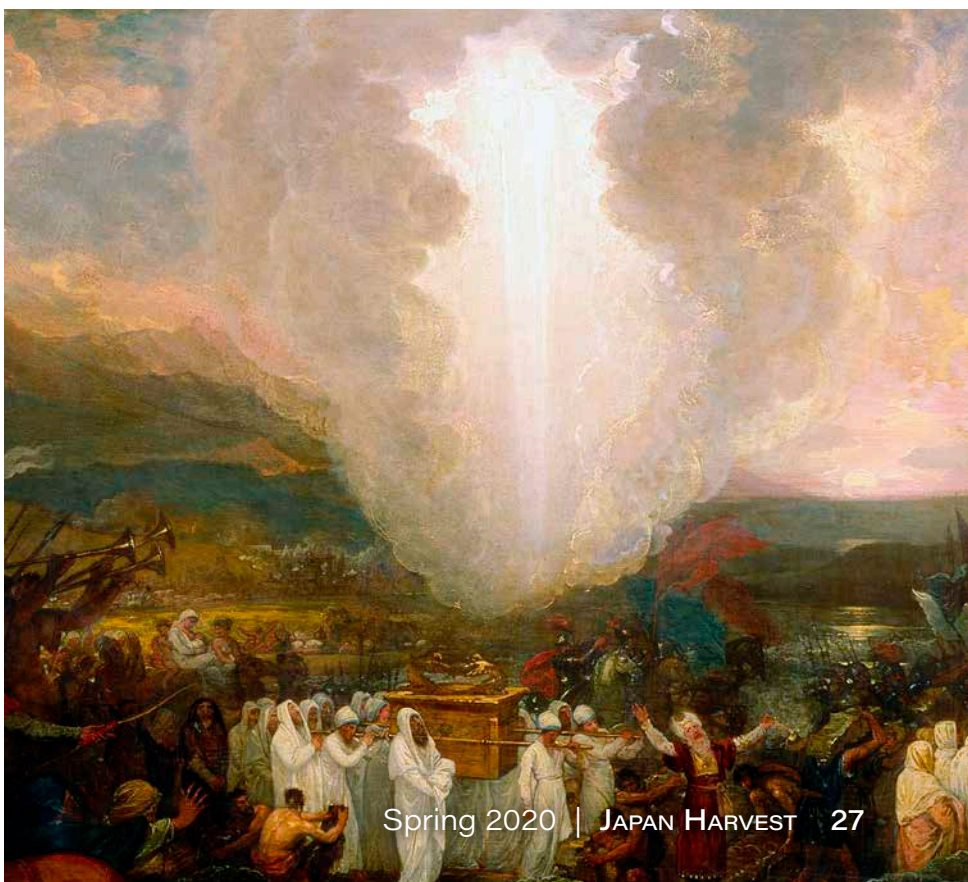
true hope that lights our way. In the words of the famous song, “In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song.”¹ Christ is Immanuel, God with us, the tangible, knowable presence of God for the people of God. On the cross, Christ experienced the darkness of God so that we could know the light of God. On the cross, Christ was consumed by the fire of God’s wrath so that we could be surrounded by the fire of God’s love. Christ became the forsaken One, experiencing total physical and emotional abandonment so that you and I would never have to know this kind of abandonment.

During the 90 days of the Grace2020 prayer campaign (www.grace2020.org), from June 9 to the closing ceremony of the Paralympic Games on September 6, please join us in praying for the Holy Spirit to sweep powerfully across Japan. Please pray God would use the energy and the excitement of the Olympics to spread the gospel throughout this nation. Please pray that more and more people would come to know the light of the presence of God that gives true hope and life.

“Help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many” (2 Cor. 1:11 NIV). **JH**

1. “In Christ Alone” Words and Music by Keith Getty & Stuart Townsend

Roger W. Lowther is the director of the GRACE2020 prayer campaign, spreading the gospel through a movement of prayer around the 2020 Tokyo Summer Games. He is also director of faith and art at Grace City Church Tokyo, Community Arts Tokyo.



Surprised by JOEE

God gives the grace we need to meet new challenges

By Ruth Gilmore Ingulsrud



Have you ever been swept off your feet by a wave or a powerful idea? Or launched into an adventure with no map or compass? It's not exactly comfortable—that feeling of helpless exhilaration mixed with joy and uncertainty, and inundated by a large dollop of panic. You're out of your depth and not at all sure that you can handle being this far from shore.

Being flung into something new

Recently prompted (or possibly flung by a heavenly gust of inspiration!) to start a non-profit organization called JOEE (Joyful Opportunity English Education), I don't yet feel that I can handle the trajectory upon which I have embarked. I'm desperately trusting God to keep me afloat.

I continue to work at Christian Academy in Tokyo as a teacher-librarian, but every Thursday and Friday afternoon, I pack up puppets and props and go to teach English to youngsters at Children's Home in Ota-ku. The ultimate goal is to provide basic language instruction and native-level pronunciation skills so that when the children exit the care

system at the age of 18, they have a marketable job skill and the confidence to work anywhere in the world. My students sing songs, act out words, and play games while learning basic English vocabulary. Puppets who speak only English help make the lessons fun. It's both exhausting and exhilarating. But I'd like to do it even more, and so next year I will work full-time for the non-profit. This is a frightening leap of faith for me, with no guarantees of income or success, but I feel compelled nonetheless. I trust that God will provide me with the grace I need.

And I do need grace. I have never been all that graceful (I used to break at least one toe a year!), so this new challenge has not been easy. Yes, it may be 2020 now, but I don't have 20/20 vision nor am I ready for any sort of Olympic endeavor. I don't know what God was thinking when I was led into this undertaking (or possibly undertow) that has pulled me out into deep waters. I'm approaching 60, for goodness sake. Aren't I too old for this? As an answer, the God of Abraham and Sarah reminds me that age is no impediment to being launched on a mission.

Let me give you a personal metaphor for what being launched feels like. Every summer, I escape the muggy Tokyo heat and head for Lake Nojiri in Nagano, where I volunteer as a sailing instructor. Nojiri is a quiet lake with small waves and small adventures. But even small lakes can sometimes surprise you. One day, while I was sailing my little four-meter-long Laser dinghy and reveling in the power of pre-typhoon wind and waves, a sudden gust slammed my sail smack down into the water and launched me off the deck in a soaring arc into the sodden sail.

Starting JOEE has felt like being flung into that sail. I had been swept up by an idea that was much too powerful for me to handle. I know what I can do well: I can teach children and make them excited about learning, I can create silly voices for puppets, I can tell stories, and I can capture and hold the tenuous attention of toddlers through an entire story time. But I'm also painfully aware of my shortcomings: I'm certainly not a non-profit creator, a fundraiser, or an administrator. Business plans, numbers, and red tape tie me up in the kinds of knots that a sailor of my meager experience could never undo. So how did I find myself wrapped up in this latest adventure?

God's leading

The feeling that I was supposed to do something to help began a couple of years ago. In March 2018, I read the tragic story about Yua Funato, a five-year old who died from abuse in her home. The police found a notebook where Yua had written heart-breaking pleas for the abuse to stop. She



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should have been rescued in time. She should have been placed into the safe care of a children's home. I was haunted by Yua's story. I knew that more should be done to help the 45,000 children in Japan who have been rescued and are now living in institutionalized care.

In August of that year, while sitting with other children's authors during a writer's conference in Los Angeles, the idea of creating a way to bring compelling, play-based English-language education to young children in orphanages began percolating in my mind. Literature and poetry for children have always been my passion, but so far I had only been successful at getting some of my individual poems published. All of my attempts to publish stories or collections of poems have merely taught me what receiving rejection letters feels like. My motivation as a writer has always been to educate and bring joy to kids. Making a child laugh is satisfying. Getting published, however, is much harder. So if writing for children was not going to pan out for me, how else could I help children while living in Japan? That is what I started pondering in that room in Los Angeles.

I have always admired families who've adopted children. One of my childhood friends had certainly saved the life of the boy that she and her husband had adopted. And I knew several wonderful families here in Japan who had adopted children. Most of these families could speak Japanese, of course. They could communicate with their adopted children in their native language. My French and Norwegian skills did not help me much here in Japan, but I could teach English to children. Perhaps I could teach English in orphanages.

I began to pray about it. I know full well that the results of prayer are powerful, but I was not prepared for what happened next. I began to be confronted with stories about orphans and began meeting people who were interested in helping with my project. Bible verses about orphans kept popping up: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18 ESV); "The Lord protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows" (Psalm 146:9 NLT); "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27 NLT).

At the end of August, I realized I would need a competent, bilingual administrator to help make this project work. When I mentioned my dream of starting a non-profit foundation to a friend, Hiroko, she shocked the socks off of me by replying that she had just quit her job that very day and that helping me with a non-profit foundation to help orphans was exactly what she wanted to do! God's timing was perfect.

Within a year, Hiroko had managed to register us as a non-profit foundation able to accept tax-deductible donations from individuals and corporations. In the meantime, I had set up a website (JOEE.jp) and gathered friends who could help to serve on JOEE's board of directors. We are currently teaching English lessons twice a week at one children's home and a friend is teaching one lesson a month at another children's home. The children at the home I go to have begun using English words and phrases in their daily life and singing songs in English, surprising their caregivers with their good pronunciation.

Looking ahead

Although we have had some success already, JOEE has a long way to go with fundraising and promotion. I am well aware that this small non-profit might eventually fail, but I am determined to do the best I can with the resources I have. The Holy Spirit sends the inspiration and wind, and I merely need to use that power to move forward. I must admit that I have been surprised by JOEE. Life is an adventure, and I am blessed to be part of this astounding voyage. **JH**

Note: If you are interested in volunteering at JOEE, please send an email to ruth@joe.jp.

Photos by Shin Theodore Lewis; JOEE artwork by Satoshi Kitamura

Ruth Gilmore Ingulsrud is a teacher-librarian at Christian Academy in Tokyo. She is a published poet and she enjoys writing puppet scripts and children's stories. Her websites include JOEE.jp, kidsermons.com, and BelovedOfBeasts.com.



Pressing on through suffering

We are never sure when suffering and great difficulty are just around the corner, yet we have a sure hope in Jesus that cannot be taken away

Toward the beginning of perhaps Paul's most intimate epistle we find these verses: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4 ESV). The main idea here, and indeed a main theme in 2 Corinthians, is that Christians who have been comforted by God during their darkest hours can comfort others.

When my wife Kate and I, along with our two-year-old daughter Audrey, left for Japan in 2015, we weren't sure at all what our new life would entail. Kate grew up as the daughter of missionaries in Japan, but she had not yet lived here as an independent adult. Our first year was marked by the typical stresses and challenges of missionary life. We often felt the ironic internal conflict of grieving our losses while at the same time enjoying the new path that we were walking.

Around a year in, however, we found ourselves in a whirlwind. Following the birth of our second daughter Analeigh, Kate experienced a severe recurrence of post-partum depression (PPD). Soon after the onset of PPD, she experienced a debilitating migraine and the loss of most of the vision in her right eye. She went back to the US for two weeks, with our newborn, to get her eye treated. While they were gone, Audrey became ill, but no one knew what was wrong.

By the time they returned from the US, Audrey couldn't walk and was moaning in pain. We took her to the clinic again and were quickly referred to the hospital for admission. A spinal tap showed that Audrey had bacterial men-

ingitis. Then, the next day, an MRI showed that she had a three-centimeter solid mass behind her eyes. I broke down at this point. I called my parents in America, sobbing as I delivered the news.

This began a seven-week hospitalization for Audrey. Throughout that time we had someone constantly with her. She was on an IV for six of the seven weeks. I spent most nights on the hospital cot beside her bed in case her IV stopped working.

Physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue set in, yet Jesus walked with us through those dark weeks. We asked thousands of people to pray. Audrey went on to make a full recovery from the bacterial meningitis, and the solid mass simply disappeared. They had transferred her to a specialist university hospital to biopsy the mass, but by then there was nothing to biopsy. Months later, after four eye injections, Kate also regained around 95% of her vision in her right eye.

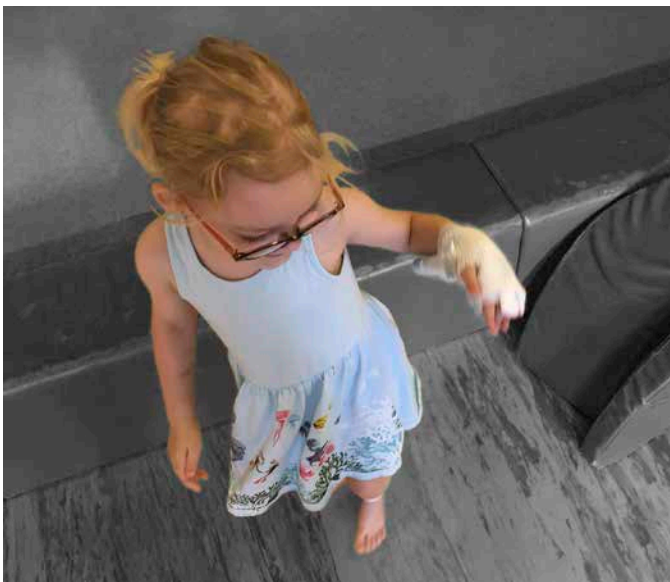
There are, of course, many more details, but a few years later, we have been amazed how God continues to use our experience of persevering—with the Spirit's strength—through that experience. We continue to have opportunities to minister to others who are going through, or who have been through, seasons of pain. There were no guarantees that the Lord would heal my wife and daughter at all, much less completely. Yet we asked in faith, knowing that he could do those things. Still, it wasn't the hope in temporary earthly blessings that helped us through that dark time. We were instead encouraged by the sure resurrection hope in scripture that we had previously embedded deep in our hearts.

Paul goes on to write in 2 Cor. 4:17-18, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." Often during that time of illness, the only thing that enabled us to trudge forward was the knowledge that at the end of this life, heaven and earth will be made new. Jesus will crush death, the final enemy, and will wipe away all tears. So we could press on.

And now we continue to press on, as long as the Lord gives us the ability to continue. Be comforted with the same comfort we had in our suffering: Jesus has come, he is with us, and he will come again! **JH**

Photo of Audrey submitted by author

Daniel Speer and his wife Kate are serving a two-year missionary internship for IM, Inc. (Japan Free Will Baptist Mission). They are from the US and currently live in Iruma-shi, Saitama, with their two girls, Audrey and Analeigh.



Church planting is alive and well

The 2019 CPI conference was the largest gathering yet

The 2019 CPI National Conference took place in November at the Tsumagoi Resort in Shizuoka. In the twenty-five-years of CPI, it was the largest gathering we've had. Nearly 500 adults gathered for gospel-centered teaching—as well as networking and encouragement; rest and renewal. In addition, over 220 kids participated in the kids' program that takes place throughout the conference. For many of these kids, this conference is the highlight of their year.

A particular encouragement was the sense of unity amongst participants. Japanese pastors, church members, and missionaries came from all over the world, and dozens of networks, organizations, and denominations were represented. There were missionaries who had recently arrived in Japan and missionaries who have served there for twice as long as those new missionaries have been alive! But two things united us—a shared passion for the gospel and a passion to propel movements of church planting throughout every nook and cranny of Japan.

As always, this conference was not simply a gathering to learn new tips, tricks, and strategies for church growth and church planting. It was a practical help for many, and there were good sessions and seminars that addressed the nuts and bolts of church planting. People were equipped through the presentation of various ministry networks as well as seminars on discipleship, evangelism, developing leadership, small groups, and church multiplication.

But the conference also brought new vision and ideas as well as encouragement. Through the main worship sessions, the training, and many gospel-focused seminars, those who attended were reminded of the centrality of

the gospel in their own lives, marriages, and families. This reminder refreshed many participants' souls. At least 10 percent of adults had an appointment with one of the consultants (these included psychologists and an educational consultant)—the appointment schedules had filled up even before the conference began.

We are following up with leaders, churches, and net-

works who want to collaborate to multiply churches throughout Japan. The CPI Leadership Team is recalibrating to deal with a growing interest in church multiplication. But the real impact is in the lives that were transformed. We are grateful that God sent his Spirit to teach and guide us all. Here

Two things united us—a shared passion for the gospel and a passion to propel movements of church planting throughout every nook and cranny of Japan.

are some changes participants expect to see because of the conference:

- “I feel that I have been reminded, not only of the gospel, but my need for the gospel every day.”
- “I will wake up in the morning with a renewed sense of joy rather than fear, anxiety, and guilt.”
- “I saw the need for vision and equipping our people more!”
- “I will focus more on sharpening our training and multiplication.”
- “Getting to network with other church planters and hearing about things that are working in Japan has widened and informed my understanding of possible ways to plant [churches].”

We look forward to seeing the ripple effects of the conference. One thing that we are sure of is that God's church is very much alive and vibrant in Japan. Join us in praying that the gospel will continue to take root in the lives of

all who came to the conference. Pray that as a result we will see many great movements of gospel-centered church multiplication in Japan. And look forward to the 2021 CPI National Conference that will be held again at the Tsumagoi Resort, November 8–13, 2021. Don't forget to block out those dates on your calendar! **JH**

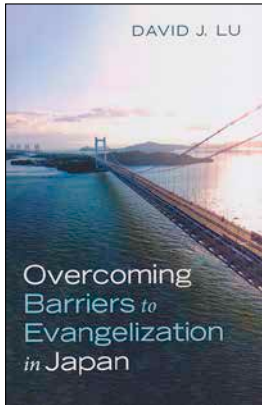
CPI 2019 photo submitted by author



Andy Rodriguez, CPI Leadership Team member, moved to Japan from the US in 2008 to help plant Mustard Seed Christian Church in Nagoya where he continues to serve as the pastor. He also serves as the Vice-President of Mustard Seed Network.

Overcoming Barriers to Evangelization in Japan

David Lu (Wipf & Stock, 2019). 128 pp.



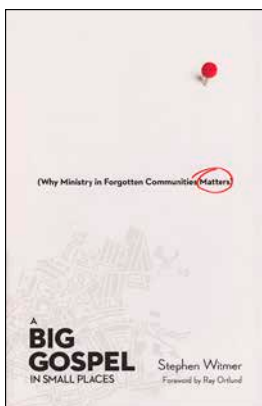
David Lu, professor emeritus of history and Japanese studies at Bucknell University, helps missionaries understand in a deeper way what is going on behind the scenes in Japan. He has observed all strata of Japanese society as an insider (he has known 17 prime ministers personally).

He looks at five barriers we face. The first is self. Lu reminds us of the dangerous attitude of pride. We must serve others by learning to listen to their needs,

immersing ourselves in Japanese society, and letting the Japanese become our teachers. The second barrier is Buddhism. After a quick overview of Buddhism in Japan, Lu gives practical ideas on how to approach Buddhists. The third barrier is Shintoism. Lu looks at some of the life-affirming aspects of Shinto and its festivals. He gives ministry ideas on how to lead Shinto believers to Christ. The fourth barrier that Lu looks at is “seeking perfection without God” or humanism. “The greatest barrier may be found in the attitude of self-reliance nurtured by Confucianism” (p. 58). He has helpful ideas on how to reach out to “these good people.” The fifth barrier is “invisible proscription.” While there is now freedom of religion in Japan, he looks at subtle roadblocks against Christianity. The most effective response to this is to pray.

The final two chapters look at solutions: walking with Christ and learning from business practices, where he discusses church planting and how to organize teams for church planting. The epilogue looks at factors of a “good and faithful church planter.” This is a book that missionaries to Japan should read and discuss with their colleagues. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 4 of 5 stars ★★★★★☆



A Big Gospel in Small Places: Why Ministry in Forgotten Communities Matters

Stephen Witmer (InterVarsity Press, 2019). 204 pp.

Stephen Witmer, pastor of a church in Pepperell, Massachusetts (a town of 12,000), reminds us that Jesus loves small, insig-

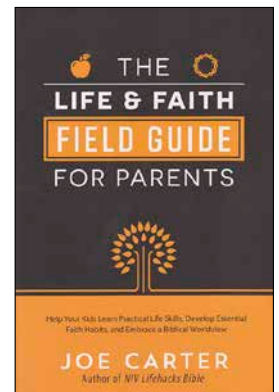
nificant places. Witmer first looks at how small places are both better and worse than we think. He then develops a theological vision for ministry and shows how to minister fruitfully in small places. Finally, Witmer address the question: Should I minister in a small place? He gently pushes back against the trend to prioritize big-place ministry. He says, “It’s best to leave it to God to prioritize the city, suburbs, or countryside in each individual life” (p. 179). He concludes by telling us to “Pray big, trust God, work hard.” “At the heart of every successful ministry, in communities of every conceivable size, is love: love for Christ and for the places he has called us” (p. 183). We must be those who gladly give our lives to the place God calls us. Witmer will challenge you to think deeply. Every missionary should read this book. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

The Life & Faith Field Guide for Parents: Help Your Kids Learn Practical Life Skills, Develop Essential Faith Habits, and Embrace a Biblical Worldview

Joe Carter (Harvest House Publishers, 2019). 296 pp.

Joe Carter, a journalist and an editor for the Gospel Coalition, has written a very practical book for those who “want to shape the character and worldview of a child or teenager” (p. 13). The book looks at 50 skills and habits that are core skills for developing a Christian character. Part 1 looks at 13 skills for Bible engagement, and Part 2 deals with four skills for interacting with God (how to pray, how to be obedient to God, how to overcome sin, and how to develop trust in God). Other parts look at skills for interacting with other people, discernment and decision-making, learning, and managing conflict. The final section has four skills for evangelism. Each chapter ends with tips for training children. Parents, pastors, and teachers will find much help in this practical book. **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.

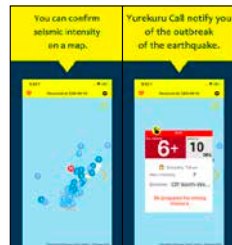
Digitally equipped for earthquakes

Here are three emergency smartphone apps

This is a review of three apps for smartphones that can help with disaster alerts (QR codes are included for easy download on iOS or Android devices).

Yurekuru Call

Probably the most popular app I know, Yurekuru Call is reliable and straightforward. It does all the things you want an earthquake app to do: it alerts you before a quake (generally 10–15 seconds), shows you the epicenter, and indicates the affected areas. This app also provides helpful instructional notes and visuals on topics concerning disaster prevention and what to do in various situations. It offers some good customization as well. My favorite feature is being able to select the level of seismic activity I want to be alerted about. My threshold for concern in earthquakes is around level four. Since earthquakes up to level four are regular occurrences, I don't want to be unnecessarily freaked out by numerous alarms from my disaster app. That's not good for my health! You can also set specific locations to watch, making this a good tool for those outside of Japan who care about you and want to be better informed when disaster strikes. The basic Yurekuru app is free. A monthly subscription removes ads and unlocks some extra features, but, in my opinion, it is not worth it as the core functions of the app are free. Most of this app is available in English.



iOS



Android

Disaster Preparedness Tokyo App

Don't be put off by this app's name if you don't live in Tokyo—everyone can benefit. It's a fantastic resource for individuals and families to make sure you are trained to deal with disasters. The app sends notifications about disasters, but it is primarily designed to teach and equip by providing knowledge and stress inoculation. It has three modes: Disaster Preparedness Tokyo mode teaches about prevention and disaster response; Disaster Readiness Guide mode offers daily prevention measures; and Disaster mode includes features for safety confirmation and a disaster map. This last mode can be used during an actual disaster.

The best part of this app is that it can be used and enjoyed as a family. Do you have a practiced plan for when disaster hits? This



iOS



Android



app makes that preparation fun! The cute little mascot rhino, Bōsai, guides you through engaging and interesting activities, quizzes, simulations, and more. It is free and has a tablet version too, which makes training the family easier. It is also completely available in Japanese, English, Korean, and traditional and simplified Chinese.

Pocket Shelter (Pokéchez)

Like the apps above, Pocket Shelter offers alerts and earthquake details, but it also offers offline maps. Bottlenecks in data networks, electricity, and communication during disasters can significantly restrict how you can use your phone when you need it most. With the offline maps feature of this app, you can see a map of your area without needing internet access. The map shows critical locations like evacuation zones, hospitals, earthquake-resistant structures, shelters, and water stations. Although we should all be aware of these things, it is good to have a safety net. This app offers a navigation function like Google Maps too. (This map can also be used for sightseeing, making it a great app if you have guests or teams visiting and want to knock out both emergency precautions and general navigation in one shot.) The map includes public transit spots, parks, restaurants, stores, and other points of interest. This app is free with no paid content. It is also completely available in Japanese, English, Korean, and traditional and simplified Chinese.



iOS



Android

I have just scratched the surface in terms of the functionalities of these three apps. You can learn more about them by spending time exploring them. I encourage you to talk with your friends and those in your networks about the apps they use and share these three apps with them. As believers, we should be ready for disaster so we can best minister to those around us in time of need. We have seen that disasters open people's hearts to the gospel, so the better prepared we are, the better chance people can hear and receive the good news. **JH**



Daniel Rice and his wife Tara (US) serve in Tokyo with IMB (SBC). They produce a YouTube channel sharing about life and ministry: <https://youtube.com/TheRicesInJapan>

Praying in context

“The devil is not terribly frightened of our human efforts and credentials. But he knows his kingdom will be damaged when we begin to lift up our hearts to God.” Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle

While reading 2 Kings 19 recently in my morning devotions, I was reminded that Hezekiah’s prayer is a good example of praying in context. His prayer goes like this:

¹⁴Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. ¹⁵Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. ¹⁷Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated the nations and their lands ¹⁸and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. ¹⁹Now, O LORD our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God.” (NASB).

Verse 14 shows Hezekiah creating the proper setting for prayer. He went to the temple (the house of the Lord). He was in the right place—before God. And he was prepared to talk with God about the letter from Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, which he spread before the Lord, not because God was ignorant of its contents but to show that he was giving everything to God in an act of reliance. Do we show by how we pray that we are really giving it all to God?

Hezekiah then started his prayer by worshiping God for who He is—Israel’s God, the One who chose to dwell in the Holy of Holies (“above the cherubim”), the true Ruler of all the earth and the Creator of heaven and earth. He is not a mere local god like Sennacherib thought (cf. 18:33–35). When we come to God in prayer, we must be sure of whom it is we are praying to. Because of His supremacy, we can leave everything in His able hands. Prayer is really our “declaration of dependence” on Him.

Hezekiah then made his first request—that God would hear and see what Sennacherib was doing (v.16). Even in his request, he acknowledged that God is the “living God.” In prayer, we bring God our requests, but we also remember who He is. Any affront or reproach to God should be taken as a reproach to his infinite dignity.

Of course, Hezekiah knew what Sennacherib and the Assyrian army had done to other countries (v.17). He was not blindly asking for

God’s help. But because all was in the hands of almighty God, he knew that there was hope for the future, no matter how bad things looked at present. He had a proper view of things, a God-based view that kept its focus on God in spite of how things seemed.

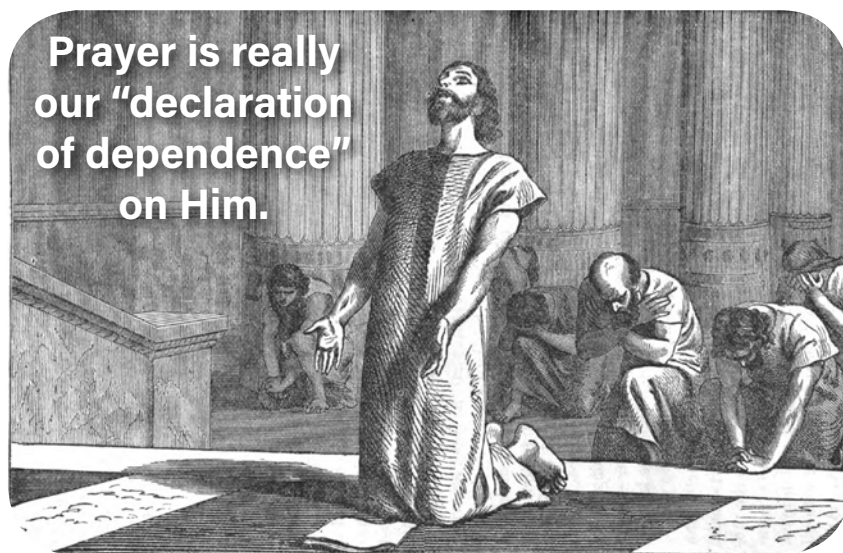
In verse 18, Hezekiah acknowledged that the gods of the countries overrun by Assyria were not really gods at all. They were just man-made statues of wood and stone that could be destroyed. And by implication, he was also saying that God is truly God who cannot be destroyed by mere men—no matter how strong they are. He had led the Israelites out of Egypt. He had destroyed the Canaanites before them. He was the same God and thus completely dependable in this situation, no matter how hopeless it appeared at the time.

Hezekiah then ended his prayer with a plea for God to intervene. But this was not a selfish prayer. The king was concerned for God’s reputation (v.19). He wanted all the kingdoms of the earth to know that God alone was “the LORD our God.”

How do we pray? Do we acknowledge who God is every time we pray? Are we concerned with our selfish desires, or for God and how He is seen by others? We need to be realistic about the situation before us, but we also need an unwavering trust in God. Let’s praise Him for who He is and rely completely on Him. Only He is worthy! **JH**



Ken Reddington, an MK, returned to Japan from the US as a church-planting missionary in 1978. He is on the Servant-Leader Team of the Prayer Summit for Western Japan, and secretary for the Kochi Citywide Pastors Group.

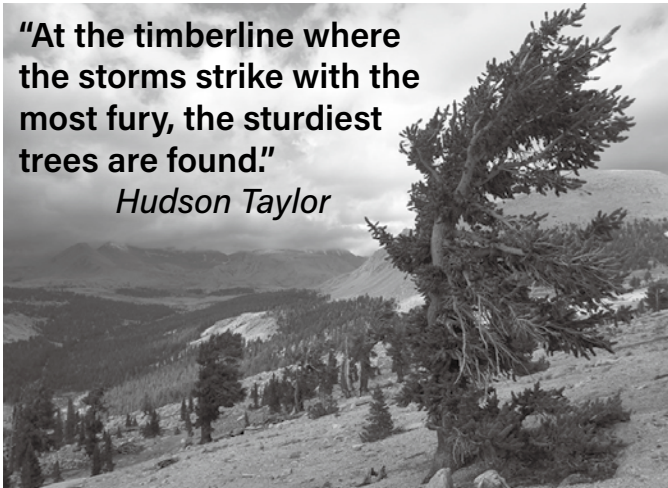


Theology of suffering in missions

Historically, missionaries' stories have inspired us. Our missionary heroes seemed to have had the ability to overcome hardships and difficulties and go on to do great things for God. It makes one wonder what was going on behind the scenes. The difference between then and now lies in a theology of suffering. This article will attempt to define this theology and show how an understanding of suffering didn't keep our heroes from doing great things for God.

"At the timberline where the storms strike with the most fury, the sturdiest trees are found!"

Hudson Taylor



1. Suffering is part of God's will. An example of this is William Carey, known as the father of modern missions. Carey was a translator as well as an educator. He said, "When I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God . . . my faith . . . would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph."¹ In spite of professional and personal tragedy, Carey went on to translate the Bible into Hindi and started schools for the poor because he believed that God would work his will in spite of suffering. Today, a college Carey established in India in 1818 trains over 2,500 students in theology and education.²

2. Suffering has purpose. This truth is seen in the life of Jim Elliot. Elliot and four other men felt called by God to witness in Ecuador to a tribe notorious for their revenge killing. At their first face-to-face meeting with tribe members, Elliot and his team were murdered. Two relatives of these men later returned to the area and led the tribe to Christ. This dramatic story "shaped generations of evangelical missionaries even as it prompted changes in their work."³ Steve Saint, son of one of Elliot's colleagues, believes this "shows that ordinary people can serve extraordinary purposes."⁴ It is also believed that "Christian conversion prevented self-extinction [of the tribe]."⁵ Elliot would have agreed that suffering had purpose, as seen in his famous quote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."⁶

3. Suffering is a tool God uses to develop character.

Amy Carmichael was an Irish missionary who served in India for fifty-five years and spent the last twenty years of her life bedridden. She was able to rescue over a thousand children from temple prostitution. In spite of her suffering, she continued her ministry, saying, "Let us not be surprised when we have to face difficulties. When the wind blows hard on a tree, the roots stretch and grow the stronger. Let it be so with us. Let us not be weaklings, yielding to every wind that blows, but strong in spirit to resist."⁷

4. Obeying God's call can lead to suffering. Missionary and Olympic medalist Eric Liddell understood this well. He went to China as a missionary, refusing to leave during World War 2.⁸ He eventually died in a prison camp. His ability to weather suffering was summarized in this quote: "Obedience to God's will is the secret of spiritual knowledge and insight. It is not willingness to know, but willingness to DO (obey) God's will that brings certainty."⁹ His obedience even when suffering continues to inspire and challenge us.

Missionary heroes of the past overcame difficulties and went on to do great things for God. They overcame because of what was going on behind the scenes. They had a theology of suffering. Developing our own theology of suffering is a powerful tool, not only to survive the suffering we encounter in our mission work, but also to produce lasting fruit. **JH**

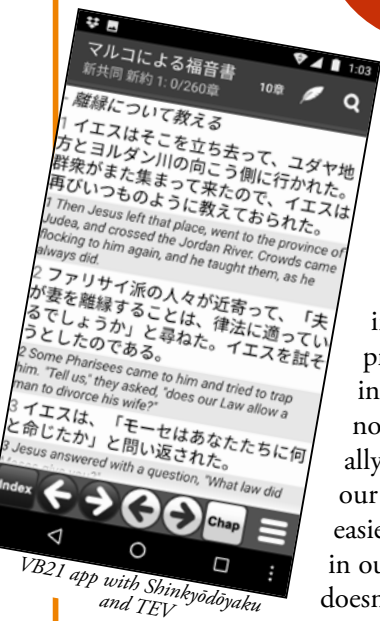
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Using the Japanese Bible devotionally

Incorporating the Japanese Bible into your devotions can be beneficial for both language learning and hearing God speak



VB21 app with Shinkyōdōyaku and TEV

Many missionaries minister in contexts that require them to prepare Bible studies and sermons in Japanese. But when it comes to nourishing our own souls, it is usually best to read the Bible mainly in our mother tongue, as it is generally easier to hear God speak to our hearts in our own language. However, that doesn't mean that there is no place for the Japanese Bible in our devotional

activities. Reading the Bible in Japanese has at least two benefits: it can provide new insights and it slows us down.

New insights

Japanese Bibles can reveal things that aren't obvious in English translations (much of the information in this article is equally applicable to other languages besides English). For example, English is quite "flat" when it comes to expressing hierarchical relationships, whereas Japanese has three levels of politeness that express the relationship between speakers. Japanese Bibles consistently use honorific *keigo* when talking about God, which brings out a sense of his dignity, honour, and loftiness. Also, the disciples use *keigo* when talking to Jesus, emphasizing the honour in which they hold him.

Another example of an insight that the Japanese versions bring out is whether "you" refers to one person or more than one person. For example, in John 1:51, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (ESV). Since this statement follows a conversation with Nathanael, the "you" in this verse might be taken to refer to him. But in Japanese it is clear that Jesus is addressing all his disciples since he says "あなたがた" (most English versions have a footnote to this effect).

Finally, it can be interesting to note places where a Japanese translation differs from the English one. There are various reasons for these differences: the choice of one textual variant in the ancient manuscripts over another, translation philosophies, interpretative decisions made by the translators, and cultural relevance to the target audience. There are variations amongst English translations for just the same reasons.

Reading slower to pick up more

Reading in a second language forces us to read more slowly and carefully. This can be good when reading a short passage for devotional purposes since it may cause us to notice nuances and details that we might have missed if reading faster.

Ideas for devotions

You can incorporate the Japanese Bible into your devotional time to different degrees depending on your reading ability. If you're reading a short passage and your reading skills are up to it, you could read the whole passage in Japanese after reading it in English. If you find reading Japanese more of a challenge, you could just pick one or two verses that particularly speak to you and try reading them in Japanese. Or if you're just starting out, try looking for a few *kanji* that you recognize in a verse.

Here are some resources that might help you:

Bilingual Bibles

Word of Life Press has produced some bilingual Bibles.^{1,2} They are a bit hefty to carry around but are good if you just want to read them at home. Or you can create an electronic bilingual Bible by displaying your preferred English translation side by side with a Japanese translation (Accordance mobile app has *Shinkyōdōyaku* and *Shinkaiyaku 2017*; Olive Tree's Bible Study app has *Shinkyōdōyaku*; You Version's the Bible app, has *Shinkyōdōyaku*, *Living Bible*, and *Kōgoyaku*—all for free). Electronic versions have the advantage that you can look up unfamiliar words just by touching them (with the exception of You Version).

Audio Bibles

There are a couple of free audio Bibles available in Japanese, which you can listen to while following the text and thereby strengthen connections between reading and listening. The You Version app has audio versions for the *Living Bible* and *Kōgoyaku*, which can be streamed but not downloaded. Another free app, called Kiku Dorama Seisho (聴くドラマ聖書), has the full text of *Shinkaiyaku 2017* along with a dramatized audio version that can be streamed or downloaded. This is the same app mentioned on page six of this issue. It is very well done and is definitely worth checking out.

Try experimenting with different ways of incorporating the Japanese Bible into your devotional time and see what works best for you. **JH**

1. Japanese-English Bilingual Bible/NIV 2nd edition (Word of Life Press Ministries; 2014).
2. Japanese-English Bilingual Bible 2017/ESV (Word of Life Press Ministries; 2019).



Simon Pleasants works as an editor in the Tokyo office of a scientific publishing company and is the executive editor of Japan Harvest. Originally from Wales, he moved to Australia in 1988.

Prayer letter critique

Are there gaps in what you tell your prayer supporters?

Prayer letters are standard fare for the missionary's life. As Daniel Rice pointed out in the Winter 2020 issue of *Japan Harvest* (p. 31), missionaries have written newsletters since the Apostle Paul's time. Of course, you can choose multiple ways to keep up with people these days, but let's think about the basic prayer letter.

We know that it is important to stay in touch with supporters we don't see often, but it can become a burden and it's easy to slip into bad habits. I think the priority is to find a balance between quality content and frequency. That will be different for every missionary unit as each of our situations and styles are unique. But it's vital to find a good rhythm: one that works for you and your support base.

Not long ago I came across a well-considered critique of the content of missionary prayer letters.¹ The writer observes concerning trends: missionary prayer letters these days mostly contain reports on a missionary's social activities plus pleas for finances. Even though the critique is ten years old, it raises potential concerns.

The writer (a missionary supporter, not a missionary) suggested other ideas for the content of a prayer letter:

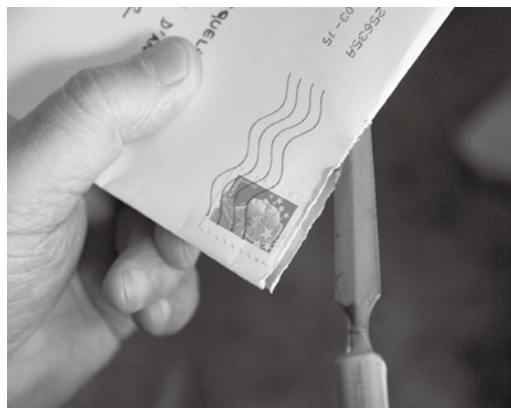
- Share details about specific situations, people groups, or events (not generalities).
- Report answers to prayer.

- Outline ministry plans.
- Relate family and personal needs and problems about which people can pray.
- Explain how financial and ministry challenges are being handled and processed.

He went on to observe that the best prayer letters are thoughtful and not written in a hurry. Good prayer letters are attractive, yet personal; provoke readers to thoughtfulness; and provide interactive opportunities. He also suggested expressing a "Pauline mindset" by showing concern for those in the church/es back home.

One of the concluding sentences in the article hits hard: "Your letters and communication style will largely determine the level of support and care you receive from those who committed themselves to stand with you."

Is it time to re-evaluate your communication with supporters, whatever forms that takes? Where are the gaps? Can you get some honest feedback from one or more of your supporters to help you improve your communication? **JH**



1. Allan G. Hedberg, "Prayer Letters to the Home Team," *Mission Nexus*, <https://missionexus.org/prayer-letters-to-the-home-team/> (April 1, 2010).

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"You are the God who sees me"

Let's not forget the people who support us as we work in Japan

Hagar, slave of Sarai, "gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me. That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi'" (Genesis 16:13–14, NIV). Hagar found herself in a difficult situation and found God speaking to her, and the title for this article was her answer. God not only sees us but also cares for us.

Over 40 years ago, I set out to come to Japan on the invitation of a Japanese church. The church in Japan did not have the same background as the church I grew up in. Just before I left for Japan, I was told that my childhood church would not help me. But I knew God had opened this door, so I went to Japan anyway. In those days God gave a promise: "Follow my ways, and I will be with you."

For my first few years, a retired missionary couple helped me, and then I was on my own until the door opened for me to be supported by another church back home. To do this efficiently, a small group in the church is responsible for sending out the "newsletter," receiving funds and sending them on to Japan, keeping the address list of the supporters up-to-date, and praying and keeping in touch with me on a regular basis. When I am going back to report about the ministry here in Japan they help and arrange meetings.

Through this I learned a lot about the economy of Christ because he called people to partner with me not only in finances but most of all in prayer and sometimes, encouragement through letters and emails.

I always knew, though, that there were people praying for me and the people I love and am privileged to work with. The strongest supporter I ever had was my mother. Father died when I was nine years old; life was not very easy, but my mother was always giving and supporting missionaries and their work. In Switzerland we had many "travelling through" missionaries, evangelists, and preachers visiting our home. Mother always had something to give. One needed a bed to sleep in, so I slept on the floor in the living room. Another had holes in his shoes; Mother bought a new pair. Still another had eaten no food for two days. He sat at the table, and Mother served. "How did you know?" he said. "This is my favorite food!"

She answered, "Well, in the store Jesus told me to buy this piece of meat." In the store she hadn't known this visitor would be stopping by. When a missionary in India needed financial help, Mother somehow always found some money to give.

Now her "little girl" was in Japan. Every week a letter arrived, always with the same ending: "your day and night praying mother." She did, but she also made sure that the people she knew kept on praying for her girl. Sometimes Mother would even ask people, "Have you sent some money lately?" I only found out about this last part some years after her promotion to heaven.

A dear friend in her nineties raised four children and now lives surrounded by grandchildren up to the fourth generation. She doesn't miss a day to pray and to think about the work in Japan and me. All her children know the latest information about it, and I get much information about her family as well. And then there is the family who was once considering serving in Japan but decided to stay back home as they could help better this way. I can't even begin to count the ways they've helped, and their house is always open to me.

So I want to draw attention to the millions of "behind the scenes" people we seldom hear about or who don't get mentioned because many things are calculated and organized and measured like the ways of the world. Maybe it would be a good idea to stop for a moment and think about the many people who pray and give like the few I mentioned. Give praise to our wonderful and powerful God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit for his faithfulness and grace through the years. And don't forget to bless the people "behind your scene." **JH**

***Ruth Ester Waehrer**, born and raised in Switzerland, has lived in Japan for over 40 years. The first few she spent in Yokohama then in Toyama Prefecture in different locations. Since 2005, she has lived in Uozu.*



The author and her mother (photo submitted by author)

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