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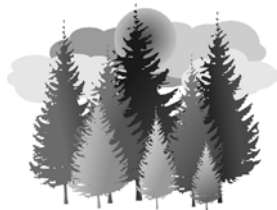
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August

Karuizawa Union Church Summer Conference

August 7-12, 2020*

*Check the latest information at karuizawaunionchurch.org

October

WIM Fall Day of Prayer

October 8, 2020

Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo



January

WIM Winter Day of Prayer

January 19, 2021

Venue TBD



February

JEMA Connect

February 15-17, 2021

Ochanomizu Christian Center, Tokyo

March

WIM Annual Spring Retreat

March 3-5, 2021

Okutama Fukuin no Ie



WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 6, 2021

Venue TBD

Hokkaido Christian Women's Fellowship Day Retreat

March 8, 2021

Venue TBD

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

jema.org

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



Japan Harvest

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Japan Harvest Staff

Executive Editor: Simon Pleasants

Managing Editor: Wendy Marshall (wmarshall@jema.org)

Associate Editor: Rachel Hughes

Editorial Assistants: Elena Kua, Jackie Peveto, Ariane Peveto, Jenn Bello

News Editor: Peter Swan

Layout Designer/Production Editor: Karen Ellrick

Advertising Director: Atsuko Tateishi

Fact Checker: Sara Wolsey

Proofreader: Ken Reddington

Printer: Printpac

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JEMA Administrative Assistants (part-time):

Atsuko Tateishi, Mayumi Penner, Michiru Pleasants, Grace Koshino, Ai Nightingale

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The editors welcome unsolicited articles. Non-JEMA members are also welcome to write.

Writer's guidelines are available at: japanharvest.org/submissions

Submission Deadlines

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Winter issue: August 30

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JEMA

2-1 Kanda Surugadai

Chiyoda Ku, Tokyo 101-0062

Tel: 03-3295-1949 Fax: 03-3295-1354

Email: jema-info@jema.org

Website: jema.org

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Japan Harvest publishes articles in either US English or Commonwealth English, depending upon the author's primary English background.

Ministering through education

My husband is a high school teacher, and his call to mission came in the form of a desire to minister to missionary kids. But even though we came to Japan in 2000, it wasn't until August 2005 that he stepped onto a school campus in Japan as a teacher. I remember that first week he came home with a glow on his face and said, "This is where I'm supposed to be." It was such an encouragement to us both. Since that time he has blessed many students, families, and colleagues through his ministry as a teacher.

Teaching is a calling, and one that some are especially gifted to do. Those of us who aren't gifted in that way often look on in awe. After my short stints as a homeschool teacher and English teacher, I'm so thankful for the people God has gifted as teachers! Even as I write this, in the next room my husband is doing a great job helping our 11th grade son with physics. The school is working via distance learning with the COVID-19 crisis in full swing. So, in this issue, it's been a pleasure to focus on education and those ministering in that way.

This issue reflects several different ways people minister through education in Japan. We have articles about English teaching—how it can create a safe space in a neighbourhood and provide ways to connect—and a church that has expanded its small group system to include English groups.

We have people who have written about other education-related activities going on in churches. We hear about a theological school that operates in local churches around the country and an international church in Osaka that organised a trip to Israel. And we also have articles about three main ways missionary kids are educated in Japan: international schools, Japanese schools, and homeschooling. These are valuable articles for those who are considering what the future might hold for their own children.

If you browse through old issues of Japan Harvest, you'll find we've published many articles on this theme over the years. One article that particularly comes to mind is from 2016 by Paul Tsuchido Shew about ministering through Japanese Christian schools and universities (Paul is a chaplain at Aoyama Gakuin).¹ Simon Pleasants often writes about how we can keep growing in our understanding of Japan in our "Language and Culture" column. In 2018 Peter Dallman encouraged us to be life-long learners.² Also, in our last issue (Spring 2020), Andy Rodriguez wrote about 25 years of CPI (Church Planting Institute). Indeed, continuing to engage in professional development is a key component to remaining on the mission field.

Current events

In 2020 current events have changed rapidly and in directions that we could not have predicted at the start of the year. Whatever I write about them will soon be outdated, so it's good to remind ourselves that God remains unchanged.

Nathan Snow, JEMA president, encouraged us as a JEMA community on April 4 with an email: "My prayer for each of you is that you will experience the undergirding and sustaining peace of God, and that he will pour out his wisdom liberally, as he promises to all who ask . . . May God continue to pour out his grace, mercy, and wisdom upon us, and may this even be a trigger for a spiritual awakening in Japan like no other in its history!"

We do not know (and never have known) what the future holds, but we can hold firm to God's promises. I echo Nathan's thoughts: May God's peace be with you all.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Autumn 2020: Strength in Weakness

Winter 2021: Challenging Issues (submission deadline August 30)

Spring 2021: Pastoral Care (submission deadline November 30)

Summer 2021: Japanese mindset (submission deadline Feb 28)

1. Paul Tsuchido Shew, "Reaching the 99% through Christian education," Japan Harvest Vol 67, No. 3 (Summer 2016): 16-17. Online version: <https://www.japanharvest.org/reaching-the-99-through-christian-education/>

2. Peter Dallman, "Are you a lifelong learner?" Japan Harvest Vol 69, No. 4 (Autumn 2018): 16-17. Online version: <https://www.japanharvest.org/are-you-a-lifelong-learner/>

BibleProject Understanding the structure of the Bible with illustrations

Christian Shimbun, February 9, 2020
Translated by Grace Koshino

As many youth turn to online videos to learn about the world and 5G wireless technology is increasingly popular, an online video series called BibleProject has been created to reach the younger generation.

Each book of the Old and New Testament is stylishly explained with solid Bible teaching through a series of YouTube videos. In the overview of each book, pictures and graphics are displayed as the narrator takes the viewer through the Bible. The viewer can follow the events of the Bible through the visuals. The overview of the book and its context is kept in mind throughout the video, and each section is put together to create one final overarching illustration as each video closes. This allows the viewer to see how each of the chapters link to each other and to un-

derstand the bigger picture. Each video is seven to eight minutes long.

Taking Psalms as an example, the narrator explains that the book has a “unique design and message . . . which (the reader) won’t notice unless it is read from beginning to end.” He then explains that it can be divided up into five sections, and that Psalm 1, which focuses on the Torah (the five books of Moses), and Psalm 2, which describes the Messianic King, serve as a foundation for the rest of the psalms. The video also points out that the first three sections of the Psalms contain many poems of lament, whereas the fourth and fifth sections have more poems of praise. The video explains that this shift from lament to praise tells us “not to ignore the pain in our lives,” but also that “biblical faith is forward-looking, looking to the promise of God’s future messianic kingdom.”

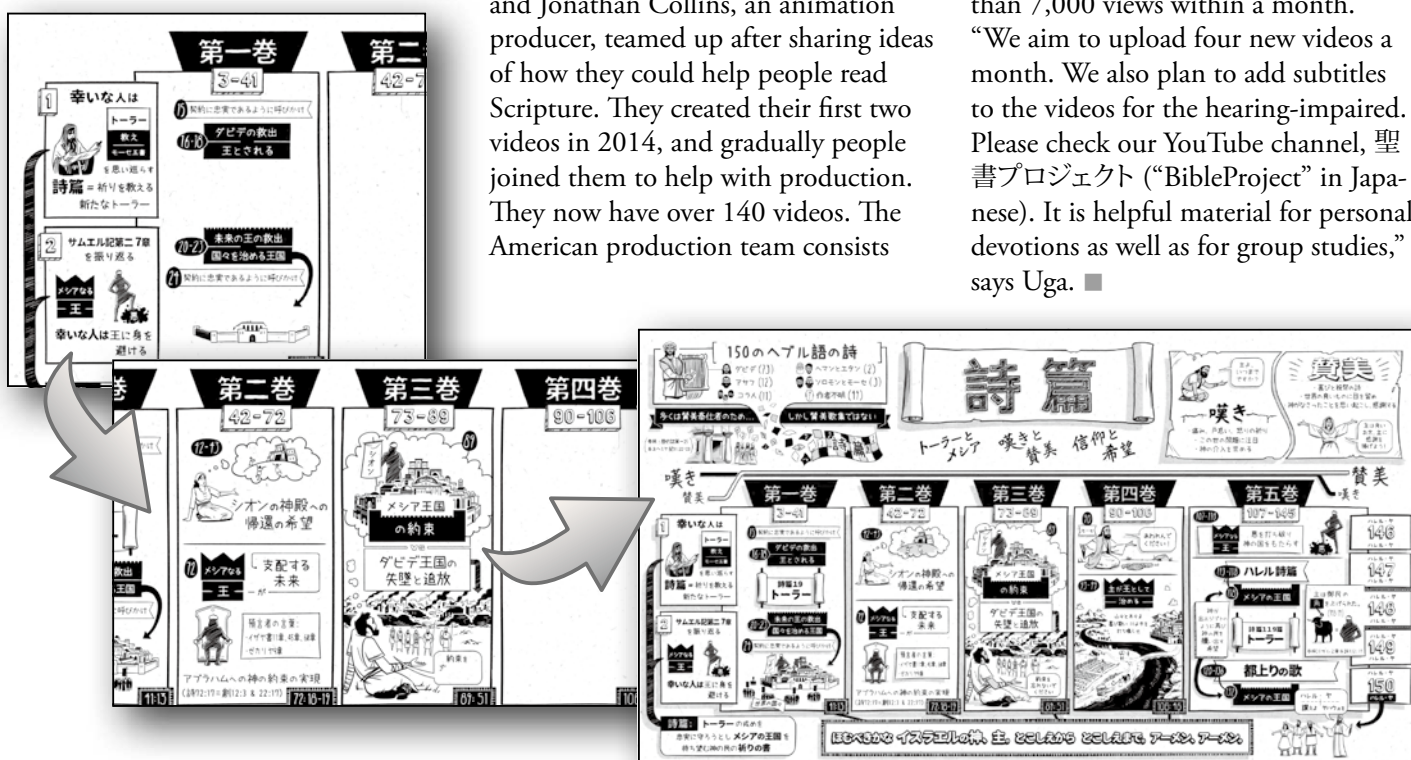
BibleProject originated in America (bibleproject.com) and was created with the mission to “help people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus.” University friends Timothy Mackie, a Bible scholar, and Jonathan Collins, an animation producer, teamed up after sharing ideas of how they could help people read Scripture. They created their first two videos in 2014, and gradually people joined them to help with production. They now have over 140 videos. The American production team consists

of theologians, animators, illustrators, web designers, and marketers.

Project manager for the Japanese team, Hishō Uga, took an interest in BibleProject when he came across it four years ago and was eager to create the Japanese version. Production started last year, with the help of the Grace & Mercy Foundation.

Instead of simply adding subtitles, the Japanese version replaced all of the text in each animation. A Japanese team of illustrators, animators, narrators, translators, and staff from a student outreach group came together to produce the Japanese videos. “The script is built on solid biblical teaching, yet the language is simple. Due to the differences in the English and Japanese grammar, the illustrations and animations had to be readjusted and the choice of words and nuances had to be changed to be understandable for Japanese viewers,” Uga explained. The Japanese version can be followed smoothly thanks to the team’s efforts.

Uga and his team began to put Japanese videos online just before Christmas 2019. Some videos gathered more than 7,000 views within a month. “We aim to upload four new videos a month. We also plan to add subtitles to the videos for the hearing-impaired. Please check our YouTube channel, 聖書プロジェクト (“BibleProject” in Japanese). It is helpful material for personal devotions as well as for group studies,” says Uga. ■



West 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!"

Table tennis mission for children

*Christian Shimbun, December 8, 2019
Translated by Tomoko Kato*

Table tennis is a very accessible sport—you just need a table and a small space. Well-known players such as Ai Fukuhara (“Ai-chan”;

“We started with two children from Christian homes, but some junior high students from school clubs started joining us because they liked the atmosphere here,” explains evangelist Katsutoshi Mineguchi, their youth leader. The club’s membership currently includes mostly students from non-Christian homes.

We have coached some advanced children, though the skill level of our

Mineguchi thinks “we’re just at the starting line of a unified table tennis ministry. More churches should start ping-pong evangelism.”

Amongst competitive sports, table tennis boasts the highest number of people who play at least once a year. The number of primary school children registered with the Japan Table Tennis Association has increased 110%. Moreover, four Japanese players are ranked among the top ten players in the world. The T League, the premier table tennis league of Japan, also started in 2018. We look forward to Japan’s athletes getting medals in the next Olympics.

On the other hand, there are many “table tennis refugees” who cannot find a space to play at their local gyms. We know that many local churches already have table tennis tables, pastors with experience playing table tennis, and church members who like to play. These churches should be able to contribute to the local community using table tennis.

Mineguchi pointed out some advantages of table tennis—no age limit and the strong relationships that can develop between coach and players. He said:

Our super-aging society is a big concern nowadays, but the elderly can beat youngsters in table tennis. Childless churches may be able to attract some young people. Besides, table tennis is played in one-on-one matches, and the number of learners in group lessons is rather small. This makes it relatively easy to develop relationships with members, which naturally leads to chances to share the gospel and to train them as disciples.

The size of the church doesn’t matter—all that is needed is space for a table. I hope more churches will take on the challenge of table tennis evangelism as we did. We would like to broaden this ministry and have deeper exchanges with other churches. ■



now retired), Mima Itō, and Tomokazu Harimoto have greatly helped to increase the sport’s popularity among Japanese youth.

Tokyo Lighthouse Church (Japan Church of God; Rev. Eriya Yatsuzuka) started Lighthouse Table Tennis Club in 2015. It runs from 4:30 to 6 p.m., Tuesday to Friday. Even though we visited the club outside its operating hours, some local junior high school students were still enjoying singles and doubles matches. For these young table tennis lovers, playing at church on the way back from school seemed to be a part of their lives.

The club currently has 11 members, and more are on the waiting list.

coaches wasn’t that high. Coaches at professional table tennis schools can direct the ball to the right spots on the table, but we did not have such skill. So we followed some advice and bought a ball dispenser, and the results have been improving little by little over the past four years. Some members have reached high ranks at local matches.

Two local junior high students have been baptized, and two others have decided to believe in God. Also, a man baptized at our church has been training to be a coach.

Last September, the club held their first exchange match with Hongodai Christ Church, Kokubunji Baptist Church, and some other churches.

Pursuing a deeper knowledge of God

By Daisuke Okada

Bringing theological education to the local church

Few doubt the importance of education. You can live without any education, but the more you know the better and fuller your life can be. This is why most governments in the world require education for children. This is why most families in developed countries send their children to high school. This is why companies recruit people with higher education. Yet, students benefit, not only from acquiring greater knowledge through education, but also from gaining valuable life skills through the rigors of studying. They become enriched as individuals.

The benefits of education are especially true for Christians. We must understand that we cannot worship God if we do not know him. As one preacher expressed, “Depth in the Word produces height in worship, length in ministry, and breadth in outreach.” However, many believers in Japan have not received systematic teaching of the Word of God. It is common for Christians to know little beyond the fundamentals of the gospel, thus their lives may tend to be guided by common sense and worldly wisdom. The lack of deep and true knowledge of God and his Word can only generate a shallow and superficial Christian life. We cannot practice what we do not know. We cannot proclaim what we do not understand. We cannot fully live the new life God has blessed us with, unless we know him and his truth well.

Japan Bible Academy (JBA) exists to educate believers to know their Lord better and to train men to teach and preach his truth to others around them. JBA offers two curriculums: Lay Leadership Track (LLT) and Expositors Track. LLT is similar to lower division Bible degree courses with classes like

Introduction to Hermeneutics, Systematic Theology, OT and NT Surveys, as well as several on practical Christian living. Classes are taught with a significant amount of practical applications so that the students not only learn the truth but also are challenged with the truth in their own lives. We want to educate our students to be better people because of what they learn. The LTT course consists of 18 classes; each class is taught in a single weekend with 15 hours of lecture time, so that students can participate without taking time off from work. A teaching weekend is held every two to three months at each location.

Lay-level training

JBA believes in the priority of the local church, since Christ builds his church and not a theological institution. Therefore, all LLT classes take place in the context of the local church, under the watchful care and discipleship of the pastor(s). For many churches in Japan, pastors are not able

to provide systematic teaching of the Bible to their congregation because of the pastor’s heavy responsibilities. JBA desires to come alongside the local church to provide theological training, while pastors continue to disciple their congregation in day-to-day ministry and life. Pastors benefit by learning alongside students from their congregation, students can remain in their own church context as they learn and grow, and the church itself also greatly benefits. In order to accomplish this, JBA asks like-minded churches to host classes at their facility, and JBA teachers travel there to teach.

Since its inception in 2013, JBA teachers have trained close to 100 students in seven locations throughout Japan (see map on this page). The students have been excited about the intense study of the Word, and their desire to know the Lord and live out the truth has been contagious. They share what they have learned in small groups, their personal devotions are enriched, and they become more active in serving the Lord. This in turn frees up the pastors from many miscellaneous ministry duties in order to focus more on their own study of the Word. Then, as they nurture their own souls, they are able to preach what they have studied. There is great benefit to the local church as a result.

Paul has clearly laid out the process of how the church is to grow. He writes, [Christ] “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the



stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–13 ESV). The people mentioned here that Christ gave to the church have one thing in common: they all have speaking gifts to communicate the truth of God. They are to use their gifts to equip the saints for the work of ministry, so that the church grows to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. If this is not happening in the church, the believers will continue to remain as children, “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). True believers must be active ministers to each another, and for each one to be an effective member of Christ’s body, they must continue to grow in the knowledge of God. JBA’s desire is to help local churches to kick-start this alongside local pastors.

Ministry-level training

However, the true desire and the goal of JBA’s training ministry does not stop at lay-level training. We desire to train men for teaching and preaching ministry. As many of you know, Japanese churches are facing a serious crisis right now, namely the shortage of pastors in the church. We are beginning to see more churches without a pastor. Current pastors are aging and not many are available to replace them,

because few are seeking training in pastoral ministry. That few are seeking to do pastoral ministry has always puzzled me since I strongly believe that there is no greater work in the entire world than to serve and care for the flock of God as under-shepherds of Christ. As Paul writes, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1).

While there may be a few different reasons for the lack of desire among the believers to aspire to be in the pastoral ministry, one of the primary reasons is spiritual immaturity. Just as little children do not desire to do hard labor no matter how satisfying that work may be, spiritual babes do not seek to pursue hard ministry no matter how rewarding it may be. But as believers grow in the knowledge of the Lord and become equipped to do the work of ministry, they begin to see and taste the joy of serving the Lord and his people in the local church. Lay-level training at JBA is designed to encourage people in this direction, so that we can nurture them further to become preachers of the Word and shepherds of the flock.

In the history of Christianity, awakenings and revivals have begun with men who were committed to preach the Word accurately, faithfully, and boldly. No gimmicks are necessary to bring about a great work of the Lord in Japan. It is God’s Word that the Spirit

uses to bring sinners to the Savior and to change fallen men to the likeness of Christ, so faithful proclamation of the Word of God is all that is needed. True biblical preaching is not a communication of human wisdom and opinion. It is an accurate explanation of what God meant to say through the original authors and an authoritative declaration of what God means as it applies to today’s audience. JBA’s mission is to train men to become faithful preachers who lead and shepherd the flock of God.

Jeremiah wrote, “let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD” (Jer. 9:24). Our boast is in our understanding and knowledge of our great God. The deeper our knowledge of God is, the higher our worship will become. The more we know him, the better we live for him. To know him better together with the saints is what JBA aspires as we train his people in theological education. **JH**

Photos and map submitted by author

Daisuke Okada serves as the president of Japan Bible Academy and as a pastor/teacher at Megumi Bible Church in Tokyo. He has an M. Div. and D. Min. in Expository Preaching from The Master’s Seminary.



A nine-day study tour of Israel

By Sara Wolsey

A visit to Israel will revitalise, renew, and reenergize your faith

Would you love to revitalise your faith and see the Bible brought to life in a unique and unforgettable way? Organising and participating in a study tour of Israel will help Christians:

- Grow in their faith
- Improve their biblical knowledge
- enjoy exciting cultural experiences

In June 2017, the Osaka International Church Council and pastor wanted to give our congregation an opportunity to experience these things. After extensive prayer and discussion, we started organising a nine-day study tour of Israel for Golden Week 2018. We advertised at church and booked to travel with Oak Hall Holidays, a reputable U.K.-based organisation.¹

A total of 24 congregants of various nationalities signed up. To prepare for the trip we met several times to watch a video of an Israel tour and held group discussions (using resources such as the 2017 edition of Fodor's Essential Israel).

The tour

On our tour, we visited over 30 locations including Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the City of David, the Pool of Bethesda, Immanuel Christian Bookshop, and Jericho. Visiting these locations helped us grow in our faith and appreciation of the culture and widen our view of Scripture.

The House of Hope

In the evenings, we attended worship services led by our pastor. At one meeting, we were blessed with a local guest speaker—a Palestinian Christian—who gave a fascinating presentation about his ministry work at the House of Hope (hohbethlehem.org). This is a Christian ministry which cares for the blind and children with special needs regardless of their religion. It fulfills the biblical mandate stated in Romans 15:26-27 by providing for the needs of Christian (young) people in Israel. Moved by his presentation, we committed ourselves to pray for the House of Hope. It was wonderful to witness how experiences like this revitalised our faith in Jesus and future ministry.

The Bible brought to life

It was awe-inspiring to see the Bible in geographical context and to gain a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. Our tour guide, a theologian named Paul, read relevant Bible passages in various locations where Bible events occurred. We read the Scriptures while sitting next to a cluster of olive trees on the Mount of Olives, in the beautiful grounds of the Garden Tomb, and at the Garden of Gethsemane. We visited the ancient house ruins where the healing of the paraplegic man allegedly took place (Matt. 9:1-8) and the hill beside the Sea of Galilee where the “two demon-possessed men” were healed (Matt. 8:28, ESV). Several

participants remarked that it was the best holiday they had ever been on, because they saw the Bible brought to life in such a vivid way. We returned with sharper minds, especially when reading the Bible. It was truly amazing to see, feel, and experience many of the places where Jesus and his disciples ministered.

Exciting cultural experiences

Our group enjoyed rich cultural experiences such as walking through the Judean desert and the delights of delicious Middle Eastern food. We took a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee, which included taking part in an energetic and lively traditional Jewish dance on board. We prayed at the famous Western Wall, travelled by coach over 430 metres below sea level, and floated in the Dead Sea.

Conclusion

Organising an Israel tour helped our church to grow in faith and renew its spiritual life. If your church is led by the Holy Spirit to do its own Israel tour, we highly recommend you consider a safe time to go and then take a step of faith to plan what may be a journey of a lifetime! ✨

1. More info: <https://www.oakhall.co.uk/israel/israel>

Sara Wolsey first came to Japan from the United Kingdom in 1998 as an Assistant English Teacher in public schools. Sarah teaches English in Kansai and is the secretary of the Osaka International Church Council.

Biblical discipleship course

How to help Christians grow in their faith and become mentors

“What’s the greatest need at our church?” Our pastor asked the church council in 2015. Several council members said, “Biblical discipleship.” A number of new people who needed discipleship had recently joined our church. Participating in a biblical discipleship course is an excellent way for Christians to grow in their faith and for them to go on to become mentors to others.

Starting the course

A year after this conversation, we began a successful ongoing bilingual church discipleship course as part of the biblical education ministry at our church (the course was developed by the pastor of Osaka International Church and its council). Its purpose is for any Christian to be mentored by a more mature Christian. In this context “a more mature Christian” means someone who has been a respected, active Christian for a long time. At our 2016 church retreat at Japan Mission in Ikoma, about 30 people signed up as participants, approximately 15 people as mentees and the other 15 or so as mentors. The church staff drew up a list of suitable pairs. Men mentored men, and women mentored women. Language skills, nationalities, culture, and availability were also considered when pairing mentees with a suitable mentor. For example, English speakers were generally paired with English-speaking mentors and Japanese speakers with Japanese mentors.

How the course works

Mentors and mentees went through the course together at their own pace. Most took about three years to complete it. Each mentor met up with their mentee every few months for study and discussion. In their own free time, mentees read the course books and the complete Bible in a year. The Japanese mentees read through the

Bible and *God’s Big Picture* in Japanese. They also went through other material in Japanese that the church staff had produced.

Scripture memorisation

The final part was memorising scriptures from a list of verses in the Navigators Topical Memory System Workbook. From this list, our pastor chose 60 key verses. We could choose to memorise all 60 verses or one verse



from each of the following categories:

- Living the new life
- Proclaiming Christ
- Reliance on God’s resources
- Being Christ’s disciple
- Growth in Christlikeness

Scripture memorisation actively improves a Christian’s journey of faith in so many ways. For example it

- strengthens a Christian’s relationship with Jesus;
- equips Christians for spiritual warfare; and
- provides help, inspiration, motivation, comfort, and instruction.

Memorisation helps Christians recall key scriptures of encouragement when they are in a situation with no access to a Bible. This happened to one course mentor who was stranded outside all night during Typhoon Jebi (4 September 2018). Recalling Scripture was a huge comfort in this situation.

How the course achieved its aim

At least two mentees who had backslidden in their Christian faith returned to Jesus with renewed love, passion, and commitment. It was so encouraging to witness this! As a result other people at church signed up as mentees.

Several reported that they had benefitted from the scripture memorisation. This strengthened their relationship with Jesus, improved their biblical knowledge, and provided motivation for them in further biblical study and future ministry. Others said it was helpful to read through the whole Bible and see the big picture of God’s story of redemption. Some reported that they had a better understanding of the Bible and how to apply biblical truths to real-life situations such as prayer, giving, relationships, and employment.

Conclusion

A Bible-based discipleship course is one of the best ways for a congregation to grow in their Christian faith. It is an effective way to help Christians to maintain an exciting and vibrant Christian faith and to go on and mentor others to have the same kind of faith! 🙌

Some helpful resources:

- » <http://daws.discipleshiplibrary.com/pdfs/E192A.pdf>
- » John R. Cross, *By This Name* (Alberta, Canada: GoodSeed International, 2007).
- » John R. Cross, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* (Alberta, Canada: GoodSeed International, 2009).
- » Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (London, UK: IVP Books, 2012). Available in Japanese from: <http://www.jclglobal.org/bookshop/order>
- » The Navigators, *Navigators Topical Memory System Workbook* (Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA: NavPress, 2006).
- » Dr. Henrietta C. Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016).

Nothing is useless

By Keiko Gray

This small church in Tochigi Prefecture has a lively small group ministry

“Nothing you do in the Lord’s service is ever useless” (1 Cor. 15:58 GNT). What an encouraging word to the Christians in Corinth from Paul, a great evangelist! It is also true for us now, who tend to think what we do is so little or insignificant compared with what happened in his time.

How God led me into my current ministry

My late husband, David Gray, worked as an English teacher in Okinawa Christian University for 23 years. One day, he came home with a big smile and told me that one of his students decided to get baptised after a long time of counseling. I don’t know how many students he helped in this way during his time in Okinawa. Not many, I think, but certainly he was sincere in his Christian life and willing to share his faith as an English teacher. Even after David’s death, his faith is still living in the lives of the students he taught and witnessed to. When I visited Okinawa last year, I met a former student who told me that David was her teacher and that she became a Christian later on. I could almost see my husband with a big smile in heaven.

During our 2004 summer holiday in my hometown, David went to a swimming pool by himself and was later found drowned. That was a big turning point in my life. I was led to dedicate my life to the Lord as a single woman. I stayed one more year in Okinawa teaching English to children and helping the ministry at a UCCJ (United Church of Christ in Japan) church. Then I flew to England to study for two years at Redcliffe College, a centre for mission.

After I returned to Japan looking for a place to work, a church in my hometown, Kanuma Kirisuto Kyōkai, invited me to work as a lay worker. It is one of the churches of Fukuin Dendō Kyōdan, which was started in 1955 by the work of M.A. Burnet, a missionary from England in 1927. I have been a member of this church since I was baptised. They had been praying for us and actually helped me financially while I studied in England. When I still couldn’t decide whether to accept the offer, my daughter encouraged me by saying, “Mummy, you’d better go where you are wanted.” So I did!

The small group ministry of my church

Kanuma Kirisuto Kyōkai is a typical Japanese church, not large but with a congregation of around 20 people. Most of them are women. However, the women’s power has been great in sustaining the ministry of the church. When I started working there, the

pastor was trying to introduce cell-group ministry into the church. Several women were willing to open up their homes to start groups. Now we have a different pastor, who has one more church to look after and is also happy about the group ministry. At the moment, there are thirteen groups, of which five are held at a leader’s home: one is reviewing Sunday messages and



Small groups are good ways to meet people locally and invite them into the church life.

So then, my dear friends, stand firm and steady. Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord's service is ever useless.

1 Cor. 15:58

the other four are sharing the Bible. Six groups are held at the church building: one is sharing the Bible in Japanese and English, one is a tea salon mainly for elderly people, one is sharing haiku, and three others are English classes for children and adults. We also have a youth group and a group that visits an old people's home. We leaders meet with our pastor regularly and have an evaluation time.

These small groups are good ways to meet people locally and invite them into the church life, so we might call it "pre-evangelism." There was one lady

who came to learn English who also came to Sunday worship, and by meeting Jesus, she was set free from one of the new religions. There are some people in the groups who are reluctant to come to church but are willing to read the Bible with us. For our children's English class, a child is usually brought by a family member, and they all participate in the class and learn together. There is also a time for Bible stories shared by our pastor. It is such a blessing that he comes to the class and becomes familiar with the people there. It was such a lovely sight to see one boy

of eight, who couldn't live with his father, sitting on the pastor's knee as if on his own father's.

The groups are not only a place for getting

to know new people, but also for the church members to deepen fellowship, which we cannot easily do if we are just going to church on Sundays. One of the ladies who goes to a home group commented that if it weren't for the group, she couldn't have continued to go to church. When we think of the needs of newcomers, it is also important not to forget to care for church members. Small groups are effective in both ways.

Nothing done in God's service is ever useless

In our church we don't see many dramatic changes in people's lives or see them coming to the Lord like in the first-century church. Even bringing one person to Christ takes a long time and needs a lot of prayer and Christian witness. If we are not careful, we tend to feel little and powerless, and we start wondering whether what we are doing is right. I am sure that some of you who are reading this article share the same feelings. However, let us firmly hold onto Paul's words to the Christians in Corinth. He did bring a lot of people to Christ himself, yet he encourages us now by telling us: "Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord's service is ever useless" (1 Cor. 15:58).

We never know what good will come out of our work. What we do now is an irreplaceable piece of work for God's kingdom to come. May the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ be our guide and strength in all we do for the Lord! Amen. **JH**

Photos submitted by author



The author (in red) with children's English classes at the church



Keiko Gray was born in Japan. She married a British missionary and they worked as missionaries in Okinawa. After her husband passed away in 2004, she studied in England and returned to Japan as a lay church worker.

Bridging the language gap

By Ginger Tobin

Three ways that God has provided opportunities for me to minister to Japanese people

In the 25 years since I moved to Japan, I have tried a variety of approaches to ministry outreach through teaching English. I've seen God work in three significant ways to bridge the language gap.

God drawing students

Like many rookie missionaries, I wanted to share the gospel, but the concepts were beyond my Japanese ability and the English was too difficult for most of my English students. But as Jesus said, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44 NASB). For me, one early bridge to success came when God drew English students to seek Jesus on what common ground we could find—through language classes.

One starry night during my first year in Japan, my students (nurses at a children's hospital) walked me to my car after our English class. I had been chirping my excitement about a Bible study I was in. As I reached my car, there was a lull in the conversation and a sad thought came: These women would *never* want to study the Bible.

Suddenly, the class leader asked me in Japanese, "Would you teach us the Bible?"

Astonished, I stuttered, "Could you say that in English, please?"

She confirmed her request, and we began our adventure the next week.

As my mother often said, "No one can think about God on an empty

stomach." The nurses came straight to class—sometimes late—from work. On our Bible study week we cooked in the morning and brought food, which we ate as quickly as possible, then dived into a study of women in the Bible. They read handouts in Japanese, while I followed along in English. Then we pooled our language skills to have a discussion.

Within a year, the class leader, her six-year-old twin daughters, and two of the other students joined me on a trip to the States, attending church for the first time. This resulted in

questions which we addressed in our monthly studies. Unfortunately, when I later returned to the States to fund-raise for long-term ministry, the Bible study ended because other teachers in my company did not have enough Japanese to continue it. However, I am still in touch with the leader, who has achieved her dream of opening her own restaurant. She assists in gospel outreach by distributing fliers to her customers.

Through our class, it has been a blessing to see these women, who didn't mind my limited Japanese and



A class of nurses at the children's hospital, where I used a children's Bible monthly

Her students became so excited about the story that they asked to read the children's Bible together at my house. They even opted to begin with the Old Testament instead of the Gospels, because they didn't want to miss anything!

were willing to bend their schedules, drawn by God to catch a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, I have learned that it is a worthwhile struggle to learn Japanese as well as I can, to help them to venture deeper.

Language study

On my return to Japan, I attended language school full-time for two years. At my leaders' recommendation, I continued only one Bible study during that time. It was with a student who had gravitated from English classes at her company to BEHoP (Bible/English Home Parties), a circle from which interested students could move into private Bible studies. That student came to believe in Jesus, and we enjoyed watching God bring many others into our weekly circle in a park after church, with an *obentō* lunch followed by Bible discussion and prayer.

After I graduated from language school, a BEHoP student named Yūko was given a Japanese Bible by her uncle, a believer in San Francisco. He told her to read it, so she obediently tried, but could not understand what she was reading. I was asked to help Yūko, and this year we celebrate our 17th year of reading the Japanese Bible together! Other seekers have joined us for various periods in what we call Bible Discovery Group, because we all make discoveries, rather than my teaching the study like a class. This group would never have been possible if I hadn't taken the time to do language study.

Using an English children's Bible

For several years, I looked after the house and pets of a pre-believing friend

when she went on vacation. I would also teach her English classes. Following a former teammate's example, I used an English children's Bible with her students—as I do in my own private classes. I use it because it is accessible to beginners, and advanced students don't mind the colorful stories, either.

The doctors at the children's hospital in my English class there were so receptive to the story of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary that I chose it for a lesson at my friend's home. Her students became so excited about the story that they asked to read the children's Bible together at my house. They even opted to begin with the Old Testament instead of the Gospels, because they didn't want to miss anything!

Here are women whose hearts have been grabbed by God. At first, I felt a little awkward, not wanting to steal my friend's English students. However, to my relief, our format soon settled into the students taking turns reading one sentence at a time in English, translating it into Japanese on the spot, then discussing a few pages at a time, all in Japanese.

In March, they came in chattering about the COVID-19 virus, and I was delighted that our Bible lesson happened to be on "Faith or Fear." The story was of twelve spies sent to report on the land of Canaan. We looked at the devastating results of the spies' choice of fear over faith—death in the wilderness for all except two courageous spies (Num. 14:28-30). Until then, my students had never viewed their response to the COVID-19 threat as a decision. When we finished, a student named Masako remarked, "This

was a great session. It's like a whole new world!"

Soon after, Masako showed up alone, unable or unwilling to wait for our April lesson using the children's Bible. She wanted to sit in on Yūko's lesson (by then we were into Acts), but after a bit she wanted to know where to start reading on her own. Yūko and I agreed that the Gospels would be best, and I lent Masako a copy of the Jesus film, as an introduction.


After that session, as I was leaving the house to go for my weekly swim, I found Masako and Yūko still chatting in the parking lot. Masako expressed fear about the virus because of her age and medical condition, and I was able to remind her of our choice between faith and fear.

By God's grace, the eagerness of my students and materials I was given in both Japanese and English, I could start teaching the Word as a rookie missionary. Next, intensive language study has allowed me to continue in my friends' heart language. Finally, I am grateful for the use of a children's Bible to "lower the bar," so that less advanced students can practice English while deepening their understanding of God's truth.

Through such bridges, our Father has invited these precious women into his new world. What an honor it has been to point the way to him over my 25 years in Japan, in spite of and even because of our language gap. **JH**

Photo submitted by author

Ginger Tobin has served in Shizuoka since 1995. She works with House of Myrrh Ministries and Aijalon Ministries International, bringing HeartChange Workshops from her native Oregon, USA, to Japan and other countries.



Using English to open safe spaces

By Zachariah Motts

If churches provide ways for locals to build relationships, they're meeting a basic human need

A perennial challenge World Gospel Mission (WGM) has faced in its history in Japan is how to partner with Japanese churches in meaningful ways. While church planting has its challenges, there are also unique challenges when working with existing churches and denominations. It can be a tall order for any ministry startup to try something new, build momentum, and grow the links and trust between a long-established church and their neighborhood.

In the past, we have fulfilled requests from churches for youth events, English Bible studies, English classes, preaching, children's camps, and more. Some have been well received, while others have fallen flat. Recently, though, we have seen some success with a program called Fun Fun English. It is not a perfect program or a magic bullet, but I think it illustrates some important principles about ministry in Japan.

Create a safe space

Fun Fun English was created through a partnership between a few Immanuel General Mission (IGM) pastors and a WGM missionary, Holly Muehleisen. That partnership, which grew out of a prior relationship, was an important part of the program's success. It also allowed news about the

program to spread naturally by word of mouth through denominational connections. The pastors were interested in starting an English program for children. Of course, English programs taught by missionaries are common, and we have heard of other missionaries using similar programs, but I think it is instructive to look at how Fun Fun English has met felt needs within an established church context.

Fun Fun English is a program for very small children and their parents (mostly mothers). Its focus is not on a particular course of study but on exposure to English. A lesson might consist of some simple English songs, a handful of vocabulary words related to a theme, a game with those words, an English picture book, a craft, a card to decorate, or some coloring pages. A few lessons have the same theme and build on each other a little, but the lessons tend to be self-contained so that anyone can enter the program or miss a class without falling behind. Again, the emphasis is on exposure to English—we want the children to have fun with English.

Relationships are an end, not a means

For our missionaries, the goal is to create a safe and welcoming neutral space. Churches can be threatening

places for people with little background in Christianity, especially here in Japan. Fun Fun English is a way to create a neutral space inside a church. When there is a neutral program in place, people can enter and find that what happens inside a church is not so intimidating and that the people there care and are friendly. That is, at least, what we hope they find.

We want that neutral space, the relationships, and the English exposure to be ends in themselves, not hooks for evangelism or veneers to cover hidden agendas. These are benefits that we have the privilege to provide, and we try not to treat them as means to something else. All of us can tell when someone wants to sell us something or that they have ulterior motives. It is hard to create a safe space for a person from outside the church if relationships become a means and not ends in themselves. It is good to be able to open space for others, meet the needs they see, and do the good that everyone agrees is good, and let that be enough.

Benefits flow over

That said, there have been byproducts of opening this safe, neutral space in churches. One of the best practices

This neutral space becomes a place where parents can talk about jobs, raising kids, and the struggles of life with people they may not have otherwise ever come into contact with.

we have found with Fun Fun English is to encourage church people to participate: youth help with the kids, young parents participate, and grandmothers hold sleeping babies. Participation from church members is where connections are made and new friendships formed. This neutral space becomes a place where parents can talk about jobs, raising kids, and the struggles of life with people they may not have otherwise ever come into contact with. All this while a missionary is on the other side of the room singing “Baby Shark” or doing a pipe-cleaner art project with a swarm of rowdy children. Because of relationships that people have built through this program, some have decided to show up at the church’s Easter-egg hunt or to see what happens on a Sunday morning. There is still a big step from Fun Fun English

to a church event, but some have taken it.

Karen Fisher, a noted scholar in information science, called these sorts of spaces “information grounds.”¹ They are places where people gather for some primary reason (“I want my child to be exposed to English”) but then people talk, listen, share, and trade information as a secondary outcome. There is a community that forms because a safe place has been opened. These places, that facilitate openness and connection, are a basic human need. COVID-19 has caused a break in these regular meetings as it has with so many ministries, and we feel that something has been lost beyond exposing children to English.

A rewarding ministry

Because Fun Fun English has opened church doors and encouraged community connections, other churches have asked us to start similar programs. There is more demand than we have personnel to meet. While Holly was in the United States, I covered two of the Fun Fun English classes for a year. I am not the best fit for this ministry (I am pretty introverted, and Fun Fun English can be quite energy intensive), but that year of Fun Fun English brings me more pride than almost any other ministry I have been involved with in a decade of work in Japan. I am proud of it, not because scores of people were converted and churches that grew by leaps and bounds, but because people who otherwise did not have a reason to be connected to a church found it a safe place and valued the program that was provided. **JH**

1. Karen E. Fisher and Charles M. Naumer, “Information Grounds: Theoretical Basis and Empirical Findings on Information Flow in Social Settings,” in *New directions in human information behavior* edited by Spink, A., & Cole, C. (Springer, 2006) 93-111.

Photo of the author reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* submitted by author



Zachariah Motts (Zach) is a World Gospel Mission missionary who first came to Japan in 2007. Originally a native of Ohio, US, he currently lives with his wife and daughter in Tokyo.

Organic opportunities in education

By Peter Thomson

Ministering in and alongside the education system in Japan provides us with opportunities to be salt and light in our local community

The PTA meeting started smoothly, and then—wham!—a hand slapped the conference table to my left. Accusations of disrespect flew across to the administration sitting on my right, countered by accusations of non-communication in language that belittled the work of volunteers. Tempers flared, arms tightened across chests, lips pouted. What was supposed to be a model of cooperation had quickly dissolved into an angry display of mistrust. I began praying, “Jesus, give me discernment and bless me with the words I need.” And, as the PTA president of my child’s high school, I sat there wondering, *Jesus, how did I get here?*

How did I get there? I felt woefully inadequate, both culturally and linguistically, and was operating way outside my comfort zone. To answer that question, and before telling you how the meeting ended, allow me to share my family’s vision to focus our ministry on the arena of education. For it is in this arena that we seek to proclaim the good news, equip believers, and start new churches.

Living incarnation-ally in Japan

Ask us why we wake up every morning in Japan, and my wife and I will answer: “We live to incarnate Jesus Christ to our community, so that people may taste and see that the Lord is good, and may hear the Good News of true life found in having a love relationship with Jesus Christ.” Yes, it is a

mission statement. No, it is not framed and hung on our wall. It is our faith response to live out John 1:14:

The Word became flesh and blood,
And moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
The one-of-a-kind glory,
Like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
True from start to finish (MSG).

To fulfill this mission, we continually pursue relationship building within our local community and seek to engage in activities that create connections and foster long-term relationships. While celebrating and encouraging the myriad ways this can be accomplished, we personally have felt led to live incarnation-ally in the education arena in two main ways:

1. We connect with our local community through an education center we run.
2. We educate our children via the Japanese public school system.

Connecting professionally

We have utilized English outreach ministry throughout our entire time of service in Japan. Much of our current ministry and teaching philosophy originated from our service with Asian Access (Life Ministries at the time), whose

leadership and staff innovated and shepherded a paradigm for incarnation-ally in education. We have deep gratitude for every missionary that has invested in us over the years.

Our desire is to be present in our community and for activities to help bridge people to our church. Much of what we have always hoped to do in a church setting we now achieve through the platform of the education center, such as marriage and parenting workshops, leadership development and business outreach, camps, social parties and interactions. All of these we can do in greater numbers by the church rethinking its outreach strategy and learning to proactively operate within the education arena.

We are incorporated as a general incorporated association (*ippan shadan hōjin*) that runs Flip Education Center. We chose the name “Flip” as a way to represent “transformation,” which we personally view as kingdom transformation. We currently rent a building and offer English classes four days a week and a cram school two days a week. If all goes as planned, we will have added an intensive Saturday School program and a bilingual, rhythmic ballet “mommy and me” program by the summer of 2020.

Workshops, seminars, and social gatherings happen organically, based on need and relationships.

All these programs align with a vision to “raise the next generation by providing a ‘flipped’ education and family environment.” We run the

I remember one day a group of children passed by, with one stating, “Hey, look at that foreigner.” Another child replied, “He’s not a foreigner. That’s K’s dad.” Public schools allow us to be grounded and connected in our local community.

organization based on personally held beliefs, but we are not a religious organization. Flip's mission is "to provide quality education resources, pursue innovation in education, and equip students to achieve their potential."

Our experience has been that by offering high-quality resources, we develop deeper relationships within our local community. Deeper relationships lead to more frequent communication. Frequent communication naturally leads to various discussions and questions, during which we can point to Christ.

We do face the challenge of how to better connect more people from the education center to local believers in house churches. The same challenge exists for business people who come to know Christ through workshops and seminars but who have never set foot in a church. Our ministry team is currently in a year-long project to rethink and reimagine our structures, specifically targeting how we develop house-church leaders and foster relationships in a highly dispersed digital culture.

Connecting personally

Another way we live incarnationally is in the public education arena. I'll start by saying we embrace all forms of educating one's children. We are making no value statements as to one form being better than another, and that, like parents everywhere, we have spent hours praying over our children and choices for their education.

Our four children all started their education in Japanese kindergartens. The eldest two have graduated from high school, with one in a technical school in Japan and one in university in the US. Our third child is now in their third year of high school (12th grade) and our youngest is in their third year of junior high school (9th grade). Except for the private local kindergarten, all schools have been public.

Why did we choose public schools? We believe this to be a key way for us to live incarnationally and to closely identify with the community around us. Public schools afford us opportunities to know, and be known by, many people. I remember one day a group of children passed by, with one stating,

"Hey, look at that foreigner." Another child replied, "He's not a foreigner. That's K's dad." Public schools allow us to be grounded and connected in our local community.

Here are some of the benefits our children have received. They speak, read, and write Japanese infinitely better than we ever will. They receive quality education from teachers that are aware of their "uniqueness" while helping them to achieve academic excellence. They have made some good, potentially life-long, friendships with Japanese people. Most of all, they have an intrinsic heart-level understanding of Japan.

Having our children in public schools has brought some challenges. Our ability to help with homework ended early on (they all attended a cram school throughout junior high school for Japanese and math). We worried over our children being accepted and making friends (so far, so good). Would they be able to get into a US university? (So far, so good.) We participate in school life as parents but often feel lost. And the big one—our children often think and process things differently than we do. That's a sacrifice we have had to place at the cross.

What an honor it has been to journey with fellow parents along the way—connecting at open houses, caring for one another's children, sharing concerns for our children, praying for our children to pass the high school entrance test. These parents have patiently taught us how to fill out the necessary (endless!) forms, always being willing to offer assistance. We have learned to depend on one another, and these friendships have blessed us tremendously. In the context of relationships, evangelism happens.

Which brings me back to that PTA meeting. Not a pleasant experience, but exactly the type of opportunity for which we have been praying and working! Just before the meeting began, I had the opportunity to share about biblical principles of servant leadership with the principal and vice principal. During the meeting, I diffused anger by acknowledging what was being said and gently steering the conversation back to the decisions at hand. A few arms remained crossed during the entire meeting, but for most, cordiality returned, and the meeting goals were



accomplished. And there were even a few smiles. Follow-up conversations revealed appreciation for how the meeting was handled.

These opportunities come through an ever-expanding network of deliberate relationship building in the education arena, and I am blessed by the organic opportunities we have to be salt and light in our local community. **JH**

Photo submitted by author

Peter Thomson has served in Japan since 1988, first with Asian Access and now with Sunrise International Ministries. He and his wife Wendi live in Hyogo Prefecture. In May this year, he began his second year as PTA president.



A leap of faith into the local preschool

By Hillary Baden

God called us trust him by sending our son to a local preschool when he couldn't speak Japanese. Many blessings have flowed from that step of faith.

Sometimes God calls us to do scary things. About two years ago, my husband and I felt God asking us to send our oldest son to a local Japanese school when he couldn't speak Japanese and we struggled with the language and culture. But looking back, we can see how God has been faithful to us in so many ways.

When it came time for us to make decisions about our oldest son's education, we prayerfully decided that he would enter the local school on a trial basis. The decision about which school to choose can be quite intense as there are numerous options to consider. For us, however, the decision was actually quite painless, being made easier because we live in a small town with only one preschool. Even though the school has existed for many years, our son was the first foreigner to enroll in it. With some trepidation, the staff graciously accepted the challenge of teaching a little boy who spoke zero Japanese.

The staff wasn't alone in their trepidation. Although I knew our son was ultimately in the Lord's capable hands, I struggled with visions of him sitting off alone in the corner, either friendless and by himself or crying tears of frustration, overwhelmed by his inability to communicate. This was new territory for all of us, and I wasn't sure how things would unfold over the coming days and weeks.

Learning to trust God

The Lord used this process in my life as an exercise in trust. We felt strongly

that God wanted us to place our boys in the local school to expand our contacts and share about him. I knew in my head that this was a wonderful opportunity, but my heart wrestled with wondering whether our firstborn would be able to thrive in this situation. I had to work hard at trusting that the Lord knew my son's needs and could meet them far better than I ever could.

From what I hear, most moms face reservations about entrusting their firstborn into the hands of teachers. I felt assured that my fears were normal, but I also knew that I needed to deal with them properly. I don't have a failproof, step-by-step process to follow, but I can speak from experience that giving your fears and concerns over to the Lord is the best thing to do when you

We now find ourselves with a wide pool of contacts to draw from and build relationships with.

find yourself in this situation. I have discovered time and again that God isn't surprised by our feelings nor does his affection toward us change because we're experiencing fears and doubts. In fact, he wants us to release our burdens

to him (Ps. 62:8; Matt. 11:28, Phil. 4:6–8), and he will give us his peace in return.

Along with praying about this transition in private, I also started regularly praying with my son in the van during the five-minute drive to school. It has been both beneficial for my own relationship with God and a wonderful opportunity to teach our son how to dedicate his day to the Lord, giving over any fears or concerns he might have, as well as praying for his teachers and classmates.

A learning experience for all

Though there was a definite transition period for us, our son, and his teachers, things gradually fell into a routine and, before we knew it, life before preschool seemed like a distant memory. I'm happy to report that our son is now thriving in his second year of preschool, and, at the time of writing, he is eagerly awaiting the start of his third and final year when his younger brother will be entering the same school for his first year. He has learned so much Japanese and is on track to surpass my abilities. He even frequently uses the local dialect, which everyone always gets a kick out of!

We've learned a lot about Japanese culture through this experience while making plenty of mistakes along the way (such as sending our son in a girl's uniform blouse for several weeks without realizing it because the teachers didn't feel the need to tell us—they

thought he was “cute”!), but we’ve received abundant grace. And for the sake of full disclosure, there still are the occasional mornings when we find ourselves in the “why do I have to go to school?” battle, but most days, my son happily and independently skips off to the school entrance without looking back.

Many benefits

Countless other benefits and blessings have come from our decision to send our son to local school. For years, along with our teammates, we prayed that God would open doors for us to get to know young families in our community. At last, we now find ourselves with a wide pool of contacts to draw from and build relationships with. Our son’s school is unusually small, which has made it very easy to get to know the other families there. We were warmly received, and on several occasions other moms reached out to us to help us navigate these new waters—graciously answering our “foreigner questions” like “What’s the difference between a *ryukku* and a *tsüen baggu*?” and “Do I send my son to school in his formal uniform tomorrow or his gym clothes?”

Along with new relationships, I have also noticed that my Japanese has progressed. I had been studying part-time for about five years but lacked opportunities to use what I had been learning on a practical level. But once our son was enrolled in preschool, I was forced to talk to the other moms. I’m still far



from fluent and quite often find myself in awkward situations where someone thinks I’ve understood something and I definitely have not, but being in this environment has improved my Japanese and increased my confidence.

A new opportunity to trust God

Just like that, two years have gone by, and we’re now only one year away from facing another crossroads with more uncertainties—elementary school. This time, there are more factors to consider and a lot of things that we may have to play by ear as things

come up (such as furlough interruptions to the school year). Thankfully, there is less fear in my heart because I can now look back on our preschool experience and remember that God is faithful and will carry us through whatever lies ahead. We serve an ever-present God (Ps. 46:1) and are never alone. I want to encourage you to prayerfully step out into whatever the Lord might be calling you into with regard to your children’s education—whether that be local school or homeschooling when you don’t feel that is your gifting—and sit back and watch how God will prove himself faithful to you as he did for us.

I should finish with the caveat that not all missionaries who choose to place their children in local schools will have the same positive experience that we have had. As we have heard from veteran missionaries, every child is unique, and it is very important to consider the needs of your children as individuals and closely monitor their emotional health throughout this process. **JH**

Photos submitted by author



Hillary Baden and her husband Bobby work as church planters in Yamaguchi Prefecture with Christar. She is Canadian and he is American. They met in Japan and have three boys, who were all born here.

Yokohama Christian School is a young school that is reaching out to change lives in its corner of Japan

God's work in his time

By Alisha Yamamori

When I saw the topic of education and ministry drop into my inbox in February, I thought—*Piece of cake. I'll write a bit about Yokohama Christian School's place in the broader context of Yokohama City as a small school making a difference in the lives of our students and families.* Done and dusted. However, the current global pandemic and ensuing crisis has caused me to rethink what I would like to



write. Instead of a general introduction to Yokohama Christian School, I will share positive, real-life stories of our small school in this difficult time when it is sometimes harder to see God's plan in action.

Education is such a core experience for many of us. As children, we spend hours learning the basic concepts of mathematics, reading, and writing. As Christians, education also means training in God's ways: often through Sunday School, youth group, and Bible studies. Even if your job title is not teacher, many of us are educators in some form. What type of schooling experience do you get when you blend the academic and the spiritual in a

school setting? What if the school is, at its foundation, God's school?

At Yokohama Christian School (YCS), we take our job as an outreach school seriously. While one of our goals is to teach and train the minds and hearts of children from Christian homes, another goal is to reach out to families interested in a solid, English-based education program. The fact that our program is both high quality and affordable allows a greater number of families to come through our doors.

In times of growth or uncertainty and upheaval, it is important for staff, teachers, and administrators to remember that YCS is God's school. We start each day in prayer for the school, students, and families. It is sometimes hard to remember, but God brings students for a time and then sends them on their way. Day by day, as teachers, we minister to and teach each student in our care. We nurture them, problem-solve for them, and see them on their way when it is time.

For such a time as this

Over the last few years YCS has begun the process that leads to accreditation. This is a process that requires in-depth discussions on everything from food allergies to fire drills, tardy policies to grade promotion. Not only do policies need to be in place, but those policies must be reviewed and discussed to remain current. In short, accreditation is a grueling process. Initially at YCS, reviewing documents and piecing together all the paperwork to be a "school" seemed too much, too daunting. Yet, just as God brings the students, he brings the right teachers as well.

When it was time to sit down and develop our curriculum guide, as a staff we did our best and were hopeful it was enough. However, God had a better plan. He brought a young, energetic navy wife and music teacher to YCS. Beyond her wonderful teaching ability she happened to have a master's degree in curriculum development and design. We presented her with what we had been working on and began to realize that what we had created wasn't quite right. However, with her patience and expertise, we started again. We began writing grade-level goals, objectives, and having really good discussions about what needed to happen at each grade level to prepare students to move to the next grade.

Looking back, I am in awe that God brought the right person to lead us through writing our first full curriculum guide at YCS. Every three years, as a staff, we will need to review and make improvements on that initial document, but the review process would not have been possible without that initial steady, guiding hand.

Seeds and sprouts

Our preschool classes at Yokohama Christian School are called Seeds (two-year-olds) and Sprouts (three- and four-year-olds). As a school we are fortunate to have the opportunity to plant seeds in each student's heart and mind. The idea of seeds, roots, and growth in a Christian school comes directly from the Bible—from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the parables of Jesus to the epistles. The guiding and founding verse chosen at the inception of Yokohama Christian School comes from the third chapter of Ephesians:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being root-

ed and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God. (v. 16-19 NRSV)

These verses root everything we do at Yokohama Christian School in a biblical foundation that we hope has a lasting impact on our students and families. International schools are often not the end of a student's education, but just one of many places that they learn academically. YCS staff and teachers hope that the additional seeds of spiritual guidance and growth sown at our school will reach far past the time that each student spends within our walls.

Lasting impact

While sometimes it is hard when students and families move on from the school, it is important to remember that our impact may be felt more deeply than we imagine, even when a child is enrolled for only a short time. One mother told me that she and her husband had made the difficult decision to change the educational trajectory of their son and he would be leaving the school (an older sister would remain). After their children started at YCS, the family had returned to church and were

happily settled in their life in Yokohama. The mother said that no matter how long her other child remained at YCS she was grateful that the family had moved to Yokohama. The Christian community and fellowship that came with that relocation was something that she acknowledged and was grateful for. Though this family no longer has any children at our school, YCS has made an educational and personal difference in their lives.

In March this year, after the school had closed because of the COVID-19 outbreak, YCS held a small send-off ceremony for students leaving from April for other educational endeavors. Three of the students had been at the school since age two. Each child came from a different background: one is bicultural, one is from an expat family, and one is Japanese. We have watched these three children grow from shy two-year-olds to self-assured six-year-olds. Children are often only able to stay a year or two at our school before they move again, so the longer stay of these three children has impacted us as a staff as much as we have impacted them—maybe more. We have seen them develop spiritually as well as academically. At the beginning of their



time, they struggled with basic praise songs, could not focus on a Bible story, and did not understand who they were praying to. As they have grown, they not only remember Bible stories and songs, but they understand prayer as communicating with God, who cares about them and wants a relationship with them.

This lasting impact on families and students is what Yokohama Christian School is all about. Nurturing the whole development of each child—intellectually, socially, and spiritually—is an honor. The seeds planted and the sprouting branches that we are able to observe and nourish in our students is a blessing that encourages us to continue. As we move forward, we strive to always remember that seeds will bring forth good in the wider world as each student walks the path that God has planned for them. In this time of deep uncertainty and upheaval, God has been faithful—as he always has

been to the school over the years—and we can have faith that he is indeed in control. I pray that YCS will continue to stand firm in its mission of outreach and of educating the young people of Yokohama while doing God's work moving forward. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Alisba Yamamori is originally from Alaska, and has lived in Japan for over fifteen years. She's worked at Yokohama Christian School for the past five years and has been the school head since the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year.





Empowering agents of change

Seventy years of serving the missionary community in Japan

By Anda Foxwell

Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ) exists to equip students to serve Japan and the world for Christ. This is our vision and the destination to which we navigate. From classes meeting on a converted dairy farm in 1950 to a high-quality Christian education in 2020, CAJ has served the educational needs of the missionary community in Japan by partnering with parents for their children's education and also serving other families in Japan who desire a Christian education for their children.

CAJ graduates will be serving a world that is a different place from the world their parents entered as young adults. As "third culture kids," they are uniquely equipped to address the needs of a rapidly changing and diverse society. They leave CAJ intimately understanding a biblically-based worldview and values. Our students are equipped with the understanding that being created in the image of the one living and true God bestows special dignity and value on human beings and mandates

us to be God's agents of creativity, care, and truth in the world. They form deep relationships with their teachers who nurture them in the learning journey, and they develop lifelong friendships with peers that transcend distance and cultures.

Opportunities to serve

To enable students to be prepared to serve, we provide opportunities for them at all grade levels to serve others. For example, elementary school students visit local elder care facilities, singing, reading, and interacting with the elderly residents. Middle school students provide food and other supplies for homeless people and underserved families in Tokyo. High school students participate in a wide variety of service experiences, culminating in a service trip to Northern Thailand for a building project serving a hill tribe school. Our hope is that our students will leave CAJ prepared to be the next generation of missionaries to Japan and

beyond . . . though what these graduates do may not fit a traditional definition of missions.

As we equip students to serve Japan and the world for Christ, we know they need skills and tools to meet the needs of the world of today and tomorrow. We desire for our students to demonstrate creative thinking and initiative, enabling them to respond to the problems they will face and to be agents of change in their generation. To this end, we provide education and opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in addition to a full range of courses in the arts and humanities.

Next generation leaders

One of the best examples of STEM education is our robotics program. The robotics students align their vision with that of the VEX Robotics program: "Providing the tools to inspire the problem solvers of tomorrow." They innovate, create, test, and overcome

failure, which equips them with skills to become the next generation of leaders. They do this in a highly collaborative environment, with experienced students mentoring students exploring robotics for the first time and high school students mentoring elementary students just beginning their robotics adventure.

Support across Japan

Providing a robust set of opportunities is much more challenging for families who live far from CAJ and are not able to access our labs, classrooms, and the full range of programs available. This is why our School Support Services (SSS) program exists. We understand that parents need support to help their children build the skills they need to reach their potential for learning and serving. Members of SSS receive help in understanding and making appropriate choices in curriculum that matches children's learning needs and family situations. They also have access to print and online resources they can use. Families can consult with our educational experts to learn more about learning needs, child development, and an array of other issues that may cause parents to feel intimidated by the huge responsibility of educating their children.

SSS can support families who enroll children in local Japanese schools but want to keep up their children's English learning, as well as those families who are providing all of their children's education at home. We also provide support to small schools (that are SSS members) to help them build their programs. We provide them with consulting services in topics that could include designing assessments, child safety, facilities management, and teaching strategies. We know that we have learned so much during our 70 years of equipping students, and we want to share what we have learned with other educators who share the same goals.

SSS students are also invited to a variety of on-campus events. Some events target opportunities specifically for the SSS students while other events seek to enfold them into the CAJ Higashi Kurume campus community. For many

SSS high school students, the most popular event is spending several days together at CAJ during Spiritual Life Emphasis Week. They participate in special events and activities with their own group while also being immersed in student life on campus.

Prayerful planning for the future

Though CAJ's influence extends far beyond the boundaries of our campus on the west side of Tokyo, Higashi Kurume has been our hub for seven decades. We have come a long way from the former dairy farm that a small group of foresighted missionaries purchased as our campus in 1950; converted cow barns served as our very first classrooms. With careful stewardship, creative planning, and conscientious maintenance, our buildings and grounds have been well used. We are now in a master planning phase to determine what our campus could look like as we continue to serve the needs of the next generation of students. We are committed to prayerfully addressing how we can most effectively equip



students for the decades to come.

Phase one in this overall campus plan begins with our cafeteria. We have served meals to students in this building since 1965, and though it is still a popular place for students to gather, it is showing its years. We have also been seeking space for community events to reach the needs of an increasingly diverse group of families. We have experienced limitations in our PE and music programs due to space constraints, and we need additional space for our school lunch program. The first phase of our building program will be a new multipurpose building that will house a cafeteria, a well-equipped band

room, and a multi-use room suitable for lower elementary play and physical education space. After a community survey to suggest names, we have decided to christen this new building "The Ark." Though this was suggested as an acronym for "arts, recreation, and kitchen", we believe it will also be a place of refuge and a space we desire to be filled with God's presence.

After we complete construction of the Ark, we will demolish the existing cafeteria. These two projects will create quite a bit of construction wear on our playing field, so it is a perfect opportunity to do some additional work, extending and resurfacing the field into a FIFA regulation turf field. This will also necessitate repositioning the play equipment and tennis courts.

Though we have conscientiously saved for these projects and will obtain low-interest loans to construct them, we will also be kicking off a fund-raising campaign to be able to complete them in good time for them to be used by our current students: those who attend school on campus and those who come only occasionally through SSS. The Ark and the field will be the beginning of a multi-phase campus improvement program that we believe will benefit students and families for generations to come.

At CAJ, everything we do is with the intent of coming closer to the destination of our vision: "equipping students to serve Japan and the world for Christ." The way we strive to achieve this vision is through developing servant leadership, cultivating individual excellence, fostering healthy relationships, and building a sense of local and global responsibility. We do this in a Christ-centered, nurturing, diverse, and inspiring learning community that extends even beyond our physical campus. **JH**

If you'd like to know more, please check out CAJ's website:
<https://www.caj.ac.jp/about/mission.php>

Photo submitted by author; logo from website

Anda Foxwell is the head of school at CAJ, where she was formerly a teacher and high school principal. Her husband and four children are all CAJ alumni. Born in America, she now considers Higashi Kurume her home.

My place at the table

A new missionary's story of God's goodness as her family immersed themselves in the Japanese school system

By Beth Anne Trim

Oh no! I missed something again! I experience that sinking feeling as I once again realized I had misunderstood instructions. I squinted as I looked down the street for the kindergarten (*yôchien*) bus which would pick up my daughter. The sun also shone in the eyes of other moms with me, but they were holding jump ropes fitted with cute handmade cloth handles. My hands were empty.

After the bus left, I raced back to the house calling frantically to my husband. We scoured the home for the paper we missed. My hopes soared for a moment when we found it, but were shattered the next, as the paper did not include the instructions I was hoping for. So, we went to the one place to go when confronted with an urgent knowledge crisis: Google.

A dozen Japanese blogs later, we had what we needed: a list of necessary items and a detailed explanation of how to make cute jump rope handles. After a trip to the store and an hour of crafting, mission accomplished! Armed with my daughter's newly accessorized jump rope, I furiously peddled my bike to the *yôchien*, where I apologetically bowed multiple times to the teacher and handed her the jump rope. She

smiled comfortingly and reassured me, "*Zen zen mondai nai. Arigatō gozaimasu.* (No problem. Thank you.)"

Four months after we had arrived in Japan in 2016, my eldest daughter started *yôchien* at age five. We were nervous because neither she nor I spoke Japanese and had no idea what to expect. There have been days filled with tears but many filled with smiles, laughter, and joy. She's now in second grade at elementary school; it has been an adventure for our whole family. The decision to send our children to local Japanese school has been a difficult one with many challenges. I have learned that it is a commitment I choose to make every day. For us, it is worth it!

First challenge: language

Japanese is our family's second language. Prior to coming to Japan, I worked in the ESL (English as a Second Language) department in a high school where students were all learning English for the first time. I observed firsthand what it meant for a student to sit for eight hours a day in class, not completely understanding what was being said by the teacher, and how hard it was for that student to keep pace academically. Here I was exposing my

daughter to a similar experience! What was I thinking?

Language can affect most everything we do. Therefore, every task done in a second language becomes more complicated. It is easy to become overwhelmed.

Second challenge: time

During my first year in Japan, the most common thought was, *This is going to take longer than I thought.* Shopping for school supplies, figuring out instructions on paperwork, and spending time chatting with other parents all took more time. I had to adjust my expectations of what I could accomplish in a day. I reminded myself that just as everything took me twice or three times as long to accomplish, the same may be true for my daughter.

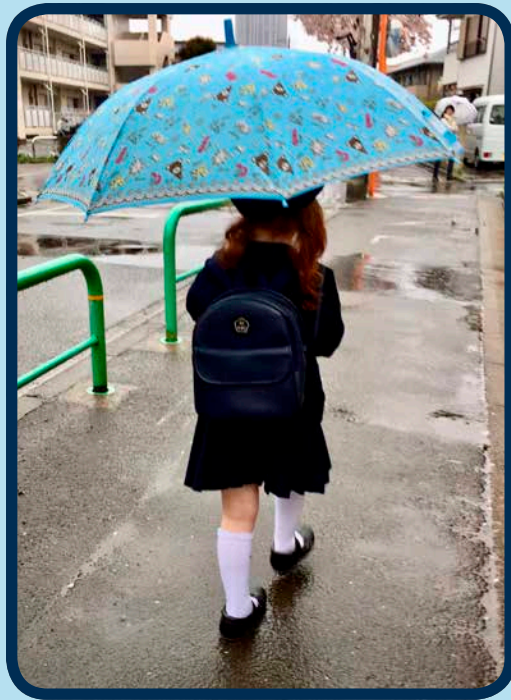
Third challenge: culture

The differences between Japanese and American school culture are also challenging. There were so many differences, including wearing indoor shoes, lunch in the classroom instead of a cafeteria, and class sizes of 35 or 40 students. Adapting takes time and effort. Cultural misunderstandings happen frequently and sometimes over simple



concepts such as what can or cannot be worn outside on the playground.

The significance of intuitive and indirect communication and the importance of group-oriented behaviors



are the two most meaningful cultural observations we have made. Even if an individual is fluent in Japanese, clearly understanding school expectations can still be difficult. This was my husband's experience, even though he grew up in Japan as a missionary kid. Many evenings after he translated school papers, I would ask him what it meant. He would often say, "I am not exactly sure. Let's call someone and ask."

Students do everything in groups in Japanese schools. They walk to school in groups and they sit in a group called a *han*. Classroom tasks are designated to groups of two to four students for morning greetings, announcements, serving lunch, cleaning the white board, and taking care of the class garden or pet. Every week our daughter works together in a group with her classmates on some task.

A place at the table

This group-orientedness is also seen with the parents. Mothers of my daughter's *yōchien* classmates invited me to multiple group gatherings, despite my limited Japanese. We would often meet for lunch or dinner. Our children were in the same class together and that was enough to secure our bond of friendship. It was also enough to give me—a foreigner—a "place at the table."

It was at this table that God revealed to me that no matter what challenges came with sending our children to Japanese school, this was how he was going to use us in this season. At this table, I was asked about my family and about my faith. It was at this table that friendships formed and grew. One of the most significant blessings our family has experienced in Japan has been seeing God growing relationships with our friends in our Japanese school community.

For each challenge, God sent us a blessing. He sent me a friend from the

yōchien who invited me into her home for tea and patiently talked with me while using dictionaries and simple second-language skills. My daughter's first grade teacher had also lived abroad. She was empathetic and patient as she explained cultural differences. We have been blessed with a community that has welcomed us and included us as part of their group.

What I've learned

God has taught me some principles through these experiences.

First, it is very important to show ourselves and our children grace and compassion. Learning a new culture and language is exhausting for both adults and children. Rest and spending time to love on each other is vital while we face these challenges together.

Second, do not let shame or discouragement keep you from showing up and being vulnerable. Negative experiences or hurtful words threaten to keep us from engaging a new community.

I have also learned to daily remember that it's in our weakness that our God is strong. It's not in our own strength or our own language or culture skills that we face these circumstances; it's in God's strength! And it is in that strength that we can remember who we are as his children—we are called by him, and we are loved by him! 🙏

Photo of daughter in rain submitted by author

Beth Anne Trim is from the Chicago area. She and her husband Caleb both serve in workplace marketplace ministries.

Our children were in the same class together and that was enough to secure our bond of friendship.

A homeschooling community in Japan

By Carla Gibson

Classic Conversations provides a community for homeschooling families and an opportunity to minister to Japanese people

Have you considered that the answer to $2+2$ never changes? Or that the square root of 144 is always 12? What can this constancy teach us about the Creator of our world, the designer of arithmetic?

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8 NRSV).

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).

What do other subjects have to teach us about our Lord? There is far more to be uncovered in our pursuit of truth and knowledge than just equations and definitions. When I teach my children, I get the opportunity to consistently remind them of the truth of Scripture, the gospel message, and the implications of living in a world created by God. As a missionary mom, I have found that homeschooling not only benefits my own family, it also has great potential in Japan as a ministry opportunity.

My husband and I originally began homeschooling because we wanted a flexible Christian educational option. Life during missionary deputation in the United States was full of unanswered questions regarding when and where we would be moving, so we wanted to be able to set our own academic schedule and teach from a God-centered curriculum regardless of what the future held. After moving to Japan, we continued with this method, and also started a homeschooling community in Osaka. Speaking with other

parents, we discovered many reasons Japanese families might see homeschooling as an attractive option:

- Christian families may prefer a Christian teaching method and curriculum.
- Families with special needs or gifted students may need a method of schooling uniquely adapted to each child.
- Kids who have suffered from bullying may no longer be able to pay attention to their studies within the public school system if they do not feel safe.

Homeschooling takes less time than the average full day of public school, freeing up several more hours in the week for other needs, such as ministry, recreation, or rest. While we do maintain a family routine, there is less stress in our day because we can move things around as needed. The timing of our lessons can be adjusted, and the material can be adapted to each individual child. Our children benefit from being able to push forward in their studies or slow down as needed.

We are working alongside a translation team to produce a Japanese version of the Classical Conversations curriculum.

Integrating education throughout all aspects of daily life can better promote critical thinking and a continual desire for exploration. Our children have begun to learn alongside us. They ask a lot of questions, and sometimes we answer their questions with an “I don’t know yet. Let’s find out,” exemplifying the goal of continuous learning throughout one’s lifetime. This way children learn the value of pursuing truth and knowledge.

While homeschooling is an excellent option for many families, it can seem like a daunting task for the newcomer. Deciding what curriculum to use, spending time learning how to teach the material, finding desired supplemental or extracurricular activities, and potentially having to balance multiple programs for different age levels can appear rather daunting. We decided early on that we needed a homeschool community that would provide a way for us as parents to encourage and support one another in this worthwhile task. Thankfully, we found that in Classical Conversations.

Classical Conversations (CC) is a Christian community of homeschooling families using the classical method—a proven format used by Aristotle, Thomas Jefferson, Shakespeare, and many other great historical thinkers. Once a week we gather together to learn and encourage one another. Parents, together with their students, enjoy in-person example lessons designed to help them succeed as teachers while the children actively engage in learning with other homeschooling students. CC provides parents and students with the tools and support system to succeed

in homeschooling from kindergarten all the way through high school.

When our family joined a Classical Conversations community, we found a group of parents who were experiencing the same joys and difficulties we were going through. Together we celebrated our kids' achievements and weathered their struggles. We gained knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, while worshipping the God who created these treasures and designed humans to draw near and know him. We found a curriculum that was easy to use and discovered that the classical method was perfectly aligned to the way our children's minds naturally develop; this eased the burden of acquiring knowledge. This will also aid them as they move towards adulthood, helping them to grow into young people who not only know things, but have the character and skills to share that knowledge and confidently defend their beliefs in a world which challenges them.

When we moved to Osaka as missionaries, we were excited to start a Classical Conversations community here as part of our ministry. The aim of the Classical Conversations Osaka community is to know God and to

make him known in Japan through a twofold approach: helping Christian families educate their children from a Christ-centered foundation and opening the community to those who have not yet heard about Jesus. All families are welcome—Christian or non-Christian, Japanese or non-Japanese, experienced homeschoolers or those new to it all. We learn together by memorizing truth, exploring creation, discussing logic, and cultivating a Christlike character.

We heard from some families that they would love to homeschool if only there were a Christian curriculum available in Japanese. Consequently, we are working alongside a translation team to produce a Japanese version

of the Classical Conversations curriculum for 4-12 year olds. We are hoping to provide this resource by the end of this year, and we aim to establish Japanese-speaking CC communities throughout Japan in the near future.

Families in the Kansai area are welcome to join the CC Osaka community, and there are tutoring positions available for those who want to serve in Osaka. You can apply to direct a

Classical Conversations community in your own city as well. This is an excellent ministry opportunity with a worldwide network to equip and help you succeed in any location.

There are other Classical Conversations communities on US military bases in Japan, including Okinawa, Iwakuni, Yokosuka, Yokota, and Zama. A new community will hopefully be opening soon in Tokyo as well. For more information about Classical Conversations or homeschooling in general, there are great resources on classicalconversations.com. **JH**

Connect with us at <https://facebook.com/ccosaka> or email us at ccosakacommunity@gmail.com.

Photo submitted by author

Carla Gibson is the director of CC Osaka. She and her husband, Daniel, are missionaries from Tennessee serving at Mustard Seed Christian Church Osaka.



CC group in Osaka learning science

Hint for getting cheap children's books

Amazon Japan sells off various books including children's books and homeschooling material for a very cheap price, in English, German and other languages.

Besides the usual way of searching by author, topic and such, you can find some helpful and very cheap material (90% off!) by a department search.

1. Open amazon.co.jp, press the menu button (three stripes) up on the left corner. That leads to the departments (カテゴリ), where you can choose the "Books, comics, magazines & Audible" (本・コミック・雑誌 & Audible) category.

2. Next click on "Foreign language books" (洋書), and a sub menu opens on the left hand side of the homepage, where more specific search options are available—genre ジャンル: Click on "Children's Books" (児童書).
3. Some further search options open up on the left hand side menu, just scroll down and click your preferences, for example: language (言語), age range, format (フォーマット)—hardcover (ハードカバー), paperback (ペーパーバック), Kindle Edition, etc.
4. On the upper right side of the homepage under "Sort" (並べ替え) one can sort the list according to price etc.



By Levi Booth

Forget excellence, pursue generosity

What should our goal be in lifelong language learning?

When I meet a Japanese person, the conversation after the basic greetings often goes like this:

Them: “Wow, your Japanese is good.”

Me: “No, no, no! I have to study more.”

Them: “Really? I think it’s enough.”

And of course I will continue to politely insist that I am utterly embarrassed by my lack of language ability, but, truth be told, I think they’re right. For most interactions I have in Japan my current level is “enough”. I can get on with daily life tasks, and I can take part in Bible studies and meetings. I avoid most cultural blunders now. My language and cultural understanding is sufficient for being a missionary.

But we are not meant to settle for enough. We are meant to strive for

excellence, right? After all, “God honours excellence,” or at least, “excellence honours God”.

But here I politely agree and disagree. If we are committed to serving the church of Japan, we should seek to keep learning and growing in our language skills and cultural understanding throughout our lives. But this should come not from a desire to attain excellence but rather from a heart of generosity towards our Japanese friends and colleagues.

This distinction is important for a few interconnected reasons:

Generosity aids humility

It is very difficult to aim at excellence and remain humble. Sure, there are some people who are—or at least who appear to be—but I find the humblest people do not talk much of

excellence. Personally, if I start to think of myself as being or becoming excellent at something, then I will either drift or dash towards pride. To talk of excelling at something, you have to compare yourself with others. And even if we are only looking at our previous self, aiming for excellence will lead to either unrealistic goals and pressure (“I must be better!”) or laziness and pride (“I am the best!”). But generosity and humility go together as best friends: they take our focus off us and place it on others. Indeed, they are great allies in the battle for self-forgetfulness.

Generosity guides learning

Striving to be excellent at Japanese is what leads many a young man to spend hours memorizing all 29 strokes for the *kanji* for “depression” 「鬱」, ignorant of the fact that it is normally written in

hiragana: うつ. Such Japanese knowledge may impress some, but it doesn't actually help anybody.

But generous lifelong learning is other-focused, and so we don't have to think, *What is the next step that I should master?* We simply ask, *What do I need to improve to serve and bless those I am working with?* Lifelong language learning should be about us working diligently to be understood well so that the people we are ministering to don't have to work hard to understand us. For me, knowing pop cultural references from the eighties and nineties will help me interact with the guys on my sports team much more than being able to read classical Japanese literature, and ironing out my pronunciation will bless people more than passing a high-level *kanji* test.

Generosity kills comparison

Our ministry situations and life stages are different and so generosity in language and cultural study will be different for each of us. I'm a native English

speaker, a single man in my mid-thirties, whose ministries all involve using Japanese. It'd be ridiculous to compare how much ongoing language learning I do with, say, a married woman from Brazil with multiple children they are trying to raise to be tri-lingual whilst doing ministries that involve using lots of English (their second language!). We simply have different amounts of time and energy to give towards study. In the same way, I have less energy now than I did ten years ago and so I don't beat myself up now for not spending as much time memorizing vocabulary as I did back then. Generosity looks different for different people and so there is no space for comparison.

Generosity drives us to the gospel

Excellence requires discipline for the sake of your future self, and that's hard. But to be generous, you have to make joyful sacrifices for the sake of others, and that's impossible! At least it is impossible apart from the power of the gospel. God's Word tells us that even

the most excellent Japanese spoken without love is nothing more than a clanging gong. But love is not something we can learn from a textbook; we must receive it from God before we can live it out. Therefore much, much more important than lifelong learning is daily dependency on Christ, and a pursuit of generosity will keep pushing us back to him and his grace.

Excellence may honour God, but I am not sure I can be driven by it without causing heart attitudes that would displease him. I am confident that generosity in lifelong learning is a way to both honour God and serve people. And that drives me to keep up the hard work of language study now that the initial enthusiasm has worn out. I remain committed to a lifelong study of Japanese language and culture, but I've given up excellence. Instead I am striving to be generous. **JH**

Photo by Karen Ellrick

Levi Booth is a Brit working with OMF Now based in Tokyo, his ministry focus is using sports for outreach and discipleship. He also plays with Frisbees, hangs out in coffee shops, and reads manga.

Advertisement

WIM
Women in Ministry
Invites You To Attend:

Fall Day of Prayer

Date:
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Winter Day of Prayer

Date:
Tuesday, January 19th

Location:
TBD

Spring Retreat

Date:
March 3-5

Location:
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Top 10 Reasons to Study at Tokyo Christian University

by Randall Short, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

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The CALM community

Sharing professional skills for the benefit of the church

In Japan, networking and participation in groups is crucial. It is a major aspect of how society and life functions in this country. Belonging, benefiting, and growing in the context of a group is a no-brainer for the Japanese people. This should be true in the context of the church. I want to introduce you to CALM, a group that is bringing Christians together.

What is CALM?

CALM is a new, invitation-only network of Christian professionals based in Japan with members mainly from an information technology background. They are “an online community of members that exchanges information about their areas of expertise and enhances each other’s skills.” Founded by Yoshihisa Nakamura, who formerly worked as a TV broadcasting director and a freelance web director, the network is being developed across Japan and internationally. The men and women of the core team have a variety of professional experiences in the technology sector and involvement in Christian groups in Japan, including freelance engineering, web production for Rakuten, leadership of KGK, and direction of sales force.

CALM has a three-fold mission: to create communities to serve one another, to provide learning opportunities, and to train tentmakers. CALM network’s vision is for Christians to use their gifts to support one another toward excellence in each individual’s own work and ministry.

You may wonder, *Why is this group called “CALM”?* At the core of CALM is the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to believers to live quiet lives: “Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs . . . as we have instructed you” (1 Thess. 4:11 ESV). As Christians, a pure occupational testimony is an easy bridge to one’s personal testimony about Christ. CALM members challenge themselves to grow to benefit their companies and coworkers while bringing glory to God, by pursuing professional excellence and blending that with theological application.

CALM and Education

One of the most important things about the CALM community is its members’ wealth of backgrounds. This also contributes to the educational content available through the network. Future educational activities include holding IT workshops for members and the general public. Pre-launch workshop topics have included creating promotional movies that can be used in churches, creating websites, and logo development. In addition, CALM regularly holds online learning sessions for its members with regular opportunities for dynamic exchanging of ideas. CALM has actively facilitated events, such as hackathons and idea-

athons, with local Christian organizations to aid projects in the digital space.

One of the dreams of Nakamura is an online school. Through this school, CALM aims to enrich Christian lives through education centered on IT. Along with IT-based content, CALM also plans to provide training videos by worship leaders and teach a wide range of technologies focused on the task of translation. With so much on the horizon, and the recent push for the whole world to embrace digital communications

due to COVID-19, keep an eye on the CALM community and opportunities they have to help the church through this surging digital avenue.

How Can You Be Involved?

CALM officially launches Summer 2020, but leading up to the launch there are plenty of opportunities to learn more about the community and potentially join. The application process to join the CALM community is based on referrals because they wanted to “prevent the intrusion of cults and heretical teachings and to maintain a healthy community.” It also promotes the gathering of high-quality IT engineers. In the near future, CALM plans to organize some events, such as an IT Christian tech camp and hackathon.

Message to the JEMA Community

I invited Nakamura to address the JEMA community regarding CALM. He said, “Japan is only 1% Christian, but . . . this country has advanced IT. We encourage Japanese Christians to use their technology as a platform to share the gospel. We hope this community will create new mission tools. I would be grateful if you would remember us in prayer and support us as we grow.” Nakamura and his team are overflowing with talent and potential, but they need our prayer and encouragement. CALM is pursuing a unique intersection of education where technology and theology meet in the Japanese context. Let us pray for and cheer on this exciting initiative! **JH**

To learn more about the CALM network, upcoming events, and joining, please visit their Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/calmform>



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

Take it to the Lord in prayer

*"Prayer surely does influence God. It does not influence His purpose. It does influence His action."
S. D. Gordon¹*

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!
2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
3. Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.
4. Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear;
May we ever, Lord, be bringing
All to Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright, unclouded,
There will be no need for prayer—
Rapture, praise, and endless worship
Will be our sweet portion there.²

During these trying times with COVID-19 causing concern across the world, singing and listening to others sing lifts our spirits. Recently, I have been singing and reflecting on the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." And once again, I was reminded that it is as much a song about prayer as it is about our Lord Jesus.

Yes, it is a privilege to bring everything before Him in prayer. Not just the "big things" but even those things we might think God would call "inconsequential." Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:7 to cast "all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (NASB).

And it is true that we forfeit peace and bear needless pain because we don't take everything to God in prayer. Jesus tells us, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). Is your heart at peace? If not, why not pray?

Though there seems to be trouble everywhere, we need not be discouraged because we can pray. Isn't that wonderful? Jesus knows all about us—our sorrows, our weaknesses, everything. In it all, He is our faithful friend.

The words of this hymn are even more amazing when you realize what life was like for the writer, Joseph Scriven.³ Born in Ireland, his childhood sweetheart drowned the day before they were to be married. He left for Canada soon after. Then it happened again! His new fiancé contracted pneumonia and died a few weeks before they were to be married. He wrote this hymn in a letter to his suffering mother in Ireland.

Though weak and heavy-laden under a burden of care, Scriven found Jesus to be his refuge. And so he prayed, finding the solace he needed—in His arms. He knew Jesus had said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28), so Scriven rested in God—in prayer.

Though Scriven's life on earth was filled with trouble, he was looking forward to that day when there would be no need for prayer. In heaven, all would be "rapture, praise, and endless worship."

May this song be true of us. May we take everything to the Lord in prayer. Only He is worthy! **JH**

1. S.D. Gordon, "Does Prayer Influence God?" <https://www.free-bible-study-lessons.com/does-prayer-influence-God.html> (accessed May 18, 2020).

2. "What a Friend We Have In Jesus," Timeless Truths, https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/What_a_Friend_We_Have_in_Jesus/ (accessed May 15, 2020).

3. "KidTunz," accessed May 15, 2020, <https://kiddtunz.com/history-behind-the-hymn-what-a-friend-we-have-in-jesus>



Ken Reddington, an MK, returned to Japan 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.

Disappointment with God

What can we do when it seems God lets us down

On our last home assignment, we rented a missionary house near my hometown. It was a blessing in many ways, especially in that it had a well-stocked library. It was interesting, but not surprising, that the library included three copies of Philip Yancey's book *Disappointment with God*. The missionary life has many disappointments. How we deal with the times we feel let down, especially when we feel that way about God, is important. These feelings don't need to define us, but God can indeed use them for good in our lives.

One statistic says the biggest challenge for missionary organizations is getting missionaries to return for a second term. They leave for a myriad of reasons, but those reasons might be summarized best by saying the missionary was disappointed—with ministry, coworkers, and even himself or herself. Disappointment is usually not one big thing but “petty disappointments [that] tend to accumulate over time.”¹ Taken by themselves, we could deal with them, but over time become: “I wonder. Can God be trusted? If so many small prayers go unanswered, what about the big ones?”² The question we need to ask ourselves is, *Is this a three-day story?*³

The Bible is full of third-day stories: Esther praying before facing the king to save her people, Jonah in the fish, etc. But the most famous is Jesus' resurrection. The Bible gives a lot of space in the New Testament to talk about Good Friday and Easter. But little is said about Saturday. Saturday, for the disciples, was the day they reflected on the fact that maybe Jesus had failed, and they felt deeply let down. C.S. Lewis noted, “When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing [God], so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms.” Lewis goes on to contrast this with when you feel your need is desperate and you can't find help anywhere, so you try to go to God “and what do you find? A door slammed in your face and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become.”⁴ After Jesus' death, the disciples were deeply disappointed by the silence.

Perhaps, you are in a third-day story and it's Saturday. It is the day of silence. For some of us, the “day” has lasted



a long time. And for those of us who have been disappointed in missionary life where we felt led and called by God, he seems especially quiet.

The way to deal with a third-day story is first to find out if that is what is happening in my life. To do that, I need to get to the “third day,” and that often means I need to wait. Unfortunately, the idea of waiting is never something we enjoy. Most of us get impatient waiting in the line at the grocery store. And waiting when we feel God has let us down seems impossible. But there is something different in this waiting because we are with God. The seemingly impossible wait can best be endured by looking to the Scriptures for other such stories.

Scripture is full of encouraging third-day stories:

Joseph waiting for years to confront his brothers, Abraham's waiting until old age before God gave him a child, David's desperate wait and flight from Saul before he became king as God promised, and many others. The ultimate might be Job's story, where, after all his losses, he was able to meet with God one-on-one. Bible stories can comfort us during the most difficult times of disappointment, especially as we see other people who have endured and come out on the other end closer to God than before.

Missionary lives are full of disappointments. And though these are part of our story, they aren't the whole story. They can actually be a “pause” in our story, or a Saturday in our third-day story. Waiting with God in our disappointments can actually result in good in our lives. And maybe “Resurrection Sunday” is right around the corner. **JH**

1. Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 13.
2. Ibid.
3. John Ortberg, “Between Despair and Joy,” *FaithGateway*, <https://www.faithgateway.com/between-despair-and-joy> (April 4, 2015). John Ortberg uses this phrase to refer to the story pattern of trouble, waiting for God, and deliverance.
4. C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (HarperOne, 2001), 5-6.



Eileen Nielsen is the Member Care Facilitator for TEAM Japan. She is a counselor at Tokyo Mental Health Clinic. She leads seminars on using MBTI for team building, conflict resolution, and personal development. Email: eileenpn Nielsen@gmail.com

COVID-19 and church planting

The pandemic is exposing the need for greater application of the gospel in our lives and our church communities

I could never have anticipated the extent to which COVID-19 would disrupt the lives of countless people, both sick and well, throughout the world. At the time of writing (in late March), churches are trying to figure out how to care for their members and carry on their God-given mission when they are unable to gather together for corporate worship or in other ways.

But perhaps this season is a divinely orchestrated opportunity to reevaluate the health of our churches. I have been praying for God's mercy and the alleviation of suffering around the world. At the same time, as someone involved in local church planting, I have been praying about and reflecting on what the Lord wants to show me through this season for our church.

COVID-19 exposes the health of our hearts

Our kids have been out of school for several weeks now. It has been great to spend more time together as a family, going on long bike rides, playing games, etc. But, as we are encouraged to practice social distancing and I'm staying inside with them more, I find myself sinning more by my impatience, irritability, and anger toward my family. Can you relate? The current circumstances bring more of the residual sin in my heart to the surface, and I am confronted once again with my desperate need for God's rescue. I need God's transforming work by the gospel through repentance and faith, and I am learning to apply the truths of the gospel in this area of my life. I am hearing similar struggles when I talk to church members via Zoom, and I suspect others people, including non-Christian friends in our community, are experiencing much of the same. Perhaps two of the best ways I can serve our community as I pray for this pandemic to pass is to:

1. Continue to pray for and seek gospel transformation in my own heart and
2. To find ways to encourage others by speaking the gospel to them in love.

COVID-19 exposes the health of our relationships

"I'm turning 50 this year, and I don't know how many more years I have left," a non-Christian friend confided in me recently. "I find myself wondering why I'm doing what I'm doing." I don't know if he was prompted by the current situation or just by the realization that he is getting

older. Either way, I'm glad he felt comfortable enough to share this with me and that I could share how his story intersects with God's story. This is a man who had told me several times in the past that he would never become a Christian. But he has been coming to our Sunday gathering weekly since the beginning of this year and even participating in our Zoom Sunday worship gathering since we started meeting virtually. It has taken several years for him to get to this place—years of his wife's faithful prayer and gospel witness, as well as our community spending seemingly mundane and non-spiritual quantity time with him and seeking to demonstrate the gospel through words and deeds. Even if it takes years, we want to continue to cultivate deep relationships with our non-Christian friends in our community, so that in a season like this, when people feel fearful and anxious, we are close enough to offer them the hope they need through the gospel.

And what about relationships in the church? Do people in our churches know each other well enough to give and receive help from one another even when we can't gather on Sundays? Is each member in a close relationship with at least one or two others so that they can receive prayer, support, and encouragement and can continue to mature in Christ? Can the work of disciple-making continue without a large-group gathering? I value the public preaching of God's Word, sacraments, and corporate singing and prayer. These are all means of God's grace to his people for their discipleship. But gathering on Sunday alone is insufficient to foster the kind of relationships in which life-on-life discipleship happens. Perhaps the current season of not being able to have normal Sunday gatherings is an opportunity for churches to review their disciple-making strategies and make sure there is a pathway for each member to be in discipleship relationships with others.

Regardless of the current situation, I want to keep praying for my own heart transformation by the gospel and helping others to do the same. I want to continue to cultivate deeper relationships with a few individuals inside and outside the church while continuing to pray for opportunities to show and share the gospel with them, trusting that Jesus will keep building his church. **✠**

Seita Sakaguchi serves as a pastor at Toyosu Community Church, a recent church plant in Tokyo, and also serves on the Leadership Team of CPI. He lives in Toyosu with his wife and four children



Writer's retreat 2020

If you were given an intriguing photo or topic and ten minutes to write about it, would you get excited?

In early January, I sent an email through the JEMA email network asking for people who were interested in participating in a writer's retreat in Nagano Prefecture in early March. To my surprise, I received enthusiastic replies from nearly 20 people from across Japan. In the end, only 12 could join me, but it turned out to be just the right number. We had a wide range of ages, writing interests, experience, and personalities—which made for a fascinating weekend.

My goals for the retreat were:

1. To provide an opportunity for people to take time away from their daily lives to write.
2. To energise writers by getting them together.
3. To offer my help with writing or editing.

On the Friday night, we introduced ourselves and engaged in a warm-up writing exercise. One writer later confessed to me that this simple exercise had caused him to lose sleep that night as he thought of more things he could have written.

Participants had an opportunity after lunch on Saturday to learn about some pitfalls that writers often fall into. Some of us also met in a group to hear and critique one another's work.

Both mornings, we gathered for a devotional and prayer time led by participants.

I also spent time one-on-one with most of the attendees to talk about their writing or publishing questions. But it was a relaxed schedule that allowed people to pursue their own goals for the weekend.



When I asked about what could be improved about the weekend, the only thing I heard is that it could have been longer. I know I could have used more help with logistics, but it was fantastic to get away from the busyness of ministry and to focus on writing and to hang out with other people who are excited about writing.

This won't be the last writer's retreat in this area. I don't have any details planned at this point, but if the above description makes you excited, keep a lookout for another email. Or if you are interested in hosting a writer's retreat in your area, please let me know. **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.

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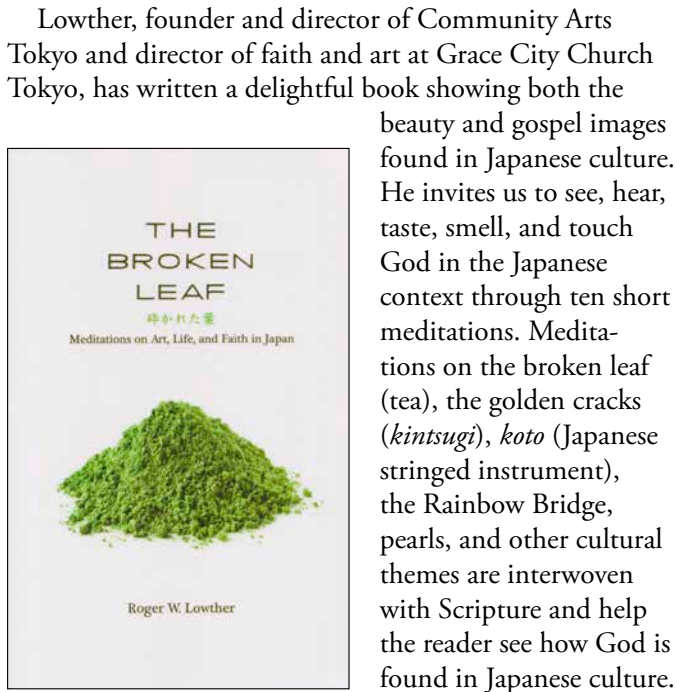
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The Broken Leaf: Meditations on Art, Life, and Faith in Japan

Roger W. Lowther (*Resource Publications WIPF, 2019*). 49 pp.



Lowther, founder and director of Community Arts Tokyo and director of faith and art at Grace City Church Tokyo, has written a delightful book showing both the beauty and gospel images found in Japanese culture. He invites us to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch God in the Japanese context through ten short meditations. Meditations on the broken leaf (tea), the golden cracks (*kintsugi*), *koto* (Japanese stringed instrument), the Rainbow Bridge, pearls, and other cultural themes are interwoven with Scripture and help the reader see how God is found in Japanese culture.

The book is elegantly written, well-researched, and includes a short bibliography. The book is being translated into Japanese and will be a very helpful tool for missionaries and believers in Japan who want to share the gospel with the Japanese people and show how images of God and parallels with the Bible are embedded in the culture. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Operation Japan: Prayer Guide 5th edition

Don Wright (2019). 105 pp.



Wright, former missionary to Japan, has updated this excellent prayer guide for Japan. Wright has been editor of the prayer guide since it was first published in 1997 and has updated this edition with the latest statistics. The book goes through each prefecture and gives information on the church situation, number of believers, and prayer points. Sixteen different themes are also

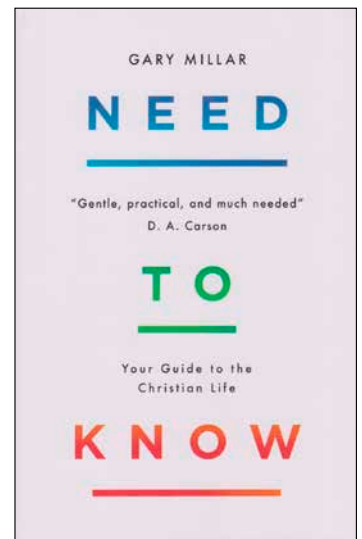
addressed, including youth, social issues, and literature and evangelism. More careful editing and attention to details will further improve the next edition. This is a book that every missionary to Japan should have and pray through. As Wright notes on p. 3, “The prayer of believers is THE key to turning Japan to the light and love of Christ.” This prayer guide will be a wonderful help to those who want to pray for Japan. It is available on Amazon and I will have copies to give to people as I travel to churches in the US this next year. **JH**

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

Need to Know: Your Guide to the Christian Life

Gary Millar (*The Good Book Company, 2020*). 125 pp.

Millar, an Old Testament scholar and principal of Queensland Theological College in Brisbane, Australia, explains the basic principles of the Christian faith in a very practical way. He writes with humor and grace and shows what it means to live for Jesus in a way that will benefit every reader. He focuses on the essentials—what we really need to know if we are going to follow Jesus. We need to know the God of the gospel and live with him in the power of the gospel. Six biblically-based chapters cover the basics of the Christian life and show that life with Jesus is the best life there is. That is what we most need to know. Millar has recommended resources in each chapter and provided mentoring questions to help apply the truths of the book. This is a great resource for helping others follow Jesus. **JH**



Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★



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

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