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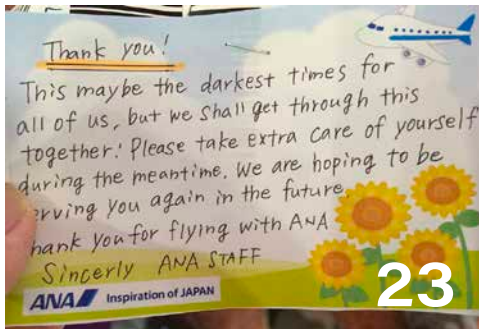
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Please note that event details are subject to change at this time of uncertainty. Please check with JEMA or organizers for confirmation.

Every other month

JEMA Online Prayer Gathering

The last Tuesday of each odd month in 2021:
 March 30, May 25, July 27, Sept. 28, Nov. 30
 Includes breakout rooms based on language
 To register, scan this QR code or go to:
<https://forms.gle/3Q1G8nAVCc8oo2y27>



May

Prayer Summit for Western Japan

May 24-27, 2021
 Nosegawa Bible Camp, Hyogo

October

WIM Fall Day of Prayer Plus

October 7, 2021
 Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo



CPI National Conference postponed



The CPI conference previously scheduled for November 2021 will be postponed until 2022. New dates will be announced soon.

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

jema.org

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



Japan Harvest

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CARING IN THE NEW NORMAL

We've got a "Responding to Disaster" list from our mission pinned on our family's noticeboard. However, it does not particularly cover the sort of disaster that we've experienced this year. "Do not panic and rush outside" is an instruction for a short, sudden event like an earthquake. This last year we've experienced a global disaster that's been slow moving and largely invisible. These two factors are part of what has made it so difficult. We've also had many things we've taken for granted, like travel and talking with people face to face, radically changed or denied for a time.

Learning how to care for one another when we often can't meet in person has been a big challenge. So this was a natural theme for an issue about missionary member care.

Meeting people

I am thankful for technology that, not too long ago, didn't exist. In my early twenties, I was an occupational therapist in a small town. I had almost no local professional support but was responsible for a wide geographical area. I was linked to other occupational therapists in the same government organisation. But we were spread out over an area larger than Denmark. Once a month, we had a group telephone call. That call was challenging and nowhere near as effective or easy to use as group video calls are now.

But, we also know that online meetings aren't the same as in-person meetings. One of the reasons Zoom makes us so fatigued is that the nonverbal cues that we rely on are harder to pick up on a video call. And—as Celia Olson notes in her article—it's harder to meet new people in online meetings.

Even meeting in person is hard at the moment. My husband works at CAJ, and one thing I've heard from teachers is how much they miss seeing their students' whole faces. Chatting with a colleague the other day in a café with masks on was difficult because I couldn't always hear her over the background noise.

Loss

We've all experienced loss this year, more than in a usual year. It's been easy to feel isolated with our challenges. I'm excited that this issue of *Japan Harvest* has the opportunity to reach you in your homes and help you see you aren't so alone in what you've experienced.

Earlier this year, I heard someone say: "We're all in the same storm, but all in different boats." In May, I took a fiction book to the park for a couple of hours to get out of the house and relax. But my thoughts turned to my losses in the current situation, and I surprised myself by writing a poem. It was one of the ways I've grieved the losses of the last year. What have you done? Often missionaries are quick to name the things they are grateful for. This is good, but I don't think it's unbiblical to name those things that have caused us pain and turn them over to God. After all, King David did so in many of the psalms he wrote—for example:

Fear and trembling come upon me,
And horror has overwhelmed me.
I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
Behold, I would flee far away,
I would spend my nights in the wilderness."
(Psalm 55:5–7 NASB)

That psalm continues later:

Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you;
he will never permit the righteous to be moved.
(vs. 22 ESV)

Let's indeed cast our burdens on the Lord.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Summer 2021: Japanese Mindset

Autumn 2021: Men, Where are They? (submission deadline May 30)

Winter 2022: Technology (submission deadline August 30)

Spring 2022: Rest (submission deadline November 30)

Japanese video for “The Blessing” released

Christian Shimbun, October 11, 2020 Translated by Grace Koshino

In 2020, a song called “The Blessing” swept the world. The lyrics of the song are based on Numbers 6:24-26 in which God blesses Aaron and his children through Moses.

On September 11, the official Japanese version of “The Blessing” was released. Around 170 people from 75 churches and ministry organizations took part in the project. We spoke to Yuko Nakaue (on staff at Hongōdai Christ Church), who began the project and is a member of the team for the Japanese version.

A missionary from Australia showed me the UK version and encouraged me to try it with Japanese churches. A few weeks later, a Canadian, who is a friend of the Australian missionary and had been involved in the creation of the Canadian version, contacted me to push for the creation of a Japanese version, with a promise to help me.

I felt convinced that this was the Lord urging me, so I prayed, “Lord, I don’t know what I can do to help, but I am willing to do anything to bring the churches of Japan together, even in a small way.” I then told Pastor Keishi Ikeda (Senior Pastor of Hongōdai Christ Church)

that I wanted to help with the project. Pastor Ikeda had also been approached by the missionary. This is how the project came about.

Pastor Nobuyoshi Nagai of Tohoku Central Church also joined the project. At the end of May, Shalom Sillavan, who has worked as a producer of videos for Japan Hope and 7MEDIA, said that she had already begun preparation on making a Japanese version and asked about collaborating.

“Even though we had never met each other, through God’s mysterious guidance more people were gradually added to the team,” recalls Nakaue.

The lyrics had already been translated by Shalom and her mother Ioanna and had been edited by Pastor Nagai.

The karaoke version was created by Gordon Hyppolite, who plays multiple instruments and is a friend of Shalom.

In June, the project team invited various churches and missions across Japan to take part and the musical backing was sent to those who were interested. The recordings sent from the churches were then put together by Gordon and Shalom, and edited by YouTuber Samuel Kaylor.

After some time, the video was approved by copyright holder Elevation Worship and finally uploaded.

“The Blessing” has been sung across the globe in different languages. It gained attention when people from over 65 churches in the UK gathered together online and sang the English version of the song together. Similar projects have been carried out globally, and the song has been sung in multiple languages.

In the video, beautiful scenes of the four seasons of Japan are interspersed with views of the faces of the participants. It starts with winter to symbolize the spiritual state of Japan, then gradually goes through spring and summer which symbolize God’s hand at work. The end shows autumn, which symbolizes spiritual harvest. During instrumental intervals, traditional Japanese instruments such as the *kokyū* (a string instrument), *koto* (a type of zither), *shinobue* and *hichiriki* (types of flutes), *shamisen* (another string instrument), and *taiko* (drum) were played together with traditional dancing as a form of worship to Almighty God to symbolize spiritual breakthrough.

Just 10 days after the Japanese video was uploaded, it had reached over 20,000 views. The aim of the video was to help the body of Christ to be one. Nakaue hopes that this will be the first step towards that happening. ■

https://youtu.be/b74EymT_0GA



uest News

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

Opening the Bible Channel BRIDGE to the public

Christian Shimbun, October 11, 2020 Translated by Tomoko Kato

In order to set up a platform for Japanese churches, the Pacific Broadcasting Association (PBA, Chairman Yoshio Yagi) built a website called Seisho Channel BRIDGE (seishobridge.com). Their goal is “To send God’s blessings to as many people as possible.” Organizations such as Word of Life Press Ministries, One Hope Japan, Our Daily Bread, Hakobune-bin, Ochanomizu Christian Center (OCC), and RCJ Media Ministry offered their own content and know-how to the site. Their hope is that BRIDGE will link people to churches and promote cooperative evangelism.

Since the site’s launch at midnight on October 1, its various films and audio materials have helped people understand Christianity easily. At the time of writing, 900 audio and video articles have been uploaded, sorted into these categories: Recommended content, New content, Learning the Bible, Kids, Music, and Daily Scripture. Our Daily Bread (including sign language), Kids’ Bible Class Online, and LUMO videos can be freely watched anywhere at any time without any restrictions. Radio programs are also provided by PBA (Pacific Broadcasting Association) and groups such as Lifeline and Light of the World.

PBA, as a pioneer in broadcasting ministry, has been supplying Christian radio and TV programs all over Japan for 70 years. Mr. Mitsumoto Morita, the General Manager, gave seven characteristics of this site: Christian content supplied by a variety of groups, a simple design, no unnecessary advertis-

ing, the ability to easily search for the meaning of Scripture or technical terminology, being able to watch past programs, having close relationships with local churches, and no registration fees.



Mr. Morita explained at length: “In addition to PBA’s content, associated organizations will contribute new material and we are going to ask more people to join us. Not just mission organizations, but also churches or, if their churches permit, individual Christians. Of course, we set guidelines and comply with the faith standards of the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA). This, however, does not mean that we will restrict the content providers only to the JEA constituency.

“The quantity of information in the world has been increasing explosively, and sources of information have changed rapidly. Sending transmissions over the airwaves used to be enough to deliver the gospel, but it is not so now. People are busy and their tastes vary. Only a limited number of people can

watch programs that are supplied at an appointed time and place. However, TV and radio programs do not have to only be broadcast just once; they can also be recorded so people in need can access them at any time according to their lifestyle, while we carry on making up-to-date programming.”

Each page on the site has a Contact button. “Responses from the audience are important. They were able to access content from the PBA website, but there had been no place to support visitors. The BRIDGE site now provides this option, by taking visitors to content such as ‘church introductions’ or ‘online Bible classes’ and links them to local churches. PBA acts as a reception desk at first, but then connects visitors to

preachers or missionaries in the groups all over Japan who follow up. This is our commitment.

“The idea for this site was announced at the National Conference of Broadcast Evangelism (全国放送伝道会議) in September 2018. Rev. Hatori, the founder of PBA, once said, ‘I never think that once the gospel is on the airwaves, everyone will believe and be saved.’ When we share our resources and cooperate together, more people can be given the gospel and some of them will be connected to churches.

“This site can be considered a platform for cooperative evangelism. The name BRIDGE is very meaningful. I will not exaggerate—this is a rather small start. But I hope this platform will be widely used and become the go-to site for Christian churches.” ■

Called to be present and go deep

Frustrated by the limitations of online ministry, Celia sought a different way to serve people in the midst of this pandemic

By Celia Olson

I kneel on the tatami floor of a tea room crowded with sixty other tea lovers clad in festive kimono. We have gathered to celebrate *hatsugama*, the “first kettle” of the year. I watch our host prepare the first bowl of *koicha* (thick matcha) in a red bowl lined with gold leaf. She sets the bowl out to be shared by the three most honored guests while an army of helpers emerge from the kitchen with tea to nourish the other fifty-some guests.

I am the last of the three people to drink from one bowl. On my left sits my teacher, but the tea arrives from my right—two complete strangers. A few weeks have passed now since the first COVID-19 cases here in Sapporo. I wonder, as I lift the bowl in thanks, how much backwash is mixed in with the tea. Even so, I drink deeply—the traditional three sips and a slurp. As I savor the sensation of

viscous *koicha* coating the inside of my mouth, I reflect on the joy of being united with other humans by sharing a communal bowl.

Loss of physical connection

This may have been the last public *koicha* in Sapporo—ever. A few weeks after this event, the leader of my school of tea ceremony called for a permanent end to the practice of sharing *koicha* bowls, and all large *chakai* (tea gatherings) have been canceled for the foreseeable future.

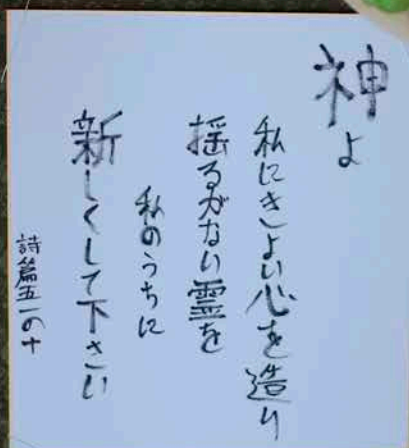
It may seem strange that my biggest heartbreaks (so far) during COVID-19 have been the loss of shared *koicha* bowls and the inability to gather with hundreds of mostly elderly ladies kneeling on the floor for hours at a time. It's not so much these two losses in themselves that I grieve, but rather what they stand for.

During the Warring States period (1467-1615), when tea ceremony evolved into its current form, samurai would sometimes share a bowl of *koicha* to deepen their bond with one another before riding to war. Who knew if any of them would live to share another tea? I am reminded of Jesus sharing the Passover meal with his disciples before going to battle with sin and death. Now, in our battle against germs, we have lost a meaningful physical connection with friends and strangers, and for Christians, a powerful symbol of unity in Christ.

I started attending local *chakai* with my teacher in 2019 with the hope of expanding my circle of friends outside our class of five. I began to make connections with people I met. It seemed that participating in these gatherings was God's leading for friendship evangelism and a solid next step in my frustrating journey towards arts ministry. Losing this opportunity felt like (another) door slammed shut.

Unable to gather in person, some of the younger tea practitioners in Hokkaido held a Zoom *chakai*. I watched as our host prepared tea in Kushiro, then the first guest, elsewhere in Hokkaido, drank. Each participant prepared his or her own tea and sweets. This was a fun and interesting experiment and cer-

Photos are from the missionary chakai on Oct. 2nd. To the left are the tokonoma decorations used for that chakai. The hanging scroll is Psalm 51:10, written by Celia. The boat shape of the flower vase symbolizes "receiving treasure."



tainly better than nothing, but it lacked the sensory richness, informal conversations, and serendipitous meetings which one expects at a chakai. There was a sense of togetherness in adversity, but no possibility of making friends.

As the pandemic wore on, I grew anxious. Grieved and frustrated by the impersonality and rootlessness of online meetings, I wasn't doing anything that looked like ministry. God has called me to be physically present with people, I reflected, *but how can I carry out that calling while stuck at home and cut off from all my friends?* I felt like an utter failure as a missionary, turning up my nose at Zoom, the only means of connecting with the people I hoped to reach. The pressure to move my ministry online brought a bigger problem to light: Rather than serving God as myself and embracing his calling for me, I realized that I had been trying to mimic what I saw other missionaries doing.

Caring for those close by

Finding joy in the midst of COVID-19 grief started when I accepted God's invitation to take a break from looking for new connections and to love and serve those with me now. During lockdown, that meant God, the occasional neighbor, and my husband, Keith, who often gets my emotional leftovers when I am exhausted from ministry work. I spent hours each day practicing in my tea room, savoring the quiet space and the fragrant presence of God. Sometimes Keith joined me, and sometimes I was alone.

As restrictions eased, tea lessons started again. My teacher developed safety measures for performing tea ceremony and hosting guests, and I felt loved and hopeful, not least because she wanted to meet with her students in person. It seemed that each week we spent as much time sharing our joys and sorrows as we did studying and practicing. God gave me opportunities to speak words of comfort and to give permission to grieve. I realized that although large chakai provide opportunities to meet people, tea ceremony is better suited to intimate gatherings, allowing special connections to form between individual participants.

Having learned how to host safely and inspired by my teacher's care, I began to consider who I could invite for tea in my home.

Before COVID-19, chakai-level of hospitality seemed a luxurious waste. When I host guests for tea, I start planning weeks in advance. What will be the theme of the gathering? What proverb or Bible verse should I display on the hanging scroll? Which utensils, sweets, and tea will suit the season, the occasion, and the taste of the guests? Sometimes I prepare a liturgy, weaving Scripture, songs, and poetry into the movements of tea ceremony and linking the bread and wine of communion with matcha and *manju* (steamed buns filled with red bean paste). With practice and cleaning thrown in, preparations take at least a solid week of work—all for only a few guests. No two chakai are alike. But with gatherings limited by COVID-19, I became free to lavish care on those around me.

In June, I hosted my kimono circle for ikebana and tea, with a liturgy based on Psalm 103 and Matthew 6:26–33. In July, I recycled my wedding liturgy into a fifteenth anniversary chakai just for Keith and me. In August, I hosted my tea ceremony class and challenged myself to make lunch as well. In September, a few people from my church community came for communion-tea with a liturgy based on Psalm 51; I used the same liturgy to host a group of missionary colleagues for communion in October. In November, my church community grieved and

rejoiced together with a Thanksgiving chakai based on Habakkuk 3.

Guests expressed delight in the rooted, five-senses richness of tea ceremony, a welcome break from Zoom meetings. Several missionary colleagues had not been served communion in six months. One friend pointed out that when each person's bowl of tea was individually, lovingly prepared, rather than using one communal bowl, as for koicha, it reminded her of God's love for each of us as individuals, even as we gathered in community. As I enjoyed the responses of my guests, God confirmed to me that I was participating in the work of healing—that what I offered my guests might be luxurious, but it wasn't a waste.

Tea ceremony is the way God has gifted me to care for myself, for fellow missionaries, for people at church, and for friends. We all need intentional connection with God, with people, and with the physical world in this fragmented time.

You may be skilled at connecting with people by Zoom. If so, go forward in God's power! But if, like me, you feel called to physical presence, take heart and embrace your calling and giftedness. We have the opportunity now to reach more people than ever using online tools, but God also invites each of us to go deep with a few special people—the people God has uniquely gifted us to care for and reach. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Celia Olson is originally from Seattle, USA, and has served in Hokkaido with OMF since 2009. She has studied Japanese tea ceremony since 2013 (Urasenke).



CRYING OUT TO GOD

Being real with God through lament can help us through challenging times

By Christina Winrich

How was this past year for you? I think most people would answer with some variation of stressful, lonely, frustrating, challenging, yet filled with moments of seeing God at work in and through the circumstances we encountered. One word I often heard discussed last year was “lament.” To be honest, at first I was a bit irritated that this word kept appearing everywhere I turned. Yes, we know we have to be honest with our feelings; we have to sit quietly with what’s going on to get at the root of what we might be struggling with. But in a year when so much of our time suddenly was spent sitting quietly, I was filled with longing to just get busy doing something, something that would feel productive and redeem the time. Lament felt too . . . stationary. However, once I finally started paying more attention to this word, I was helped by what the Lord had to show me.

Psalm 88

One of the first things God challenged me with was Psalm 88. Usually, when we talk about laments, we look at other psalms (e.g. Ps. 13, 42, or 86) or the book of Job or Lamentations, all of which include elements of praise and statements of trust that God will see us through. These laments follow a similar pattern: complaint, petition, cursing,

confession of sin or faith, and expression of trust or praise. But Psalm 88 does not follow this pattern.

In Psalm 88, the author seems stuck in despair. His complaint and petition end on a note of hopelessness. It is as if he poured out all of his suffering before the Lord and then simply sat down, empty of words or even tears. I was challenged by this because I wonder how often I have tried to rush myself or others through a Psalm 88-type complaint, to get to the more typical biblical-lament ending—on a high note. Yet Psalm 88 is part of God’s Word and it’s given to us as a reminder of the suffering of the Sons of Korah (who wrote it) and as a template for expressions of lament.

Maybe some of us got stuck last year in despair. This may have to do with COVID-19, or maybe other things that had nothing to do with the pandemic. What can we do if we are stuck in despair? I felt the Lord saying—it’s all right to get stuck, to sound like a broken record with our complaints and petitions. The Lord doesn’t get tired of listening to us, and it’s good for us to get these things out, kind of like clearing pus from a wound so it can heal.

But God also showed me that while it may be normal to get stuck in Psalm 88 for a season, it’s important to remember that this isn’t our final landing

place. There are some safeguards that can prevent us from lingering here too long.

Safeguards to prevent getting stuck in lament

First—we shouldn’t be afraid to be real with God. We should make a practice of being brutally honest with the Lord. He is the only one who will never be offended by us or tired of hearing about our struggles.

Some of us hold back because we don’t want to become grumblers or have a complaining spirit (Phil. 2: 14-15). Others hold back because we feel it dishonors God if we admit to negative thoughts. Yet others struggle to draw near to the Lord as their friend. But we see throughout Scripture that the Lord longs for us to approach Him with our whole selves. He already knows what we are going through anyway. Whenever we bring something to Him, in a sense we are opening that part of ourselves up for His Spirit to minister to. Like Job, as long as we’re directing our pain and grievances towards God, we are keeping ourselves open to His appearance and intervention. By regularly approaching the Lord this way, we are to some extent protected from the sudden crash that can happen if we ignore our negative emotions for a protracted time.

Second—after we pour out our hearts we can sit in silence and wait for God to respond. We can ask Him, “What do You want to say to me about this?” This may be a scary question to ask, especially in seasons where God feels far away and His only answer seems to be silence. It may feel easier to skip this part and just get back into the work He has entrusted to us. However, by having the courage to ask God this question and wait for His answer, we are opening ourselves to the entrance of His love and sustaining strength.

Third—we should at some point push ourselves to utter an expression of trust or praise. When this moment comes is between you and God, but we can trust that the Spirit will help us to speak of His goodness even when we don't yet feel it in our hearts. As we praise Him with our wills, we open ourselves to the surprising entrance of His peace.

These last two points are also ways that we can help others when they are going through a difficult season. As we pray for our suffering friends, we can ask on their behalf, “Lord, what do You want to say to them? Help them to hear Your voice and receive the help they need.” When they are unable to do so on their own, we can express trust in God's faithfulness and praise for His love for them. We can be the body of Christ to one another.

Modern-day example

As I've been meditating on Psalm 88 I have been greatly encouraged by the example of Adjith Fernando.¹ During the height of the civil war in Sri Lanka, Adjith was overwhelmed by the suffering and death around him. Every day someone he knew was killed; every day he and his wife feared for their safety and their friends and family. So he began to walk. Every day he would leave his office and walk—crying out to God in his spirit. As he pounded the dirt with his feet, he pounded heaven with his tears and pain. He would pour out his heart until he felt a shift in his spirit. Sometimes this would be after an hour, sometimes longer. When he felt that his burden had been lightened even slightly, he would turn back towards home. All the way back, he would intercede for his country.

The part I found most encouraging was that Adjith did this every day, for months. His style of lament was not a one-time baring of his soul. Rather it was a practice, a way of life. He used lament to bring his pain and needs

before the Lord over and over again. In doing so, he placed himself in a position to receive the strength and grace to get through that one day. His practice of lament was to live out a very painful reality one day at a time.

My hope is that we can do the same. Let's draw near to the Lord with whatever is in our hearts, even if we're stuck for a season in the complaint and petition part of the process. Let's keep pressing in to Him with brutal honesty, eventually finding our way out, back into a place of trust where we can lift up the needs of others too. My hope is that we can become people who embrace lament as part of our lives and learn to walk well with others who are suffering. For those of us who are stuck in Psalm 88, may we experience the Lord's help and once again say with David:

But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13:5-6 ESV) JH

1. Adjith Fernando, *An Authentic Servant: the Marks of a Spiritual Leader* (The Lausanne Movement, 2008).

Suggested further reading: *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church can Help* by Harriet Hill, Margaret Hill, Richard Baggé, and Pat Miersma (American Bible Society, NY, 2014).

Many thanks to Dr. Lisa Sinclair for her teaching on Psalm 88 and the practice of lament.

Christina Winrich (US) has been serving with OMF in Japan since 2016. She enjoys swimming, reading good books, and eating sushi, though not all at the same time.

THE LORD DOESN'T GET TIRED OF LISTENING TO US.

Remembering our primary calling

What if COVID-19 didn't catch God by surprise? No pandemic can ever restrict what God has primarily called you to accomplish.

By Kurt Owen

"I am a failure. I have failed the Lord. I have failed the people, and I feel so lost."

Are you one of the many who have struggled with these thoughts and feelings while living and ministering in a culture that prizes stability, improvement, and performance?

COVID has forced a lot of change in ministries, and particularly hard hit are the missionaries whose lives and ministries were difficult already. Those who are results-driven and find their self-worth and self-identity in their accomplishments may be struggling the most.

So, what is the cure?

Returning to the primary calling on our life, and prizing what is vital!

Let's look at Mark 3, where the Lord Jesus is selecting and calling his first ministers. "And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him" (Mark 3:13 NKJV). Remember that the Lord "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8); we know he has called us in the same way.

Why did Jesus call you?

He wanted you. He knew everything about you—good and bad—and wanted you.

This is more than wanting you in his family; this is him personally selecting you to work for him and represent him in ministry. *He wanted you.*

Next, notice that those Jesus called came to him. Yes, he wanted them, and yes, he called them—but they had to choose to come. He was on a mountain, so getting to him wasn't easy! But climbing halfway wouldn't

be enough. If they wanted what Jesus had for them, fully coming to him was the first requirement. In fact, partial commitment would only bring frustration: it would be effort without reward. They needed to be close enough to hear Jesus.

"Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14-15).

Those whom Jesus called responded. On the mountaintop, he appointed them and identified their calling.

He called them to be with him, to preach, and to walk in power.

Was their first and primary call to preach and to fulfill the work of the ministry? To build grand buildings, church groups, or programs? Was it honorable and good things, like feeding children, helping the less fortunate, visiting widows, orphans, the imprisoned, or the elderly?

All of these are noble, just, and godly causes. But none of them are our first calling.

If ministering to the needs of people is not our primary calling, then what is?

To be with God

Our primary call as a minister and as a child of God is our relationship with Jesus.

Notice this is not simply to be in his presence, because the disciples already were. They went nearly everywhere with Jesus.

Many rationalize, "Well, I am saved. I'm a Christian, so he is always with me." This was true of his disciples as

well, yet to them, he essentially invited them further—"From this point forward being with me in living relationship is your first and primary calling" (author's paraphrase).

If Jesus is to trust you to do anything else for him, our first and primary calling—before and beyond all work of ministry—is to know Jesus intimately.

This is a simple truth, yet difficult to achieve.

Why is that?

Perhaps our other callings have our attention far more than Jesus does. When our accomplishments receive recognition from others, we tend to make that our motivation, rather than the Lord.

Do you know the best thing about our primary calling? We can fulfill it even when we can't do anything else. We can spend time with him when we cannot preach. We can do his will for our lives when we're unable to feed others. When visiting is impossible, you know what we can do? Spend time with Jesus and fulfill our first call. When we cannot have group meetings, we can have fellowship with him.

Right now, many in ministry may feel like failures because of what they have not been able to do.

Rather than finding satisfaction in fellowshiping with Jesus, they may have sought joy through their accomplishments and are now pained by lack of progress. Some agonize over feeling they have failed in their calling or failed the Lord and others. All these challenges leave ministers feeling lost, not knowing what they are doing with their life or where they are going. Yet, these callings are secondary.

**He called them deeper into their first and primary calling:
to be with him and know him.**

The great news is this: you can fulfill your primary and most important calling—to know Jesus intimately—right where you are.

You can awaken tomorrow knowing exactly what you're going to do and where you're going to go. No longer aimless or lost, you can successfully spend intimate time with Jesus.

Because of COVID, many in Japan have been unable to do the things they've wanted and even needed to do. But fulfilling your first and primary call is something you can always do, locked-down or not.

Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. (Mark 6:30-32)

The disciples have been so busy in ministry that they have not even had time to eat. So Jesus takes them away to a place where they can do nothing. It is a deserted place. No physical aspect of the ministry can be fulfilled. No groups. No teachings. No visiting. No services. There is no way to do anything because there is nothing there.

How did they end up in this lockdown? COVID? No. *Calling!*

Jesus called them there. Some may ask, "Why would Jesus remove them from their calling?" He didn't! He called them deeper into their first and primary calling: to be with him and know him.

Although they already appeared successful, Jesus felt it was important to "quarantine" them in a desert place.

You may be feeling distressed and disillusioned by what you have not been able to do. Maybe you're feeling lost—as though you've lost time, lost momentum, or even lost your way.

"And this is eternal life, that they

may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

Right now, you can experience eternal life in far greater measure *and* fulfill your calling all at the same time. Plus, you can do it without ever leaving your home.

As you answer your call to be with Jesus first and foremost, you will find you are better equipped with far more wisdom, far more resources, and a far better attitude to handle the people, the problems, and the work of the ministry.

Today you can hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"—not by fulfilling the work of ministry, but by fulfilling your primary calling in life and ministry: to be with Jesus and know him more intimately than you have ever known anyone before. **JH**

Kurt Owen has served in ministry for over 20 years. He is currently senior pastor of Real Life Church in Florida. He's traveled to more than 25 nations, helping churches be healthy, strong, vibrant, and active.



Jesus commanding His disciples to rest.

J.-J. T.

STRANGE *and* beautiful

Separated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Bethany and her team had to learn to wait on the Lord in a new way

By Bethany Panian

Fushigi [不思議]. Such a wonderful word. It can be translated as “marvelous, strange, incredible, mysterious.” If you break the word apart and look at the kanji: 思議 can mean “guess” or “conjecture” and 不 is a prefix like our English “non-” or “un-.” 不 turns the root word into a negative, giving “fushigi” the connotation of not being able to make a guess or conjecture. In this age of COVID-19, we surely live in fushigi times. We can hardly guess what’s happening tomorrow, much less next month or next year. Good thing we serve a fushigi God. And when it comes to caring in the new normal, we need some of his marvelous, incredible creativity.

New and unexpected

At the beginning of 2020, while something strange and mysterious was going on in China and spreading across Asia, I was rounding out my first home assignment back in the US. I had to raise more support for my second term, and I thought I might be staying a little longer than the six months my team and I planned when I left Japan back in September 2019. However, God was faithfully bringing in the provision as I took my steps of faith. By spring, I, along with the rest of the world, suddenly became interested in daily checking a lot of graphs. And in my head, I started drawing my own graph: as my support increased and neared 100 percent, so the cases of this mysterious disease increased and the countries it invaded began its slow march towards 100 percent. By March, my support just reaching 90 percent, a weighty decision interrupted my plans. My field director

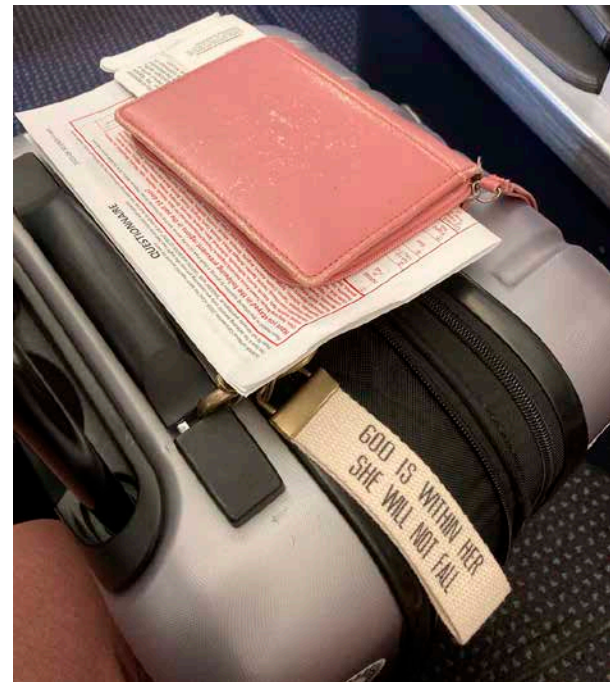
called me and said the borders to Japan were closing.

Suddenly, I had to pray desperately and ask if I should hurry my departure and return to Japan before the doors closed. I took courage, knowing my team was praying on my behalf as well. Then one morning, God distracted me from my read-the-Bible-in-a-year plan and brought me to Acts 19:21–30. In this passage, the idol makers in Ephesus stirred up a riot, and some of Paul’s travel companions got swept up into the theater. Paul wanted to go in after them, but he was stopped by his other disciples. Friends of Paul—political leaders in the area—also urged him not to go in. As I read about Paul’s situation, suddenly my own heart clenched in my chest. Through this passage, I heard the voice of my Good Shepherd telling me, “Submit to those friends who love the Lord, who love you, who have authority over you, and who can ‘read the air’ in Japan.”

I knew exactly who he was talking about. Immediately, I sent messages to my missions team and my church partners in Sendai. Through their encouragement, and particularly the words of my Japanese brothers and sisters, God directed me. My pastor wrote, “While our feelings are all the same—that we want Bethany to return!—I believe the answer is to obey the authority of our leaders and to wait to return to Japan. I think this will be an incredible testimo-

ny for you as a missionary and that this will deeply teach the church in Japan to trust missionaries.”

If my goal is to serve the church in Japan, how could I not care for my Japanese brothers and sisters through this difficult but loving task of obedience? I knew then that he called me to stay and wait in the US.



Caring from afar

In a new way I could never have imagined before, I had to wait on the Lord. I went on extended home assignment, all the while waiting for the political powers across two countries to allow me to travel back. I prayed for my daily bread in a new way. My parents and I had to learn how to walk in

Waiting is never passive.



love for one another during lockdown, each of us reacting to stressors we had never experienced before, especially as I mourned the loss of returning to Japan as planned. I had to seek new direction for what ministry looked like in a season that I didn't know the end to.

Both my field team and my stateside team were invaluable, adapting quickly to the new world, ministering to me and giving me opportunities to minister. I was the only one on my field team outside of Japan when the pandemic hit. Our leadership had already made a COVID Response Team, and they became dedicated to praying for me and researching how to get me back. I received frequent video calls and prayers from various teammates checking in on me. Spiritually, practically, and emotionally they served me, and never once did I feel isolated from them. Despite thousands of miles and travel restrictions, we were in this together.

Stateside, my sending organization had planned to have a lot of short-term teams come to Japan for summer 2020, serving in events initiated due to the Olympics. When that couldn't happen, they invited me into plans to stoke the passion for ministry and Japan in the hearts of these young people. Through monthly Zoom calls, we began building fellowship and teaching about ministering in Japan.

Waiting is never passive. Psalm 123:2 says, "Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand

of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us" (ESV). When we are waiting, our eyes are fixed on the Lord, watching for what he is doing, taking every opportunity he gives. He is always working, and we need to train our eyes to know what to look for. And we need to be ready to move.

Coming near to care

I returned to Japan on September 16, with only 12 other passengers on my flight, three days before my reentry permit would expire. God miraculously opened up the borders in the exact month that I needed to move.

I was the first one on my team reentering the country as a resident. And again, thanks to the faithfulness and love of my team and my God, I had a plan. I knew the paperwork I needed to apply for, what to expect during the reentry process, what to tell the authorities, and how to get to my quarantine location without using public transportation. I messaged my team on LINE through mini-panic attacks waiting at immigration. I spent the night in a hotel, rented a car, and left for Tohoku at 5:00 a.m. to stay in a guest house generously provided by a partner church. My team fed me, with physical and spiritual food. I had a Welcome Back sign on the table and a coffee jelly in the fridge. When a bout with depression hit in the isolation, I got prayer and BBQ from one teammate and a driveway coffee date from

another. Social distancing was no barrier to my team caring for me with love and responsibility.

The world has become a strange and mysterious place since the last time I was in this country I love. I used to be an expert in how to run a Sunday morning at our church, but now there's a temperature check and alcohol spray at the door and a plethora of enigmatic audio-visual equipment in the back for streaming the service. But I continue to look past it all to the strange and mysterious God who has made everything beautiful in its time, turning to strengthen brothers and sisters who would come after me.

With a year like 2020, I'm so glad that our God exhorts us to "rejoice with those who rejoice" and, in the same breath, "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). My team planned with me, wept with me, prayed with me, and Zoomed with me. I am also grateful that they can rejoice with me in another strange and beautiful experience as well: in the US, two weeks after I had originally planned to return to Japan, God allowed me to meet a man who wants to walk this strange and mysterious life together with me. It's amazing! 不思議だな... JH

Photos submitted by author
Photo of author taken by Casi Brown

Bethany Panian first came to Japan as an English teacher in 2011. After four years, God burdened her heart for the church in Japan, and in 2016, she became a missionary with Asian Access.



Spiritual supplies for the new normal

By Sara Wolsey

Ideas to help us live without fear in difficult times

"Are you okay?" I enquired of a young Japanese colleague. He looked quite fearful and anxious.

"I am concerned about the coronavirus—about going out and working during this pandemic," he nervously replied. This conversation took place in early 2020, and as a result of it, I endeavoured to pray for God's peace and protection upon him and all my other colleagues, family, and friends.

During 2020 I witnessed two main groups of people. The first group had fear and anxiety about the new normal and included some mature Christians. The second group had a strong, unshakable Christ-like faith and were not at all anxious. The key difference between these two groups was that the former group was mainly focused on the pandemic and worried excessively about contracting COVID-19, whereas the latter was mainly focused on God, his promises, and continuing to serve him.

Fear not!

On one Sunday morning last summer, at least one church member was especially fearful of COVID-19 and shared her fears with others just before the worship service. However, it was quite amazing to see what transpired a little later on during the service. The sermon addressed how

we as Christians should not fear. In the KJV, the imperative "Fear not" occurs over seventy times.¹ This is a command. For Christians, there are numerous benefits in following the biblical commands of not being fearful, such as:

1. God will not forsake you (1 Chron. 28:20).
2. God will not fail you (Deut. 31:6).
3. God will help you (Isaiah 41:10).
4. God can do marvelous things (Joel 2:21).
5. God will provide for you (Matt. 6:25–34).

For God to fulfil these five promises in our lives, we need to do our part and endeavour to walk in faith rather than in fear. In the latter half of Luke 18:8, Jesus asks his disciples a rhetorical question: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (ESV). Jesus had just recounted the parable of the persistent widow to his disciples "to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1 NIV). As we move closer to Jesus' second coming, fear and anxiety will increase on Earth. To maintain our faith, we need to pray persistently, fearlessly, and fervently. The hymn "Count Your

Blessings" is an excellent reminder to pray and count our blessings in all circumstances:

*When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

*Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.²*

Preparing physically and spiritually

One of the inspirations for this article was an impressive and colourful pictograph and article on the entire back page of *The Japan News* newspaper, entitled "Are you ready to evacuate?"³ This pictograph showed the contents of an emergency supplies bag and encouraged readers to make one to prepare well for natural disasters. Recommended supplies shown included water, food, clothes, rain-wear, and a blanket. Various statistics were listed of the number of people in Japan who had prepared emergency supplies in advance of major natural disasters. Some of the statistics listed were surprisingly low. For example, "only 2.9 people in 10 have an emergency kit prepared in advance . . . 3.8 people in 10 prepared their kit over 3

years ago.” Mulling over these statistics got me thinking on what spiritual supplies a Christian would need in order to live and minister without fear and anxiousness in the new normal.

Preparing spiritual supplies

Preparing a bag of spiritual supplies will help Christians to keep their focus predominantly on God rather than worrying about COVID-19.

Items could include the following:

- Bible.
- Notebook or electronic device for keeping a record of Bible studies, answered prayers, and so on.
- Devotional booklet such as *Our Daily Bread*, which is available in English and Japanese.
- Prayer guide. Some examples include *Operation Japan* and the classic *Prayers That Avail Much*.
- Bible study guide. Some church members and friends have found the Max Lucado Life Lessons series helpful.
- Christian songbook for worship. Singing praise songs and hymns will help to focus on God and will build faith rather than fear.
- Postcards and information about Christians imprisoned for their faith. (See the article's last section.)
- Holy Communion elements of bread and grape juice.

The power of Holy Communion

The regular practice of Holy Communion will release God's power in a Christian's life in various ways including God's presence and healing. When we partake of Communion, we draw closer to God and will at times feel the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit. In *The Power of Communion*, Beni Johnson recounts how Elizabeth, a member of her church, had a seizure disorder for 30 years and took daily medication. A friend suggested Elizabeth take Communion. She eventually started taking it every night and continually prayed for supernatural healing. After doing this every day for six months, Elizabeth was supernaturally healed by God and no longer needed daily medication! (pp. 56-58)

Caring and ministering in the new normal

If Christians have a strong, unshakable Christ-like faith in the midst of challenging circumstances, they won't be totally immobilised by fear and will therefore be fully focused on God and doing his will, which Jesus succinctly summed up in Matthew 22:37-39:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (NIV).

Like many churches around the world, Osaka International Church livestreamed online-only worship services at times in 2020. Our live worship services resumed in June 2020 with COVID-19 recommendations in place such as mandatory masks at church, regular handwashing, social distancing, and cancellation of the after-service fellowship time. Despite the new normal, many church members are continuing to fulfil Matthew 22:37-39 as far as possible.

As of October 2020, “according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the total number of unemployed people in the country increased 80,000 to 2.14 million.”⁴ One of Osaka International Church's most successful ministries in 2020 was its clothing collection for the homeless of Osaka. Every year, church members donate good quality used and new winter clothing for the "Mukuge no Kai"

homeless ministry in Osaka. As a result of the increase in the unemployed in Japan over the past year due to the pandemic, church members donated a lot more winter clothing than usual.

Ministering to the global persecuted church

Another excellent and exciting ministry, especially during challenging times, is to write postcards, snail mail letters, and digital letters of encouragement to Christians imprisoned for their Christian faith. Open Doors and CSW UK have annual letter writing projects for writing to persecuted Christians in various countries. Both the senders and the recipients are greatly blessed and encouraged by such letters.

Every day we are faced with a choice to either walk in faith or walk in fear. Regularly using a wide range of spiritual supplies will help us to live with deep Christ-like faith in all circumstances—including the new normal. **JH**

1. Nathan Boehm, “Fear Not,” Word Nuggets (blog) June 18, 2012, <https://wordnuggets.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/fear-not> (accessed May 22, 2020).
2. Johnston Oatman, “Count Your Blessings,” (hymn written in 1897) from *Hymnary.org*, https://hymnary.org/text/when_upon_lifes_billows_you_are_tempest (accessed December 8, 2020).
3. “Are you ready to evacuate?” *The Japan News by The Yomiuri Shimbun* (September 19, 2020), 16.
4. “Japan's Unemployment Rate Hits 3-yr High in Oct,” *The Siasat Daily*, <https://www.siasat.com/japans-unemployment-rate-hits-3-yr-high-in-oct-2035649> (December 1, 2020).

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

Useful Resources for Spiritual Supplies:

- » *Our Daily Bread* devotional booklet. (<https://odb.org>)
- » *Operation Japan: Prayer Guide* 5th ed. (Publisher: Don Wright, 2019).
- » Germain Copeland, *Prayers that Avail Much: Scriptural Prayers for Your Daily Breakthrough*, 40th Anniversary Revised and Updated Edition (Shippensburg, PA: Harrison House, 2019).
- » Beni Johnson with Bill Johnson, *The Power of Communion: Accessing Miracles Through the Body & Blood of Jesus* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2019).
- » For writing to the global persecuted church:
 - ♦ CSW UK resources: <https://www.csw.org.uk/connectencourage.htm>
 - ♦ Open Doors: <https://www.opendoors.org>
 - ♦ Japan Post Office International mail updates during COVID-19: https://www.post.japanpost.jp/int/information/overview_en.html

Caring for others through listening

By Chris Mason

Listening well is a wonderful way to care for others

Now, even more than ever during this season of COVID-19, we all need to have a listening ear so we can encourage others. With so many people struggling in isolation, both Christians and non-Christians need good listeners to help them process their struggles and to help facilitate inner healing.

By listening, we can show care and concern to all the people we encounter in our daily lives: family members, neighbors, church members, classmates, students, and beyond. Everyone wants to truly be heard.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, states, “The first service that one owes to others . . . consists in listening to them.”¹ Consider those in isolation who crave someone to listen to them. Bonhoeffer goes further to say, “Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening.”² The temptation is to elevate speaking above listening. I suggest that listening is as valuable as speaking.

When my son, Luke, was in Japanese kindergarten, each afternoon he’d come home and loved to share his daily adventures with me over a snack. I loved those chats, but if the truth be told, at times, I was too distracted with household responsibilities to listen fully. I only gave him my partial attention. I quickly learned that hearing is not the same as listening. I could

multitask while hearing his words but lacked the focus to listen well due to all the daily life distractions. How much more enriching would our interactions have been if I had listened fully.

The years quickly passed, and Luke morphed into a teenager. Suddenly, his responses to my questions would be one-word answers. He did not share many words with me, and I needed to adjust my listening skills to be more observant of his body language. I needed to learn how to ask open-ended questions that did not lead to a one-word answer. He taught me new lessons on listening well.

Now Luke is in college in California and our conversations are limited to video chats online. This is a new skill—to communicate through technology. Yet, we can still listen well to others as a gift of service. We can pick up cues from facial expressions and body language. Technology is not a hindrance to good communication, but can be an aid to serve others well.

The Bible teaches us some things about listening well. In James 1:19 it says to “be quick to hear” and to be “slow to speak” (ESV). What a wonderful gift we can offer by quickly hearing. This can be a lot of hard work and effort, but it is so worth the investment. The Bible also teaches us in Galatians 6:2 to “bear one another’s burdens.” Listening well is a wonderful way to help fulfill the mandate to carry burdens for others. To listen to people’s

problems can be a heavy burden to bear, yet we are commanded to do so. Listening well gives us an opportunity to live out these Christian principles in tangible ways.

We can all learn to be better listeners. Especially during this season of COVID-19, we can give the gift of a listening ear to those around us. Listening well is not an easy task but can be a true encouragement to others.

Here are some tips on how to listen well, whether in person or through technology.

Listen with empathy

Empathy means to understand and share the feelings of another. In order to listen well, we need to come to the conversation with empathy for the person we’re with and for what they are saying. We need to try to see the situation from their perspective and to imagine how they’re feeling. Empathy helps enforce great listening skills.

Don’t judge

We need to come to the conversation with a nonjudgmental attitude. Even if they share their sins and struggles, we can listen without criticism. Offer grace in the same way grace has been offered to you. It can be life changing.

Be patient

Sometimes people need time to talk through all the issues they are facing.

Don't rush them. Don't interrupt. Let them share openly and honestly. Often people simply need to voice their thoughts and frustrations. While the process is sometimes not clear and may not make sense, it will help them to process verbally. Verbal processors need to get things out in order to organize their thoughts. As a sounding board you can truly help someone come to a point of clarity.

Pay attention

Pay attention to what is being said. Put your cell phone away during the conversation. Respect the person talking by giving them your full attention.

Be aware of body language

Notice how the person responds physically. Are they crying, frowning, agitated? These physical cues will communicate what may be going on inside the person. Body language speaks as much as words.

Just as the speaker's body language communicates a message, so the listener's body language communicates a message as well. Be conscious of your own body. Your facial expressions, how you are sitting, eye contact, and how your arms are placed can all communicate to the recipient whether you are listening and how much you care.

Ask questions

Ask open-ended questions. Stay away from questions that required a yes/no response. If you ask the right questions, a person may really open up and talk about what is happening in the situation.

Reflect back

You can repeat back to the person what they are saying in order to confirm that you understand and are listening. This shows care and attentiveness to the speaker. Affirm what is said with a statement like, "I hear you saying—" or "let me confirm that means—."

These same principles can apply to online meetings and conversations on Zoom. People in isolation are dying to talk to people about their struggles.

I have been a missionary in Japan for 24 years. As I've communicated with my mother over a long distance, I have learned that listening well can be a gift to both people involved. When we first arrived in Japan, we would talk on the telephone. My mother and I would talk and share things. Our conversations were two-way. As my mother aged, she moved from an independent lifestyle to a dependent lifestyle in nursing care. She suffered from Alzheimer's and had various special needs. As her care needs increased, I continued to talk to her on the phone. She often did not make sense, but I asked questions and listened as well as I could.

As the Alzheimer's progressed, she became nonverbal, almost as if she had forgotten how to talk. However, I still tried to talk to her via Facetime. Sometimes she would only look at me with a blank stare. But when I

asked her questions, she still seemed to respond with her facial expressions and body language. I really tried to listen well even though she didn't speak much. I learned many things from my mother about different ways to listen. It required a lot of patience, perseverance, and effort.

Listening well was both a gift to my mother and a gift to me. I am thankful to God for teaching me the importance of being a good listener. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 instructs us to "encourage one another." Listening is a wonderful way to encourage and serve one another. Are you willing to listen? **JH**

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Samuel Wells, ed., *Life Together* (New York City: Harper Collins, 2009), 97.
2. *Ibid*, 97-98

Chris Mason and her husband, Michael, have served in Japan with JEMS (Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society) since 1997. They currently minister at Oasis Church in Izumiotsu City. Chris is from Los Angeles, CA.



JAPANESE VOCABULARY FOR THE PANDEMIC

By Rod Thomas

Words and phrases that are usually the domain of epidemiologists have been commonly used during the pandemic. Here's a selection of them along with their English translations.

Only God is infinite! The Japanese language is not. This has encouraged me when I've been overwhelmed by the number of words I've had to learn. Another encouragement is that God created languages; they didn't just happen. In fact, he created them to judge human pride and sin (Gen. 11). The gospel, which we have been sent to Japan to teach, saves from sin and its effects, so can we not ask in confidence that God would help us with our language study?

While locked down in South Africa for three months in 2020, I thought we ought to start learning words related to the pandemic before returning to Japan. Once obscure words are now used every day. For instance, how many of us ever used any of the "three Cs" of 密閉 (みっぺい—closed in), 密集 (みっしゅう—crowding), and 密接 (みっせつ—close contact) before?

Pandemic Japanese is a moving target—the words we need are changing frequently. This list was compiled in 2020 and doesn't contain vaccine-related words. But perhaps I'll inspire you to start your own list? And you know what? If you keep learning you will have less to learn, because only God is infinite!

We started learning Japanese 34 years ago and are still learning. I initially compiled this list for our own benefit but then felt it might benefit other missionaries as well. I hope it helps you, too.

Related words are grouped under headings and important words (underlined) have example phrases. These examples were taken from Japanese news reports and emails. Sometimes, I've used quite literal, rather stilted English translations to make the Japanese more understandable.

Note: This is a shortened version of the original article. The full version can be found on the *Japan Harvest* website at:

<https://japanharvest.org/japanese-vocabulary-for-the-pandemic>



Infection by the virus

かんせん
感染 Infection

かんせんしやう
感染症 Infectious disease

かんせんしや
感染者 Infected person

かんせんしやう
感染者数 The number of infected people

しんきかんせんしやう
新規感染者数 The number of newly infected people

かんせん
感染している To be infected

かんせん むしやうじやう
感染しても無症状の人 Infected people who do not exhibit symptoms

かんせんかくだい ふせ
感染拡大を防ぐ To curb the spread of the infection

しんがた かんせん ひろ
新型コロナウイルスの感染が広がる The novel coronavirus is spreading

しんがた かんせん
メンバーが新型コロナウイルス感染から守られるように In order to protect members from the novel coronavirus

かんせんりつ じやうしやう かこう
感染率が上昇または下降しているか確認する To determine if the infection rate is increasing or decreasing

しゅうだんかんせん
集団感染 (クラスター) Infection of a group (a cluster of infections)

かんせんぼくはつ
感染爆発 (オーバーシュート) A surge in infections

かんせんけいろ
感染経路はわかっていない The transmission path has not been determined

いんしよくてんかんけい かんせん
57 人が飲食店関係の感染です 57 people have been infected in restaurants

かんせん はんめい
5 人の感染が判明した Five infections have been identified (confirmed)

はっせい
発生 Outbreak

はっせい うたが
クラスターが発生している疑いがある A cluster is suspected to have broken out.

このうち 11 人はクラスターが確認された「接待を伴う飲食店」を訪れていました。 Of those, 11 had visited a nightclub [literally, "a restaurant with entertainment"] where a cluster was confirmed.

りかん
罹患 Contracting a disease

かんせんしやう りかん かたがた
コロナウイルス感染症に罹患された方々 People who have contracted the coronavirus (polite)

せんぶく
潜伏 Incubation

せんぶくきかん
潜伏期間 Incubation period

じゅうしやうしや
重症者 The seriously ill

りゅうこう
流行 Prevalence, spread, epidemic

しんがた りゅうこう
新型コロナウイルス流行 The spread of the novel coronavirus

だい は りゅうこう お
第 2 波の流行が起こっている The second wave is occurring

ひまつ
飛沫 Droplet(s)

ひまつかんせん
飛沫感染 Infection via droplets

ちゆ
治癒 Recovery

ちんせい化
沈静化 Settle down, subside

コロナウイルスが、沈静化して1日も早くお会いしたいです I want to meet as soon as this pandemic is under control.

収束 Returning to normal

収束の見通しは見えないままです There is still no end in sight

終息 To end, to be resolved

コロナが終息することを祈っています。 Praying for the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

まだまだ予断を許さない状況が続いている The unpredictable situation continues.



Prevention

防止、予防 Prevention

感染防止策 Measures to prevent infection

コロナウイルスの感染防止のために For the sake of preventing infection

ソーシャル・ディスタンス Social distancing

密集 Crowding, 密閉 Closed in tightly, 密接 Close contact (three Cs)

住民が密集しないため So that people don't crowd

密集回避へ To avoid congestion

密集の解消方法として A way to avoid congestion

密集が生まれている現状 Situations that give rise to crowding

密閉・密集・密接の「3密」に該当しないところ Places where the three mitsu (or three Cs) do not occur

外出 Going out, leaving home

外出はせずに自宅にとどまるよう呼びかけました (They) asked people not to go out but to stay at home

自粛 Self-restraint

外出自粛の呼び掛け A call to refrain from going out

外出自粛に関連した生活情報 Information pertaining to life under self-restraint

やむを得ず外出する場合でも Even if you have to go out

人ごみを避ける To avoid crowds

頻繁な手洗い Frequent handwashing

こまめな手洗いをを行うようにしましょう Let's wash our hands frequently

消毒 Disinfection, sterilization

手指の消毒設備の設置 The installation of hand-disinfectant equipment

消毒薬 Disinfectant

うがい Gargling

接触 Contact (with people)

接触率の低減や感染の拡大防止に寄与するため To contribute to reducing the proportion of contacts and preventing the spread of infection

濃厚接触者 Close contact (with people)

濃厚接触者の把握を含める Includes the identification of close contacts

着用する To wear

周りの人にうつさないようにマスクを着用する To wear a mask to protect nearby people from infection

防疫 Prevention of epidemics

新型コロナウイルスによる防疫的側面からの教会の活動の制限 Restrictions on church activities to prevent the spread of coronavirus

収まる To be contained, to be dealt with

新型コロナウイルスの感染が一刻も早く収まるよう、祈っています。 Praying that the coronavirus pandemic will be contained as quickly as possible.

予防 Precautions

感染症の予防 Precautions against infectious diseases

新型コロナウイルス予防対策として 30分礼拝を2回で行っている。 As a precaution against the coronavirus pandemic, (we) are having two 30-minute services.

「おうちで過ごそう」「Let's stay home」

それはデマです It's a false rumour



Government policies

新型インフルエンザ等対策特別措置法 National Action Plan for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases

緊急事態 State of emergency (in Japan, based on the above act)

非常事態 State of emergency (in other countries, where the measures tend to be more dictatorial and may involve the suspension of rights and even martial law)

緊急事態宣言 Declaration of a state of emergency

蔓延 Spread of a disease, rampancy

政府から新型コロナウイルス蔓延に対応した「緊急事態宣言」が出されました The government has declared a state of emergency to stop the spread of the virus

危機管理 Crisis management

検疫 Quarantine (compulsory)

空港の検疫 Quarantine at airport

検疫官 A quarantine officer

隔離 Isolation, quarantine

14日間の自主隔離実施 Implementation of 14-day self-isolation

個人宅で自主隔離しなくてはならない Must self-isolate at home

隔離措置の緩和が早すぎると If the easing of self-isolation measures is premature

隔離されている感覚が減る Sense of isolation decreases

不要不急 Non-essential and non-urgent

要請 Appeal, request

外出自粛を要請する (We) strongly request that you refrain from going out

もよお もの かいさいじしゆく ようせい
催し物の開催自粛の要請について Concerning the request for self-restraint in the hosting of events

けん 県をまたいで移動することは自粛するよう要請します (We) ask you to restrain yourself from crossing prefectural borders.

きょうか 強化 Strengthen

せいふ きせい きょうか さいけんとう ひつよう
政府は規制の強化を再検討する必要がある It is necessary for the government to reconsider strengthening regulations

ざいたく きんむ
在宅勤務 Working from home/ remote work

しゅつじゅきんし
出社禁止 It is prohibited to go to the office

ほけんじょ
保健所 Healthcare center

こくりつかんせんしやうけんきゆうじよよざん
国立感染症研究所予算 The budget of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases

こうせいらうどうしやう ころろしやう
厚生労働省 (abbreviated to 厚労省) The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

こもんだん
顧問団 Advisory body, think tank

はたら かたかいかくかんれんほう かいせい
働き方改革関連法の改正 The reform of work-related laws



Clinical words, symptoms

りんしやう
臨床 Clinical

りんしやうしやうじやう
臨床症状 Clinical condition

りんしやうけんきゆう
臨床研究 Clinical research

そくにゆういん
即入院となった Immediate admission to a hospital

しんだん
診断 Diagnosis

しんがた かんせんしやう しんだん
新型コロナウイルス感染症と診断された Diagnosis of a novel coronavirus infection

しやうじやう
症状 Symptoms

かんせん うたが しょうじやう で
感染が疑われるが症状は出ていない Showing no symptoms though infection is suspected

みの が むしやうじやうかんせんしや
見逃されている無症状感染者 Infected but symptomless people who are overlooked

はつしやう
発症 Outbreak of an illness, appearance of symptoms

はつわつ
発熱 Start of a fever

けんたいかん
倦怠感 Fatigue

ぜんしん けんたいかん うった
全身の倦怠感を訴える To complain of whole-body fatigue

だるい Feeling lethargic, sluggish

かんせつう
関節痛 Joint pain

きんにくつう
筋肉痛 Muscular pain

せき
咳 Cough

たん
痰 Phlegm

はいえん
肺炎 Pneumonia

こきゆうこんなん
呼吸困難 Labored breathing

みかくしやうがい
味覚障害 Loss of sense of taste

きゆうかくしやうがい
嗅覚障害 The loss of the sense of smell

しゅうちゆうちりやうしつ
集中治療室 Intensive-care unit

かいせき
解析 Analysis

ひんど
頻度 Frequency (of occurrence)

じんこうこきゆうき
人工呼吸器 Ventilator

じんこうこきゆうき のち しぼう
人工呼吸器をつけられた後、死亡した。

(He) was connected to a ventilator and later died.

しゅうちゆうちりやうしつ じんこうこきゆうき ちりやう
集中治療室で人工呼吸器をつけて治療を受ける To receive treatment by ventilator in the ICU

5,500 台の人工呼吸器を確保している To acquire 5,500 ventilators

じゅうしやうか じれい
重症化する事例 Cases with worsening symptoms

ぞうきやう
増強 Increase

しやうじやう あつか にゆういん いた
症状が悪化し入院に至った Symptoms worsened, so they were hospitalized

かいぜん
改善 Betterment, improvement

しやうじやう かいぜん たいいん ひと
症状が改善して退院した人 People who were discharged from hospital because their symptoms improved

じびやう
持病 Chronic disease, pre-existing condition

きそしつかん
基礎疾患 Underlying disease

とうりやうびやう じびやう
糖尿病などの持病があった Had comorbidities like diabetes

ちめいてき
致命的 Fatal

ちしりつ
致死率 Mortality rate



Medical words, tests, medicine

いんないかんせん
院内感染 Infection occurring in a hospital, institution

めんえき
免疫 Immunity

ようせい いんせい
陽性と陰性 Positive and negative

ようせい ほんめい
陽性と判明した (They) tested positive

いんせい で
陰性と出る To get a negative result

ぎいんせい
偽陰性 False negative

ぎやうせい
偽陽性 False positive

こうたい
抗体 Antibody

ちりやうやく
治療薬 Remedial medicine

しんがた かんせんしやう ちりやうやく
新型コロナウイルス感染症の治療薬として「レムデシビル」を特例で承認した。 Remdesivir has been specially approved as a remedial medicine for the novel coronavirus.

ちりやう お ひと
治療を終えた人 A person who has finished treatment

とうよ
投与する To administer (medicine)

しやほうせん
処方箋 Prescription

かいはつ
開発 Development

ワクチンが開発されるよう祈っています。 Praying for the development of a vaccine. **JH**

Illustrations by Graphic Mall: <https://www.iconfinder.com/iconsets/corona-virus-7>

Rod Thomas is a missionary with OMF International and ministers at Sendai Evangelical Church. He spends his spare time watching English TV and wondering why he isn't better at Japanese. He is married to Glenda.

We're not alone

By Selina Lin

How can we be light and salt in this pandemic?

As the plane landed at Haneda Airport, the voice of the flight attendant repeated this message several times apologetically: "Because of the COVID-19 situation, please stay at your seats patiently until the disembarkation arrangement is announced." The plane was only one-third full of passengers, and everyone waited quietly. Because I had been wearing my mask for over 20 hours, my rhinitis was acting up and causing great discomfort to my eyes and nose. To offset the agony at that moment, I envisioned the comfort of my bed at my dormitory.

After getting off the plane, we underwent COVID testing and waited for the results before we were allowed through customs and immigration. It took quite a long time before the officers checked all the application documents and completed the process. By the time my documents were ready, all of the other passengers had already left. Two flight attendants had loaded my luggage on a cart to put it away since no one had claimed it. They were happy to see me. Just when I was ready to go, an airport staff member came over and asked, "Did you bring any food items?"

I thought about it and answered, "Just chocolate and chips."

"Well, we need to examine them over there."

My heart sank. What? I was already exhausted. . . and I still needed to have my luggage checked?

Noticing my expression, she comforted me, saying, "You have food in the luggage, and we need to check it. I will help you carry the luggage."

Although we both had masks on, I could sense her warm smile, which put me at ease. When we got to the luggage inspection station, the lady was very careful not to mess up my stuff and was embarrassed to ask me to open my tightly tied bag, apologizing the whole time. When it was all done, she even helped me to zip up the bag. The staff who brought me there also came over to help me carry my luggage.

Their smiles lifted my heart out of depression. Then I found a handwritten note tucked in my suitcase. It said, "This may be the darkest times for all of us, but we shall get through this together! Please take extra care of yourself during the meantime. We are hoping to be serving you again in the future." It was from the airline! It was truly heartwarming to receive a message like this to remind me that we are not alone in this difficult time. Japan is a country that, after all the suffering they have experienced, has learned the importance of being united to encourage each other.

At such a time when the whole earth is facing this pandemic, how should a missionary respond to God's will? How should we care for the needs of this world? God gave me the answer through this experience.

The Bible says we should hold fast to the Lord's command to spread the love

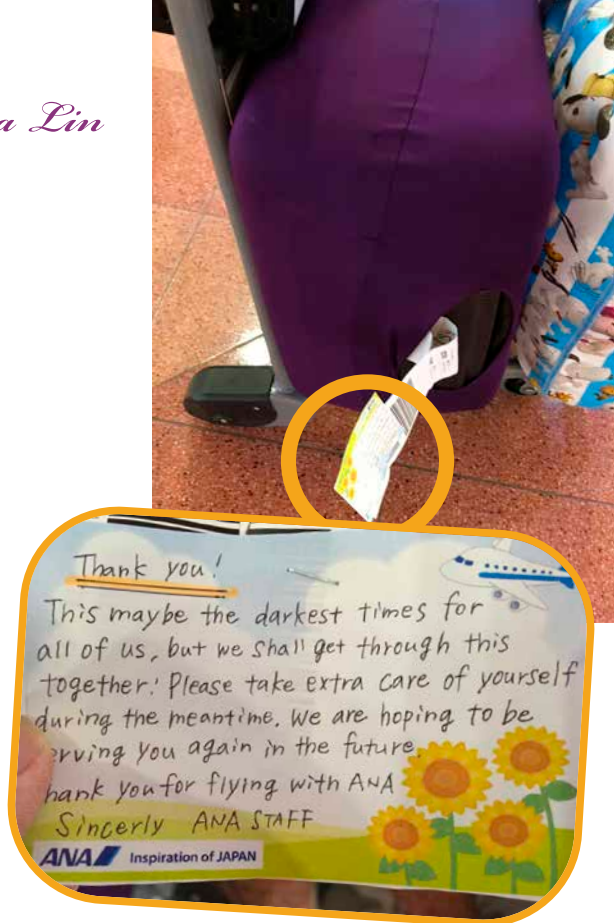
of God in dark places and to walk with those in need. That's how we can be the light and salt of the world. Even when you are wearing a mask, remember to smile with confidence. Even though social distancing is necessary, don't stop greeting others warmly. The virus can't block out love from God or his relationship with people. Just walk a few extra steps alongside others. Continue to care about people's feelings, and help others when possible. His love is the best weapon to fight the pandemic. Nobody knows how things will progress or what will become of the world. But most important is not to lose the love of Jesus and his commands. As a song from Hong Kong says, "Let's march over life, let's sing when we're tired."¹

I am grateful to be back in Japan. Now is the time to lean on our Lord to forge ahead. **JH**

1. From a translation of the school anthem of New Asia College of The Chinese University in Hong Kong. Lyrics of whole song here: http://www.kwun-tung.net/thpf/friend/article.php?friend_ID=81

Photos submitted by author

Selina Lin was born in Taiwan and sent by OMF Canada in 2015. She serves the elderly group at church in Tokyo.



Hearing the hearts of missionaries

By Alan Steier

Taking the time to process experiences is important

The past year has been one of tremendous adjustment, emotion, confusion, and anxiety. No one knew that the coronavirus pandemic would last as long as it has or disrupt so much in our lives. The mission world certainly hasn't been immune to the pandemic, and the past year has necessitated creative ways of doing ministry. The need for creativity in member care also has been heightened as missionaries face challenges brought on by the pandemic, both emotional and spiritual. But no matter what the challenges, it is always good to be able to share about their impact with someone who cares.

Sharing your story

Dr. Curt Thompson, in his book *Anatomy of the Soul*, notes the vital importance of sharing one's story with a caring listener so that the right and left brain are able to integrate the emotions that accompany what has happened to the person. Thompson writes, "Transformation requires a collaborative interaction, with one person empathically listening and responding to the other so that the speaker has the experience, perhaps for the first time, of *feeling felt by another* (author's italics)."¹ Thompson goes on to say that "One of the wonderfully mysterious outcomes of storytelling and listening is their capacity to enable our left and right modes of processing to integrate. The left and right brain are integratively woven together in a way that doesn't happen when someone simply reads or listens to text that invokes logical, linear, right-wrong processing."²

Seeing these needs during the early months of the pandemic, many mission organizations explored ways to step up care for their missionaries.

An example of creative member care

Leaders of the global mission organization Resonate (Christian Reformed Church) came up with an idea to creatively express that care. The leadership made a decision to ask all those serving with Resonate to participate in discussion groups via Zoom. It didn't matter whether the participants were involved in ministry on a particular mission field or if they worked in some position of administration. All were encouraged to take part in this unique caring opportunity.

Before the discussion groups were launched in June 2020, one of my colleagues in Barnabas International who partners with the Resonate member care team sent me an invitation to be on the facilitator team. In fact Resonate leadership decided the groups would be led by facilitators with no official connection to Resonate, so all but one of the facilitators were from Barnabas International. We were each given responsibility to lead a group of around 10 to 12 people.

Groups met every two weeks over the months of June and July 2020. The facilitators were given four topics to discuss along with a generous amount of freedom in preparing for the groups. The sessions used the online platform Zoom. Each session was to last approximately 75 minutes so that the participants could have sufficient time to share what was on their hearts.

Due to the nature of the pandemic, and the confusion and frustration it was causing, the overall theme for the experience was "Staying Rooted." The desire of the Resonate leadership was to make sure the missionaries and staff members were well rooted in their

faith, in their relationships, and in their ministries. Four specific topics were selected for the missionaries to discuss with facilitators: grief and loss, navigating emotions, experiencing God, and sustaining practices. Each of these topics were geared toward assisting participants to stay grounded in their faith.

As I prepared for the group I facilitated, I sought to bring a mixture of Scriptural assurances and truths to each topic and to provide open questions that would give plenty of opportunity for the participants to share their hearts. A few days before we were to meet, I sent the participants the basic outline of what our time would look like.

The group I facilitated included people from Nigeria, the southern border of Texas, the office in Grand Rapids, the Canadian office in Toronto, and a city in Costa Rica. It was truly a global endeavor. One of the questions early on in the planning of these discussion groups was how people who didn't necessarily know each other would respond in the groups. I found I didn't have to worry about that question because they were ready and willing to share with each other as we discussed each of the topics. It was great to see how God brought us together in the group.

One particular situation struck me in a personal way. Being a parent and a grandparent myself, I was able to relate to one of the missionary's deep losses that the pandemic highlighted: the loss of not being able to travel to see her children and grandchildren. Lockdowns and travel restrictions made it impossible for her to journey overseas and for her family to visit her and her husband. While there were other

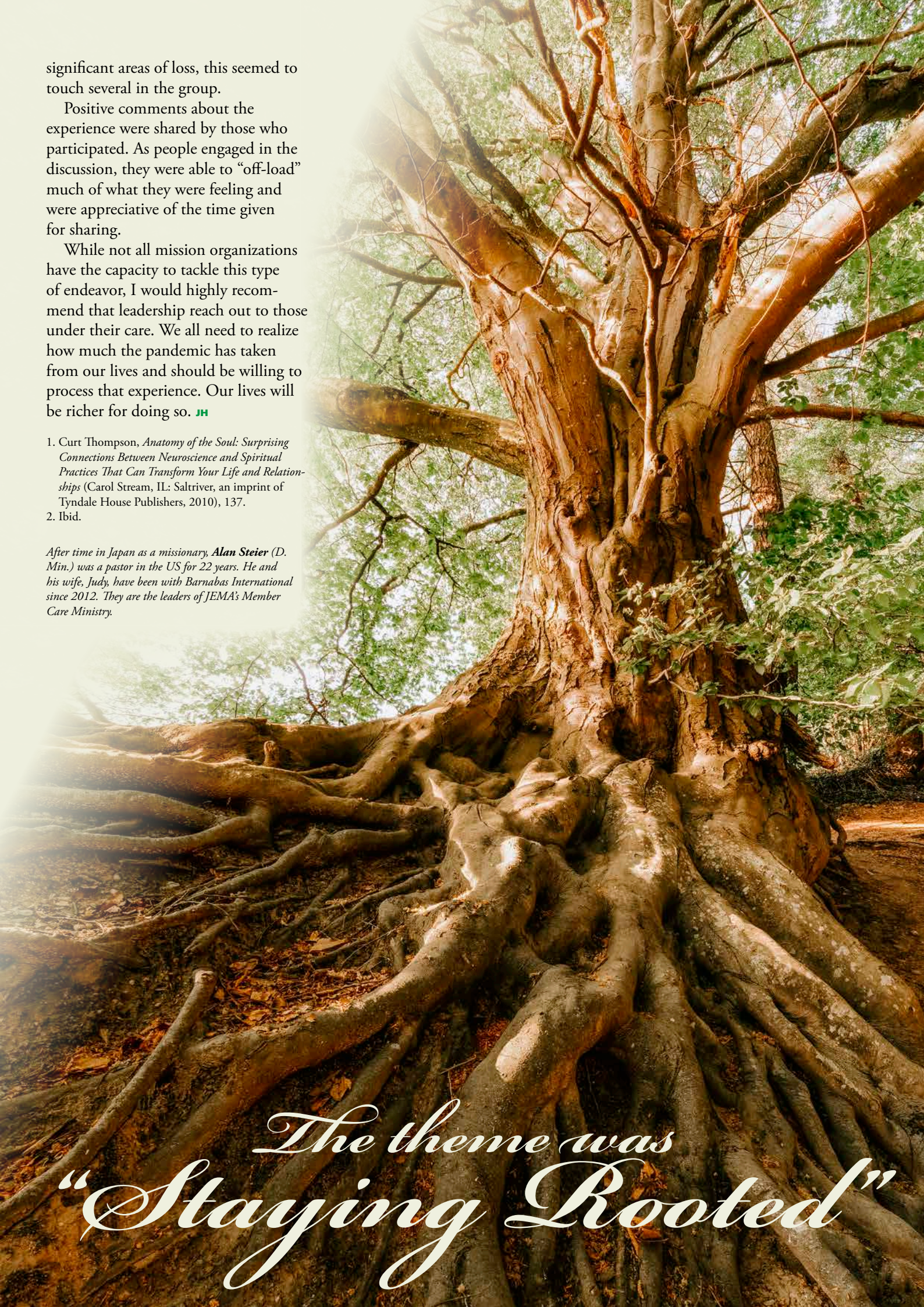
significant areas of loss, this seemed to touch several in the group.

Positive comments about the experience were shared by those who participated. As people engaged in the discussion, they were able to “off-load” much of what they were feeling and were appreciative of the time given for sharing.

While not all mission organizations have the capacity to tackle this type of endeavor, I would highly recommend that leadership reach out to those under their care. We all need to realize how much the pandemic has taken from our lives and should be willing to process that experience. Our lives will be richer for doing so. **JH**

1. Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Saltriver, an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, 2010), 137.
2. Ibid.

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



*The theme was
“Staying Rooted”*

about grief from an expat's perspective, in the context of COVID-19): <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/an-empty-ocean-and-the-10-things-we-must-remember-about-grief>

- **“Count Your Covid Losses” (Member Care Toolbox) by Harry Hoffman** (video about how to count your losses as an expat during this period): <https://youtu.be/wgwPdAC9t-w>
- **Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament** by Mark Vroegop (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019)

Anxiety

Even though Scripture tells us not to be anxious, the COVID-19 crisis has caused a great deal of anxiety in peoples' lives. Especially at the beginning, there was so much unknown about the virus and what we could do about it. Fear reigned in the hearts and minds of the most important government leaders down to the youngest students in school.

- **“Ask a Counselor: Recognizing and Managing Anxiety”**: <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/ask-a-counselor-recognizing-and-managing-anxiety>

General websites

These websites are general sources of information, inspiration, and encouragement for your missionary ministry.

- **Velvet Ashes** (<https://velvetashes.com>)
- **A Life Overseas: A Cross-cultural Conversation** (<https://alifeoverseas.com>)
- **Global Trellis** (<https://globaltrellis.com>)
- **Harry Hoffman's series on Member Care** (<https://youtu.be/gqZCshJpCrM>)

While there may be many more quality resources available, I hope this list will help you deal with the ongoing effects of the global pandemic. It is my prayer that your hearts will be encouraged and that you will gain perspective

and freedom from whatever may be challenging your heart right now. And we also know that the greatest resource we could ever have in any situation is our heavenly Father, who cares for us in so many wonderful ways.

The prophet Isaiah encourages those going through trying times in this way:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior . . . Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you . . . (Isaiah 43:2-4 NIV).

Other Scriptures you may want to go to are Psalm 18:16-19; 34:18-19; 94:17-19; Matthew 11:28; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. These are just some of the passages that speak of God's care as we face trying times. May our heavenly Father's words be an encouragement to you in these trying times. **JH**

Advertisement

Reaching out to every household in Japan—OIKOS

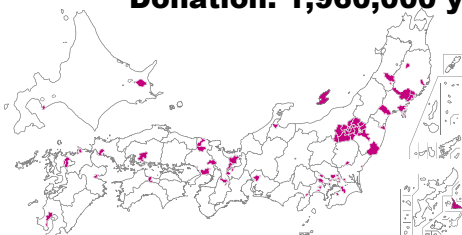
 **オイクス**

オイクス計画

By 2038,
to 53,400,000 homes
with the Gospel

終了 第一期 Current situation from 1st term 2014-2019

Covered 176,727 homes
Participant churches: 56
Donation: 1,960,000 yen



赤色は配布着手している地域です。配布は完了していません。白色は未着手の地域です。



いよいよ 第二期 Our target from now 2nd term- 2020~2025

Target: 2 million homes
Donation: 24,000,000 yen

地域の全ての世帯に
教会のない地域にも **トラクト
無料提供**

**福音(トラクト)を
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Conquering learning disabilities with God's kingdom perspective

Five ways to encourage parents with hope

By Joyce Inouye

Learning disabilities are a global phenomenon that crosses all cultures, ages, and socioeconomic differences. *Merriam-Webster* defines a learning disability as a “brain condition that causes difficulties processing and integrating information.” Yet, for parents, it is defined best as their “heartbreak.” It breaks a parent’s heart to see their children struggle in learning when other children do not. Parents are desperate to help their child, because, particularly in Japan, difference and academic failure may make a child a target for bullying. Parents are afraid to see their child hurt, and their fear robs the home of its peace, joy, and rest. It can be paralyzing. As ministers of Christ, we can come alongside parents with life-giving words and kingdom perspective to help them move forward with hope.

In Psalm 13, the pain and anguish of David’s heart is revealed. He felt alone in his suffering crying out to God, “How long, O Lord?” But David’s heart after God’s heart was only resolved when David realized his need to see with God’s perspective so he could trust the Lord in this despair.

Can we view learning disabilities that “break our hearts” as God’s blessings? 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (NIV). God promised Paul that his grace would be sufficient, and he promises us the same. God will not let our foot slip (Ps. 121:3). We can be encouraged when we face challenges, for they become opportunities to grow our perseverance, which develops character; and character develops hope, which never disappoints (Rom. 5:4).

Within the last ten years, there has been an influx of literature on learning disabilities that continues to infiltrate the news. Although the information is more plentiful, parents still testify that Japan offers limited resources for learning disabilities and in varying specialized needs. Parents can start each day feeling alone, and not sure how to minister or help their children. Learning disabilities is still a global phenomenon and presents many challenges, and even more so with the challenges this COVID-19 pandemic has brought.



I believe the solution for Christian parents is the example of David in Psalm 121:1–2. Despite circumstances, he trusted God and allowed his relationship and knowledge of God to guide his path. God is faithful in where he takes us, and we find he bestows “a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3 NIV).

Here are five ways to encourage parents to move forward with God’s kingdom perspective, so learning disabilities do not break hearts but instead, shape them for his glory and our good.

1. See your learning disabled child as God sees them.

Hebrews 4:13 says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (NIV).

When you look upon your child what do you see? Do you focus on what needs to be fixed or developed?

Prayer: Lord, I need to see differently. Help me to see my child as you do. Cleanse my eyes so what I see is not impeded by my needs or wants. I want my child to know how precious they are. Help me to see what I cannot.

2. Hear your learning disabled child as God hears them.

Proverbs 1:5 says, “Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance” (ESV). God hears our every prayer and bottles our tears. He never sleeps and is available anytime.

Are you giving your child your full attention when they need to talk?





Do you ask for clarification of what is not clear?

Do they feel it's "safe" to share and talk with you?

Prayer: Lord, help me to listen well, so I know how to guide them.

3. Bless your learning disabled child with words of life.

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (NIV)

God says that "the tongue has the power of life and death" (Prov. 18:21 NIV). Words are important and powerful. Words of life create life.

Are your words mostly instruction, blessings, or correction?
Is saying positive words hard for you?

Prayer: Lord, help me to speak words of life into my child.

4. Discover your learning disabled child's treasures.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (NIV). God has given your child strengths and talents. It might be that they are athletic, artistic, musically inclined, emotionally attune to others, good at reading, or computer skilled. But look even deeper. When you talk about their treasures, they will become movers and shakers, and creative life builders and makers.

Do you see the sunrise in their smile?

Are they the first to notice your hurt?

Are they prayer warriors or passionate about God?

Do you document how their Kingdom treasures touch others?

Have you reaffirmed these giftings in your child, explaining how God will use them?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to encourage and bless my child's treasures that will glorify you and expand the Kingdom of God here on earth.

5. Love your learning disabled child as God loves them.

John 13:34 says, "Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another" (ESV). Sometimes loving our children is hard. We feel unappreciated,



and they have an attitude. But then I think of what Jesus gave. He gave his everything although we deserve nothing.

Is it hard for you to love your child today?

Is your love patient and kind? Or irritable and resentful?

Does your love demand your way?

Prayer: Lord, increase my ability to love you first and lavishly with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, so that I can love others as I love myself. **JH**

Joyce has been battling Parkinson's Disease since 2013 and has experienced her own power-made-perfect-in-weakness through the Lord. Her ministry's website childd.org, has resources in both Japanese and English; it is for those ministering with a Kingdom perspective to families affected by learning disabilities.

Joyce Inouye is a learning disabilities specialist and has a heart for Japan. She speaks about God's kingdom perspective on learning disabilities. Although based in California, Joyce has served in Japan through short-term trips since 2012.



Japanese worldview: multiple-minded spirituality

A willingness to embrace aspects of multiple religions has profoundly influenced the adoption and practice of Christianity in Japan

By Rachel Hughes

Japanese spirituality can be baffling to foreigners. It's commonly known that many Japanese people claim to belong to both Shinto and Buddhist religions, but they struggle to explain the difference. Those same Japanese people might also claim to be non-religious, yet attend multiple shrine and temple festivals each year and have a *butsudoan* (a Buddhist altar to honour deceased relatives) and/or a *kamidana* (a Shinto god shelf) in their homes.

Multiple-minded spirituality

Polytheism is a key characteristic of Japanese spirituality. It includes the influences of Shinto belief, Confucian thought, and Buddhist practice. Prince Shōtoku (574–622), who brought about significant cultural reforms in Japan, described this national ideology:

Shinto is the root embedded in the soil of the people's character and national traditions; Confucianism is seen in the stem and branches of legal institutions, ethical codes and educational systems; Buddhism made the flowers of religious sentiment bloom and gave the fruits of spiritual life.¹

Shinto's animistic origins included the adoration of ancestors and nature worship, as well as the communal worship of local gods and guardians for the sake of a good harvest. The unstructured nature of Shinto meant it could easily adapt to integrate foreign beliefs and synthesise aspects that met the needs of the Japanese people. At various stages in history, Japanese governments have demonstrated a pragmatic approach to foreign religions, recognizing the benefits they can bring. For example, in the 16th century, Christianity brought European culture and trade; and in the Meiji era Shinto brought stability through shrine-controlled districts and education. Even in modern times, Shinto continues to evolve and develop new festivals such as the 七五三祭り (*shichigosan* festival).²

The belief in multiple sources of divine favour also led to the compartmentalizing of spiritual behaviour. Different gods could be worshipped or accessed through different locations or temples, for various purposes. For example, neighbourhood prayers for the rice harvest were made to local gods for the sake of the community. But specific requests for health, safety, or prosperity could be made to gods with particular specialties; for example, people seek healing for eye ailments at Arai Yakushi Temple in Nakano, Tokyo.

This article is the second in a series of three that investigate the historical and cultural development of the Japanese worldview and the obstacles it poses for the growth of Japanese Christians and churches (the first one was published in the Winter 2021 issue of *Japan Harvest*, p10). This series is based on a dissertation written by a Japanese friend. His goal was the effective discipleship of Japanese Christians. Through writing he hoped to help Christians thrive in their own walk with the Lord as well as within the church. He identified collectivist identity, multiple-minded spirituality, and hierarchical structures as core elements of the Japanese worldview that we should address as we seek to contextualize the gospel for Japanese people.

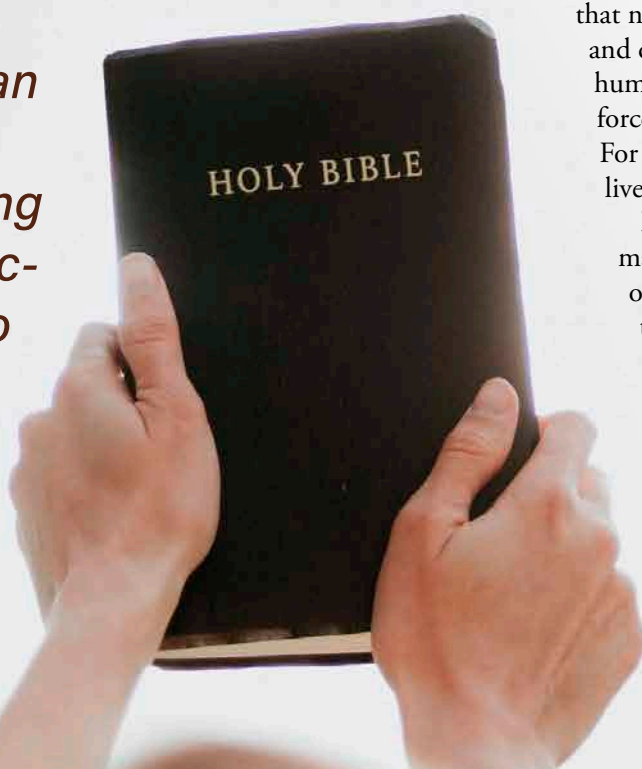
Another example of compartmentalization are the many varieties of *omamori* (amulets) in both Shinto and Buddhism, since they represent approaching a specific god or relic for a specific purpose. Gods were thought to be distant, powerful, and generally uninterested in the life of an ordinary human. So, acts of worship or sacrifice were performed to gain the god's attention and favour in order that requests might be heard. There was no perceived relationship between that god and the person's life, outside of the transaction of the お祈り (*oinori*, prayer or wish) and the received favour. One result of this approach to spirituality is that there is very little connection to the worshipper's everyday life.

Thus, the Japanese spiritual worldview has developed as highly flexible and tolerant of co-existing, and even contradictory, gods and beliefs. Spirituality, religion, and culture have often melded together through the communal nature of worship. And the emphasis is usually on the form of worship at a specific time and place. As a result, Japanese individuals may not expect to have a personal belief; but they may remain open-minded or pragmatically oriented to seek the divine favour of any number of gods, as suits their needs. Christianity in Japan can be perceived as one of many religious sources of happiness or good luck in an individual's life, rather than a deep belief that impacts a person's everyday thoughts, behaviour, and relationships.

Christianity in modern Japan

The acceptance of polytheism and participation in religious practices without a deep faith is still prominent today. According to a 2009 NHK survey, more than 60% of Japanese people have prayed to gods when facing difficulties,³ and more than 70% acknowledge the need for a religion in a person's life. On the other hand, only about 50% of people believe that faith is necessary.⁴ This shows that, from a Japanese worldview, "the endorsement of strong beliefs is not a necessary part of religion."⁵ Japanese society can thus be generally accepting of Christian practices without feeling the need to understand their deeper meaning or application. For example, 12% of Japanese people claim to feel an affinity with Christianity, which is much higher than the actual Christian population of approximately 1%.⁶ In educational institutions, 12% of universities in Japan were founded as Christian schools, but many of the teachers are not Christians. Roughly two-thirds of Japanese couples choose a Christian-style wedding ceremony, but this is often for aesthetic reasons, not because the couple holds Christian beliefs. While Japanese people have a high level of awareness of Christianity, there is an enormous gap between the forms of practice and faith in God.

To be a Christian does not mean just participating in church services and going to church programs. It's about being a child of God. It is an identity, not an action.



Coming from this Japanese spiritual worldview, people can be tempted to adopt a syncretistic approach. They may tend to primarily seek favour from God, to compartmentalize religion from everyday life, and to follow Christian forms of worship without deep roots of understanding. From the perspective of multiple-minded spirituality, it's challenging for Japanese people to accept Jesus Christ as the single and exclusive God or to see the relevance of faith in Christ to their everyday life.

Christ alone

When Paul wrote letters to Philemon and the church in Colossae, he was writing to people in a spiritual culture similar to Japan's. The Colossian church, of which Philemon was a leader, was struggling with challenges to Jesus' deity and authority. They were being influenced by local sects who worshipped angels and taught special practices. The local religion included a syncretistic mishmash of teachings from the Roman empire, Jewish traditions, and local folklore of Asia Minor.

Paul reminded them that Jesus is the creator and authoritative ruler over all things and all powers in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:16). He urged them to "see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:8–9 NIV).

From the polytheistic worldview of many gods that are geographically located or have particular specialties, it is difficult to conceive of a single God who has authority over everything, who created all locations, and made all things. Sometimes missionaries from Western countries—even Japanese Christians who have grown up in the church—assume Japanese people have a concept of one omnipotent God. So when sharing the gospel with a Japanese person, it's important to remember to explain the nature of God, and in discipleship to continually come back to the truth of Jesus' divinity and authority, just as Paul did in his letters. We must never follow cultural urges to move on from or add to the message of Christ, but remain rooted in him alone (Col. 2:6–7).

A God who seeks

Another tendency derived from multiple-mindedness is attempting to win the favour of God. This thinking can also lead

to an overemphasis on works or even a focus on actions in the church. Many church calendars are full of meetings, events, and activities as Japanese Christians often think being active at church is the marker of a good Christian. There is a sense of doing Christian duty by passing out bulletins, doing kitchen chores, teaching at Sunday school, playing piano, and cleaning the building. It's easy for Japanese Christians to misunderstand what constitutes "service" or "worship" and the motives that should drive these actions. They can thus easily fall into thinking they need to perform acts of worship in order to gain God's favour.

For someone with the perspective that gods are distant and uninterested and need to be sought out and appeased before a request is even made, it's difficult to grasp the idea of an all-creating, all-ruling, all-knowing God who seeks us out before we even know of him.

When the Christians of Colossae were being tempted to keep certain rules or festivals to gain God's approval, Paul reminded them that, "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins" (Col. 2:13). It's crucial to remind Japanese Christians that God sought us, saved us, forgave us, and marked us for eternal life with him—all before we had performed a single act of service.

It's also important that churches don't treat service at church as the marker of Christian maturity. Since God is not restricted to a church building, neither are the acts of Christian worship and service to be confined to that place. As Paul concludes, "whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). Any acts of service or worship done by a Christian should be thought of as fruit of having being saved, motivated by a thankful heart, and directed to a loving God.

Spirituality that permeates all of life

The traditional Japanese religious way was to approach a specific god in a certain place for a particular request, and to have no further connection. Therefore, Japanese people may tend to think that Christianity can be compartmentalized and is only relevant to specific areas of their lives. Many Christians attend church on Sundays, then live the rest of the week from a worldly perspective. And many would be surprised if, after church, someone asked about their money or married life, or started a discussion about how following Christ and being a member of a Christian community needs to permeate their personal value system.

It is critical that Japanese church leaders exhort believers to apply the Word of God to their lives in concrete ways. All of Colossians chapter three, and into chapter four is a good example of Paul's teaching about the practical aspects of living as a Christian—in thoughts (e.g. 3:2,8), behaviour (e.g. 3:5,9), and relationships (e.g. 3:13-15).

This type of deep, all-of-life outworking of Christian belief needs to be clearly demonstrated by church pastors and leaders, just as Paul set an example at each church he visited and with individuals that he mentored. Church leaders need to show by example how God's word critiques their

attitudes and behaviours in everyday life. This may require deep conversations outside of program-oriented meetings. If there are areas of life displeasing to the Lord and hindering a person's spiritual growth, then the person needs to change and surrender every part of their life to Christ. This includes not only obvious sins and addictions, but also attitudes and behaviours in practical matters such as money, work, and marriage.

Seminars or courses on various topics—such as marriage, raising children, and work relationships—can be useful tools to start conversations. Through more practical teaching, we can learn to connect Scripture to specific areas of everyday life.

Deeply rooted, growing faith

To be a Christian does not mean just participating in church services and going to church programs. It's about being a child of God. It is an identity, not an action.

In Colossians 1:9–14, Paul wrote that he continually prayed for the Colossian church—that they would continue to grow and deepen their understanding, as they lived a life worthy of the calling they had received. Paul wrote about a spirituality that is not a series of pragmatic interactions, but is a life journey with an eternal destination. While the Japanese worldview tends to focus on isolated transactions, it would be tragic to think that Japanese Christians might limit their Christian walk by viewing church attendance and Christian worship in the same way. It would be wonderful if Japanese churches encouraged their members to individually read God's Word and discuss it regularly in small groups. Churches need to encourage discipleship that grows understanding of doctrine and theology (such as the nature of God, the glory of the cross, and Biblical perspectives of rest and work) for all Christians, not just for the leaders and pastors.

Let's pray, as Paul did for the Colossians, that together with Japanese believers we will all grow in our personal belief in the God who loves us and has sought us out. Pray that we'll see the relevance of Christlikeness in our everyday lives and that we'll continue to grow in depth of knowledge of God's word that affects our very identity. **JH**

1. Quoted in: Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion* (London: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 8.
2. Hiroyuki Torigoe, "Is Japanese Religiosity 'Optimistic'? Japan's Traditional Culture of Folk Beliefs," *The Japan News by The Yomiuri Shimbun*: https://yab.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/wol/dy/opinion/society_150209.html (accessed December 8, 2020).
3. 西 久美子, "宗教的なもの"にひかれる日本人[The Japanese are attracted by "religious things"]: excerpts from the ISSP International Comparative Survey (religion), *NHK*: 2009: https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/summary/research/report/2009_05/090505.pdf (accessed Feb. 11, 2021).
4. 日本人の宗教意識 [Religious consciousness of the Japanese people] (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1984), 19.
5. Christopher Kavanagh, "Can Religion Be Based On Ritual Practice Without Belief?" *Aeon*, <https://aeon.co/essays/can-religion-be-based-on-ritual-practice-without-belief> (September 15, 2016).
6. Mark Mullins (author) and Megumi Takasaki (translator). *Meido in Japan No Kirisutokyo*. (Tokyo: Toransubyū, 2005), 253.

Rachel Hughes and her husband are from Australia and have served with CMS since 2012.

Language-learning wisdom from TED Talks

To speak Japanese better, focus on getting your message across and find fun ways to study

Two popular TED Talk videos have some good points about language learning and effective communication.

Forget yourself, focus on communicating

In the first video,¹ Marianna Pascal, an intercultural communication specialist, observes that a person's ability to communicate in a foreign language doesn't necessarily reflect their language level. In other words, someone who has studied a language for a long time and has a good formal knowledge of it can struggle to communicate well, while another person with a comparatively low grasp of a language can communicate effectively. That's something I've seen among Japanese students who are studying English. I've also noticed (not without a smidgin of chagrin) that some people who are less proficient in Japanese than me can express themselves much better than I can.

For Pascal, the key lies in a person's attitude to language and communication. She believes that a strong desire to communicate makes a person less self-conscious—they are less focused on themselves and their mistakes and more focused on the other person and getting their message across. Again, that's something I've experienced myself. When I have a burning desire to say something, I forget the subtleties of grammar and *keigo* and just focus on making myself understood. But my communication level drops in situations where I'm more worried about speaking correctly.

I think this point has a couple of important implications for missionaries in Japan. First, it's encouraging that, while we desire to be as proficient with Japanese as we can be, low language proficiency doesn't necessarily entail low communication ability. Second, it's a reminder that our language learning isn't divorced from the rest of our life. Rather, as our grasp of the gospel and our love for Japanese people increases, so will our motivation to communicate



Marianna Pascal

in Japanese, and we will be better able to communicate, even if our language level doesn't change much.

Find fun ways to learn a language

In another TED Talk, polyglot Lýdia Machová describes how she talked with other polyglots to find out if there was anything that they all had in common.²

She discovered that rather than learning from textbooks, they had all found ways to make language learning enjoyable. Machová, who has set herself a goal of learning a new language every two years and was on her eighth language in 2018, watched *Friends* in German and read Harry Potter books in Spanish.

While I think there still may be a place for slogging through textbooks (especially for learning grammar), there's a lot to be said for finding and using fun ways to acquire language so that it becomes something you enjoy doing. Again, that's been true in my experience. Over the years, I've been hooked on reading manga, watching dramas, writing blog posts that get corrected by native speakers (on lang-8.com), listening to podcasts (especially japanesepod101.com), and taking conversation classes via Skype (using cafetalk.com). I've also managed to resurrect my high-school French using an app called Duolingo. All of these activities feel more like fun than study. If you need inspiration, a good place to find out about websites, apps, podcasts, and video channels is the All Language Resources website (<https://alllanguageresources.com/japanese>).

These days, there is a plethora of resources out there for learning languages. It can be a good investment to explore them and see if you can find a few you really enjoy. As Machová says, maybe you're just one method away from becoming a polyglot! **JH**

1. Marianna Pascal, "Learning a language? Speak it like you're playing a video game," <https://youtu.be/Ge7c7otG2mk> (accessed Dec. 5, 2020).
2. Lýdia Machová, "The secrets of learning a new language," https://www.ted.com/talks/lydia_machova_the_secrets_of_learning_a_new_language (accessed Dec. 5, 2020).

Images are screenshots of the videos referenced.



Lýdia Machová



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The praxis of prayer

“The first thing to do in prayer is to realize the presence of God. You do not start speaking immediately . . . The realization that you are in His presence is infinitely more important than anything you may say.”¹

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

This column is focused on prayer. But sometimes I think we need to be reminded of the praxis (the practicalities) of prayer. Though we all pray, from time to time I think we need to remind ourselves of some fundamental things in regard to prayer. I hope the following will be helpful.

Put away distractions and concentrate on God

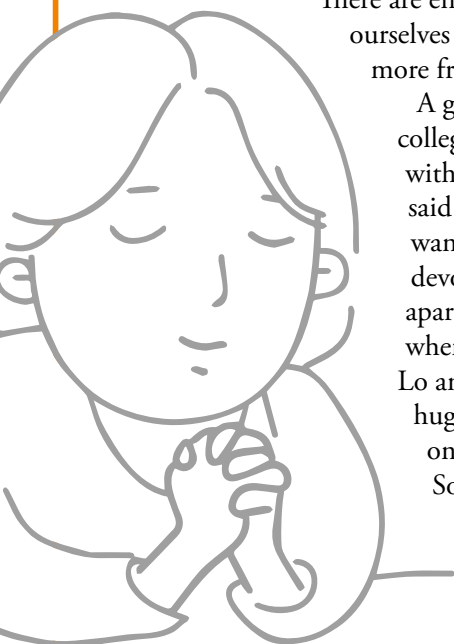
When we pray we need to keep our focus on God. To make sure this happens, we need to choose carefully where and when we pray. Jesus tells us that when we pray, we should “go into your inner room” (Matt. 6:6 NASB). This means we should pray in an environment where we are not distracted by anything—by what’s in the room, by what’s happening elsewhere (seen or heard through a window), etc. The King James Version calls it your “closet.” And that would be a great place to pray—no windows, etc.—if it were not full of things, which it usually is.

There are enough distractions within ourselves that we don’t need any more from without.

A good friend of mine in college once asked me for help with his devotional life. He said that his mind was always wandering when he had his devotions. So I went to his apartment and asked him where he sat for his devotions. Lo and behold, he was facing a huge picture window looking onto a busy street downtown! Something interesting was always happening there, so it was natural for him to get distracted.

My only recommendation was for him to sit facing the wall; that way, there was nothing exciting to see that took him off-course from spending quality time with God.

In an enclosed environment, we need to make sure that everything involved leads us to concentrate on God. If a friend came over to talk, we would not spend time looking out of the window, watching TV, or playing with our cell phones, would we? So when we spend time with God, we should put our energies into focusing on Him.



Be quiet before God and listen to Him

God tells us to give Him all our burdens (Matt. 11:28) and anxieties (1 Peter 5:7) and just be still and quiet before Him (Ps. 46:10). He wants us to learn from Him (Matt. 11:29).

May we say, “I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content” (Ps. 131:2 NIV). A child that is weaned no longer cries for its mother’s milk. It is just satisfied to be with its mother. Is that how we are before God? I hope so.

It’s easy to use our prayer time to tell God what we want rather than to ask Him what He wants. Or even if we ask God what He wants, we tend to interpret it based on our desires. And if it’s something we don’t want, we often won’t do it.

Enjoy God above all else

Instead, we can aim to spend our prayer time focusing on God and not ourselves. If we are full of our problems and worries, there is little room for God. But if we delight ourselves in Him, He promises to give us the desires of our hearts (see Ps. 37:4). It’s that simple; if we give up our failing, sputtering lives in exchange for His glorious joyful will, we will find all we need. May He fill our hearts with Himself.

This last key is perhaps the most practical. The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”² Our time with God should be when we give Him our attention, when we surrender ourselves to Him, and when we worship Him. We center our lives on Him, not ourselves. As the psalmist says, “God [is] my exceeding joy” (Ps. 43:4 NASB). Can you say that? We were made to enjoy being in His presence. Only He is worthy!

May our prayer times not be just a memory of days long past. May our daily times with the Lord be an expression of our ever-present relationship with Him. **JH**

1. Paraphrase from <http://bibletruthchatroom.com/2011/05/prayer-in-the-presence-of-god> (accessed February 4, 2021).

2. *Shorter Catechism of the Assembly of Divines*, www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/shorter-catechism (accessed November 30, 2020)



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.

Shepherding

This is a useful metaphor when considering member care

Of all the descriptions of Jesus we find in the New Testament, one that many find helpful in times of need is the image of a shepherd (Luke 15:3–7; John 10:11). Psalm 23, where the actions of the shepherd (God) bring comfort and encouragement, has even found a place within our increasingly secular society. While we may be far removed from an agrarian community, there is something about what a shepherd does for his sheep that touches the deepest part of who we are. People understand what it is like to be well cared for, watched over, and led. When one experiences those types of things, there is a greater opportunity for growth in one's life. This is no less true for those who serve in missions.

The Latin word for “shepherd” (*pascere*) means to feed, and refers to the feeding, well-being, and growth of whatever flock the shepherd has charge over and is where we get the English word “pastor.”¹ Pastors care for the flocks of believers under their charge (1 Pet. 5:2). Considering member care, the word “care” means “to be concerned or solicitous, to have thought or regard for.”² While not specifically “pastors,” member care providers function like a pastor/shepherd when the health and well-being of their particular “flock” is given a high priority.

While member care on the mission field may include a variety of elements, such as administrative needs, language acquisition, housing, and financial support, it is vital to remember that the emotional health, relational concerns, and spiritual growth of those who serve for the sake of the gospel is of first priority. Yes, the goal is to have missionaries (sheep) proclaiming the gospel to the Japanese. Yet, if the sheep are not shepherded well, that overall goal will be more difficult to attain. Also, if we see shepherding as the umbrella over all these areas of member care, there is really no differentiation in who exhibits care for others. While mission organizations may have people specifically designated to the area of member care, others—for example field leaders, teammates, and friends—have the responsibility to care for missionaries too.

The acronym CARE may be used to evaluate if the individual sheep are being holistically seen, effectively nourished, and truly resilient. When these are in place, thriving is enhanced and the best possible outcomes can be achieved.

Compassionate nature: Scripture is clear that God is a compassionate God. James 5:11 says, “You have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (ESV). And in Colossians 3:12, Paul calls on believers to have “compassionate hearts” (ESV). In the

parable of the lost sheep, Jesus teaches us that the shepherd exhibits compassion as he goes after the one who is lost and wounded. Even though hard decisions may have to be made or a confrontation necessary, the overall goal is for the benefit of the flock and the individual sheep, all done from a heart of compassion.

Attentive listening: Listening is key to truly shepherd others. In his book, *The Listening Life*, Adam McHugh notes, “When the Lord asked King Solomon what he wanted, Solomon asked for what is usually translated as an ‘understanding heart’ or ‘discerning mind,’ but in the Hebrew it is literally a ‘listening heart’ (1 Kings 3:9).”³ Showing care for another person means listening *all the way through* to the concerns and needs of that person. It means listening beyond the words spoken.

Reconcile relationships: While we may not like to admit it, conflict sometimes arises within the missionary community. It may happen because of miscommunication, misunderstanding, or simply sin. However it is triggered, it needs to be dealt with effectively and expediently. Lingering conflict is the devil's tool for mission ineffectiveness and is a significant cause of preventable attrition.⁴ Shepherds aware of conflict among the flock initiate reconciliation for the health of the ministry.

Encourage growth: The health of the sheep is important for the overall health of the flock. Making sure the flock is well fed spiritually, emotionally, and relationally is something any shepherd needs to pay attention to. By encouraging the members of the flock to engage in intellectual, spiritual, and relational opportunities, shepherds continue to stimulate growth, which leads to individual and corporate growth.

By keeping CARE in mind, shepherds are reminded who they are supposed to be and how best to serve their flock. **JH**

1. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/pastor>

2. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/care>

3. Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distraction* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 136.

4. Andrea Sears, “New Data Confirms that Team Conflict is One of the Primary Factors in Missionary Attrition,” <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/new-data-confirms-that-team-conflict-is-one-of-the-primary-factors-in-missionary-attrition> (February 18, 2020).

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

Care for your neighbor

Confronting the insidious effects of pandemic as a community of love

According to the Japanese National Police Agency, 2,153 people died by suicide in October 2020.¹ That month the number of people who died by suicide was more than the total number of COVID-19 deaths so far in this country. In recent years the rate of suicides had been declining in Japan, but the months leading up to October saw an increase.

The reasons for suicide are often complex, but you don't have to be an expert to surmise that COVID-19 may have had something to do with this increase. Even after vaccines for the virus are made widely available, I suspect we might be dealing with the insidious effects of this pandemic for a while.

What does God call us, the church, to be in this broken world? As we plant churches, what kind of community would he want us to establish?

The value of community

In his book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell tells the remarkable story of Roseto, a small town in Pennsylvania whose residents were all immigrants from the small town of Roseto Valfortore in Italy. The doctors were surprised to find out that, despite their seemingly careless health habits like smoking and drinking, the residents of the US town had an unusually low rate of heart disease and were much healthier than the neighboring towns. After extensive medical and social studies of Roseto, the researchers concluded that the secret was not in genetics or health habits, but in their community. The people of Roseto lived in a close-knit community as an extended family and experienced a sense of trust and security. This community gives us a picture of the kind of effect that the church could have on people, not only on their physical well-being, but also spiritual.

Called to be a community

As people made in the image of the triune God—who is a community in himself—every human being is made for community. We are hardwired to find fulfillment in meaningful relationships and ultimately in a relationship with God. The problem is that our experience of community is sometimes painful because relationships can be far from ideal and often disappointing. If they are unable to find support from meaningful connections with others in the lowest moments of life, some people decide that suicide is their only choice. Could it be that those who are suffering, or even perhaps contemplating suicide would have a different story if they are welcomed into a community where they experience love and hope? Anxiety and isolation may

lead to despair that kills, but a loving community can offer hope that saves. Isn't this what God calls the church to be—a community of God's children who love one another as family, and who communicate God's love and the message of hope to those around them?

Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another just as he loved them. When the church is characterized by Christ-like love, it becomes the light of the world. It is a community that displays the coming kingdom and the character of its king. Of course, no church is perfect. But as the gospel does its work and the church experiences the transforming effects of Jesus' love, we can increasingly love one another by the power of the Spirit. This love will draw others in to find the love and hope they ultimately need.



Finding ways to communicate care

Who has God placed around us whom he wants to draw into our community? Who is isolated? Marginalized? Lonely? Vulnerable? What can we do to show them that they matter to us and to God? Oftentimes it only takes a small act of kindness for someone to feel cared for and connected. Early in 2020, like most of you, due to COVID-19 my family and I saw few other people for several weeks. One of the members of our church left a loaf of bread outside our door and texted us later to let us know. Her kindness reminded us that we were not alone and that we belonged to a wider family. What can we do to communicate our care for people around us in a practical way so they feel a meaningful connection and tangibly experience God's love?

The gospel compels us to enter others' lives—even their brokenness and struggles—just like Jesus came into our messy and broken world to show us that God is with us and that he loves us. The gospel makes us bold, willing to risk our own security and comfort for the sake of others. Empowered by the love God has shown us in Jesus, let's seek to become a community that is increasingly marked by love. Let's go out into our community to love and care for our neighbors so we can be a part of the Lord's work as he builds his church. **JH**

1. Note: original figures are no longer available online, but were reported in various locations, e.g. <https://www.insider.com/japan-more-suicide-deaths-in-october-than-from-covid-19-in-2020> (Dec. 11, 2020).

Image: <https://webstockreview.net/image/community-clipart-community-support/2533978.html>

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.

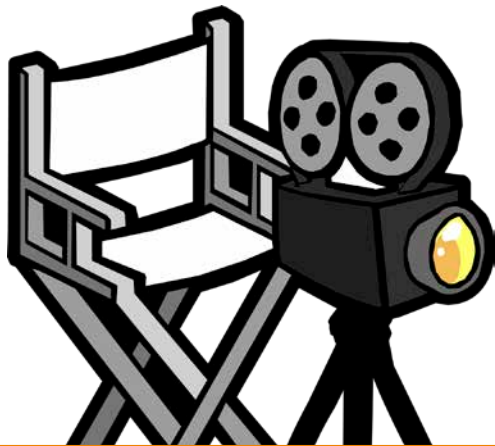
Writing scenes

Use scenes to make your writing more vivid

We live life in scenes. We like to think in scenes. And likewise, when we take in information, we like it when it comes set in scenes.

What is a scene? It's a story that contains action. It takes your reader on location. It often includes dialogue and is cinematic. It doesn't need to be dramatic; it can be subtle—but something happens.

For example, when Lee Gutkind described the first time he travelled by plane after the September 11 terrorist attack in the US, he wrote about a search of his luggage. The security guard “was intense and meticulous . . . he unscrewed the top from my After Bite Itch Eraser, housed in a plastic tube the size of a ballpoint pen . . . He touched the tip of his finger to the rollerball applicator and glanced up at me suspiciously. I turned away. No event in my past had precipitated the use of After Bite, but I like to be prepared for the unexpected.”¹



Gutkind has taken a close-up shot of the action. His “camera” is close to the security guard as he searches the bag. You feel like you are there—you feel his discomfort.

If he'd pulled the camera back a little, you might have seen passengers in the line, shifting from foot to foot or pulling laptops out of bags. You might have overheard a conversation between two overtired parents. Even further back for an establishing shot and you might have seen an airport that was unusually quiet but with more security guards than usual patrolling the vast departure lounge. In all these “shots” you see action.

How can you add scenes to liven up your writing? I'm about to write our monthly prayer letter. As an exercise, I thought about how I could add a short scene into a description of something I've done this month: “David now helps maintain OMF Japan's home assignment storage facilities. One sunny day, after church, we rode our bikes around narrow streets looking for the storage unit that we'd only been to once before. Google Maps got us lost, and so, after about half an hour of fruitless searching we consulted a Japanese man who was pottering around outside his house. To our surprise he unlocked his car to consult its GPS.”

Using action in your writing makes it vivid. Give it a try. **JH**

1. Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2012), 125.

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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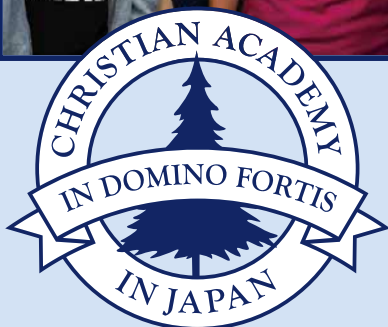
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