



Men, Where Are They?



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March 5, 2021



WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 7, 2021

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

jema.org

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



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Men, where are they?

The first time I met a Japanese Christian was as a university student. She and I lived near one another in Brisbane (Australia) and attended the same church, about 20 minutes away. On Sundays, I frequently gave her a lift in my old white Corolla. One of the things I remember from those times is learning that many Japanese Christian women struggle to find Christian husbands because there are more women than men in the church. I'm pretty sure she said that for some women, it factored into deciding whether or not to follow Christ.

In researching for this editorial, I found a 2014 report that said that between 30 and 35% of those who attend the United Church of Christ in Japan were men,¹ and Brendan Thomas, a final-year student at a Bible college in Australia who is currently doing research on the Japanese church, has found a similar figure (see his article on page 8). Pew Research Center reports that around the world, the average percentage in weekly attendance in church is 46% men, though that varies significantly between countries.² So there is probably some truth to the sense that, while not absent from the church, there are fewer Christian men than women in Japan, and that the difference in numbers is greater than in many other countries.

Inspirational articles

As I look at the articles that have been submitted, I see stories about how missionaries are meeting men in the community and also about various ways that they are “doing ministry” with men. We've also got two articles about the Biblical perspective on families and “son of peace” and how that can influence ministry approaches. We have observations from experienced missionaries about men in the Japanese church. One of *Japan Harvest's* three key purposes is to inspire, and I'm excited to see that there is much in this issue to inspire JEMA members in reaching the men of Japan.

My immediate family is full of men: my husband and three sons. When our boys were younger, there was seldom a day when we didn't have them outside for significant periods because they were full of energy that needed burning off. And feeding them is a challenge that continues, though we only have two of them left at home. So as one who's spent a lot of time with boys and young men in the last twenty years, I have a soft spot for them. I am saddened that very few boys, or indeed girls, in this country know a Christian man. What would it be like if most Japanese people knew a Christian man? If Christian men were common role models in this society?

We have picked a controversial topic for this issue. Please note our usual disclaimer (on page 4) that individual articles express the viewpoints of the contributors and not necessarily those of JEMA. The Pew Research Center wrote: “How and why men and women differ in religious commitment has been a topic of scholarly debate for decades. Even today, it continues to inspire much academic research, as well as discussions among the general public.”³ But I know many of you share the passion of a colleague who emailed me about this topic:

There may not be men in the church, but they are in the community. I long to see the church of Japan equipped to share the Gospel in a natural context, spending time out in the community with the men and families bringing them into the family of God!

May God bring many more Japanese men, women, and children into his kingdom.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Winter 2022: Technology

Spring 2022: Rest (submission deadline Nov. 30)

Summer 2022: Mobilization (submission deadline Feb. 28)

Autumn 2022: Evangelism in a shame culture (submission deadline May 31)

1. データブック日本宣教のこれからが見えてくる。日本基督教会 [Databook: The Future of Japanese Missions in Perspective] (Japan: Inochi no kotoba sha: 2014), 55-56.
2. For more detail on the gender gap in religion and detailed explanations from scholars see: “The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World” Pew Research Center, March 22, 2016, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/22/the-gender-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>
3. Ibid.

We should be aware of the reality of immigration detainees

*Christian Shimbun, April 4, 2021
Translated by Tomoko Kato*

On March 10th, a Zoom meeting addressing the issues facing foreign residents was held by the Ethnic Ministries Network Japan and the Mission Commission of the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA). Four pastors supporting detainees in immigration centers shared their insights.

For several years, Rev. Akira Watanabe of Tokyo Baptist Church has been holding a monthly Bible study for detainees at Ushiku Immigration Center. “Even though detainees in immigration centers aren’t being incarcerated because they’ve committed crimes, some church members view them with suspicion, wondering if they aren’t criminals, and they are hesitant to get involved,” he said. “If the amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, currently under discussion in the [Japanese Government] Diet,¹ is passed, many detainees will be deported after applying three times for refugee status. However, in 2019, only 44 immigrants to Japan were granted refugee status out of the 10,375 applicants. We are a nation that excludes refugees.”

Rev. Hiroshi Yunohara of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and Nagasaki International Church has been visiting Omura Immigration Center in Nagasaki Prefecture once a week since 2005. “I met an Iranian man there who wanted to be baptized,” he said, “so a Catholic priest and I made a joint proposal to start holding a worship service in the Immigration Center. We have been able to worship together monthly at the Center with their approval since 2010.”

Rev. Makito Miyajima of Haramachida Church (United Church of

Christ in Japan) served Ushiku Church and visited Ushiku Immigration Center from 2009 to 2013. He then moved to Haramachida Church and has been visiting Shinagawa Immigration Center two or three times a month. Miyajima, who has acted as guarantor for many refugees granted provisional release, said, “We Christians should be aware that many detainees are being treated like criminals, receiving poor medical support and being unable to work under their provisional release. When a breakout of the coronavirus was discovered at Shinagawa Immigration Center, an Iranian with COVID-19 was forced to move to a single room and could not even see his lawyer.”

Rev. H. (name withheld) said, “At the request of the Ibaraki Bar Association I’ve been meeting with detainees once a month for four years at Ushiku Immigration Center as a Persian-speaking pastor. Through meeting with detainees, I have gradually become aware that serious human-rights violations are taking place there. We need to help refugees who are given provisional release, but what a small church can do is limited. Church networks should be set up and do whatever they can do to support them.”

After these four pastors spoke, participants discussed the possibility of supporting immigration detainees. ■

1. This amendment was suspended in May, as a Sri Lankan woman, Wishma Sandamali, died in detention at Nagoya Immigration Center in March. Although she complained of poor health, it is alleged she was not given proper care. From: “Nagoya immigration center gets threat over Sri Lankan woman’s death,” *The Japan Times*, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/05/24/national/ratnayake-liyanage-wishma-sandamali-nagoya-immigration-threat/> (May 24, 2021).

Great East Japan Earthquake memorial live broadcast

*Christian Shimbun, March 28, 2021
Translated by Hiromi Kiuchi*

A special memorial show called “Love and Hope Concert—Never Forget 3.11” was broadcast online on March 11, ten years after the Great East Japan Earthquake. It was broadcast live in the morning from Minamisanriku in Miyagi Prefecture and in the



Mune and Nakahashi broadcasting in front of the ruins of the former Minamisanriku Crisis Management Department building

afternoon from Kesenuma First Bible Baptist Church. Both broadcasts included interviews with disaster victims and their supporters.

David Kazama, pastor of New Song Church, shared his hope—“Ten years is not the end, but rather a new beginning. Because we have learned what suffering and weakness is, we can walk with compassion.”

Hiroshi Minegishi, pastor of Kesenuma First Bible Baptist Church, said, “That day, when the ground shook violently, I immediately knew that a tsunami would strike and so I evacuated with my wife and daughter. We are thankful that our lives were spared. We are also grateful for the many churches that have supported and prayed for us and for how we were able to rebuild the church.”

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!*¹

Caleb Chan, pastor of Sendai Faith Community Bible Church, recalled his experience on a plane heading to Japan two days after the earthquake.

A local tsunami survivor shared, “I lost a lot in the disaster, but volunteers from around the world came and did great work for us. I was given love that surpassed what I had lost.”

At 2:46 p.m., all those around the nation taking part stood outside and offered up silent prayer prompted by the sirens that announced the time the earthquake struck. From 3 p.m., the Love and Hope Concert was streamed online. The concert was hosted by Sayuri Kume (musical evangelist) and Steven Nakahashi (director of the Ishinomaki Christian Center). It featured saxophonist Steve Sacks, cellist Tomoko Inoue, pianists Michiru Hirose and Mariko Kanno, and gospel singers Yutaka Hagiwara, Makoto Iwabuchi, and Yumiko Iwabuchi.

Tatsuo Nakazawa, representative for regional support network Kakehashi and director of church network Tohoku HELP, said, “In light of the COVID-19 situation, we decided to record and broadcast the program instead of holding it live. This video delivers the message ‘Don’t forget,’ reminding us to remember the victims of all disasters so that we won’t forget. We stand here at this site to build connections that aren’t merely friendships but relationships that bind our hearts together throughout our lives.” ■

Youtuber shares God’s love with those considering suicide

*Christian Shimbun, March 14, 2021
Translated by Grace Koshino*

“When I found out that many people die by suicide in Japan, I wanted to do something about it. So

when I was 17, I uploaded a YouTube video aimed at those contemplating suicide titled ‘To those considering death.’¹ That is how I started a YouTube channel,” said musician Sami Okada (her YouTube name is miura sammy), a member of Sapporo Christian Group, a local church.

“I’m sure there are various reasons why a person would want to end their own life. But God has a wonderful plan and purpose for your life. So please don’t die.”



This is Sami’s heartfelt message to those who watch her video. In the five-minute video, she shares the gospel of Jesus bearing all of our sins by dying on the cross, and says that if we believe in him our sins will be forgiven.

Uploaded five years ago, the video has gathered over 234,000 views and has received almost 7,000 comments. Some viewers have said that they have changed their minds about taking

their own life and some even accepted Jesus. One person said they “dropped the knife they were holding in their hand when they saw the video.” Another said they had visited a church and later got baptized.

Sami also shares her music on YouTube along with her messages. The kanji for her name, 賛美 (sambi), means singing praise. “I love to sing,” she says.

Her first album, *Reply*, consists of six of her original songs and was released in December 2020. “As I read the many

comments on my video and replied to them, and as I learned of my viewers’ deep suffering, I felt that words were not enough for those who didn’t know God. This album is my ‘reply’ to those people. I hope it can convey the love and truth of God.”

Sami’s CD can be bought here: <https://miusam.thebase.in> ■

1. miura sammy, YouTube, “For all those who want to commit suicide,” (English subtitles) 5:36, Feb. 17 2016, <https://youtu.be/DQe1A94tx1M> (accessed July 22, 2021).



Why is there a gender imbalance?

A survey of missionaries sheds light on reasons for the lack of men in Japanese churches

By Brendan Thomas and Simon Pleasants

Walk into a Japanese church and, on average, you will find roughly two women for every man. This was confirmed through a survey of 64 people who responded to a JEMA email survey (representing 1,550 people who had attended their churches on the previous Sunday).¹

This has significant implications. If the number of people going to church reflects the number of Christians, then only about three Japanese men in 1,000 are Protestant (roughly 0.5% of Japanese people are Protestant), making them the unreached of the unreached. It also can make it hard for female believers to find Christian men to marry, and many end up marrying nonbelievers, with all the difficulties that that entails.

Possibly even more concerning is that the gender imbalance may indicate an unbalanced presentation of the gospel. The gospel invitation to join God's kingdom is for everyone, and so whenever the makeup of churches differs from that of the general population, it raises questions about whether the gospel is being presented in all its fullness and power.

Let's consider some possible causes for the imbalance.

Putting things into perspective

The first thing to note is that gender imbalance in churches is not

unique to Japan—it exists in Western countries too, albeit to a lesser extent. For example, the ratio of men to women in Australian churches is 40:60.² So it's helpful to consider the reasons for the imbalance in Western countries.

The feminization of Christianity can be traced back to the second half of the 19th century, Matthew Sterenberg, associate professor at Waseda University, explained in a personal interview. This shift manifested itself in various ways, including greater participation by women in churches and religious orders and the feminization of piety. "The way Christians worshiped and talked about worship was expressed in sentimental and emotional language associated with feminine qualities," Sterenberg said. "And so there's this theological emphasis on motherly qualities—things like that God is caring and loving, but not wrathful."

This historical perspective is important, because when you read the New Testament, it is hard to detect anything that suggests that Christianity had a stronger appeal to women than to men. For example, when Paul greets the members at churches in Rome, he mentions 19 men and 10 women (he also adds the names of eight men who are with him). These numbers may not reflect the actual makeup of the Roman church, but they don't provide much

support for a female majority being the norm.

Japan-specific reasons

Thus, one of the biggest reasons why there are few men in Japanese churches could be that the Christianity introduced to Japan from the West has a greater appeal to women than to men. But there are presumably other factors specific to Japan at work too, since the gender imbalance is higher in Japan than in Western countries.

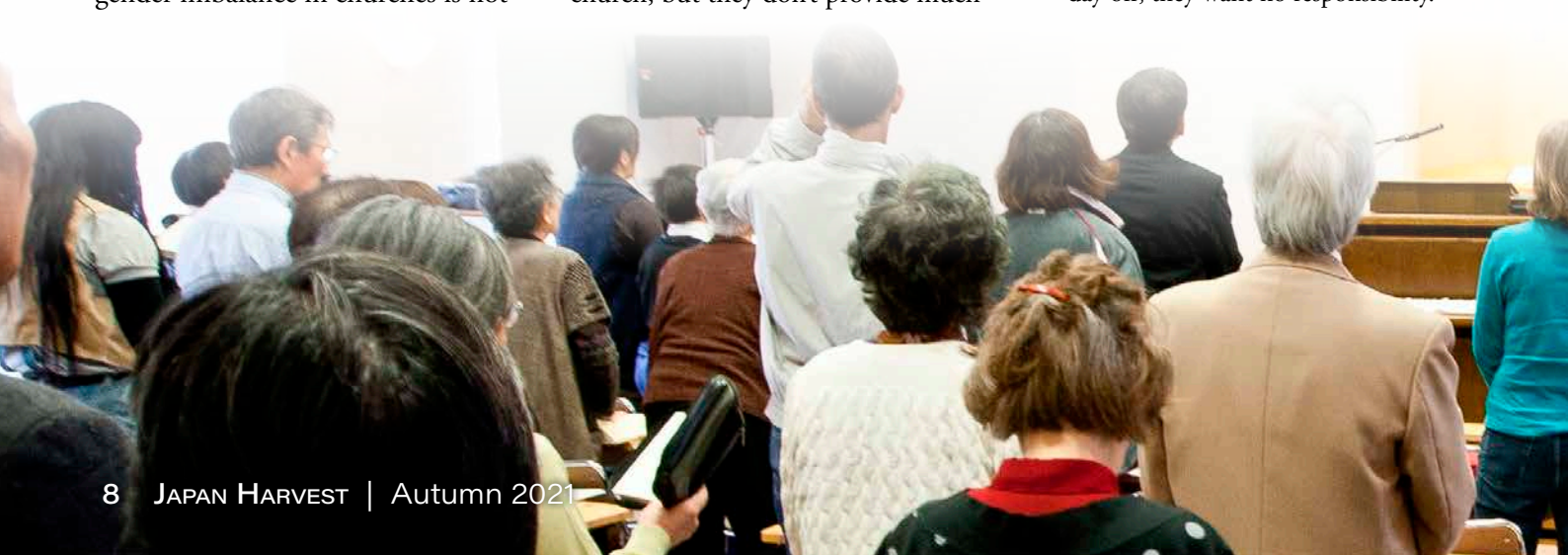
To try to shed light on these Japanese-specific reasons, we conducted a survey of 26 JEMA members. We asked recipients for their thoughts on the biggest factors responsible for there being so few men in Japanese churches.

Work pressure and culture

Not surprisingly, the top cited cause was Japan's infamous work culture. Of the 26 responses, 19 (73%) mentioned work and associated busyness as reasons why men find it hard to participate in churches. Typical comments included:

Men are still almost mercilessly expected to work until they drop dead—sometimes literally—and for many, Sunday is the only day to pay back the sleep debt.

Men are overworked at their jobs. They have high responsibility, and therefore on Sunday, usually their only day off, they want no responsibility.



Despite this overwhelming perception that work is one of the main causes for men not coming to church, two pieces of evidence suggest it might be overrated. We asked respondents to provide figures for the number of men at their churches who were full-time workers, part-time workers, and retired or unemployed. It was a small sample size, but the proportion of full-time workers (43%) didn't differ much from that for the general population (48%).³ If work pressures are such a critical factor for keeping men away from churches, you might expect full-time workers to be under-represented in men who are at church.

Another piece of evidence that work may not be such a critical factor is that male students seem to be under-represented in campus ministries. For example, 72 males (35%) and 133 females (65%) participated in a national student training seminar held online by KGK in February 2021. This ratio is very close to the one we obtained in our initial survey of 64 people from the JEMA email list. Presumably, male and female students have fairly equal demands on their time, so this figure suggests that some other factor is at play besides lack of time. Disturbingly, KGK has seen a widening gap between male and female participation in recent years, but it's not apparent what is causing it.⁴

Perception of Christianity being weak and feminine

If work isn't the biggest cause for the lack of men at church, what else might be? Several survey respondents noted that many Japanese men perceive Christianity as being feminine and for weak people. Typical comments included:

Religion is seen as something the women do. It is seen as a sign of weakness.

Men . . . see church as a female gathering.

This has strong resonances with the feminization of Christianity in the West mentioned above. But maybe the perception that Christianity is for women is stronger in Japan. Of course, this sets up a vicious cycle where men who go to church see mostly women there, confirming their suspicions that Christianity is for females.

Complex situation

Husbands are more likely to bring their wives with them to church events, than wives are to bring their husbands. So the evangelism of men may be more strategic, reaching both in a couple, rather than just one.

There are many women-only Christian universities. Many were started in the Meiji era by missionaries because higher education had previously mainly been restricted to men in Japan. Because of this, more Japanese women than men are likely to encounter Christianity at university.

Finally, many evangelistic activities appeal more to women than men. For example, classes for cooking, flower arranging, and gospel music. Furthermore, they are often held during the daytime, when most men cannot attend.

Hope

One ray of light from the main survey of JEMA members was that there were 11 churches of more than 10 people who have male-to-female ratios between 40% and 50%. This shows it is possible to attract and retain men.

One promising way forward would be to find out how these churches are achieving this.

The example of Paul evangelizing in Philippi is also a great inspiration (Acts 16:11–40). He first goes to a riverside prayer meeting for Jewish women and shares the gospel with them, and Lydia is quietly converted. After that, he casts out a demon from a slave girl, and he and Silas are arrested, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison. During the night, they stop the jailer from committing suicide and share the gospel with him and his family. In the first church in Philippi, you would have a wealthy female merchant of purple sharing meals with a burly jailer and his family. Only the gospel can achieve that kind of diversity, and only the gospel can maintain it despite the tensions that must have existed. **JH**

1. The actual male-to-female ratio was 31:69 based on figures for 1,550 people in 58 churches that people attend.
2. R. Powell, M. Pepper, and K. J. Kerr, "Gender mix in Australian churches," *NCLS Research*, 2018. <http://www.ncls.org.au/news/gender> (accessed June 11, 2021).
3. Share of employees working in non-regular employment in Japan from 2002 to 2020, by gender," *Statista*, 2021. Online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1126055/japan-shareemployees-non-regular-employment-by-gender> (accessed July 22, 2021). "Male employment rate in Japan from 2010 to 2020," *Statista*, 2021 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/643300/japan-male-employment-rate> (accessed August 30, 2021).
4. Of the 242 students at two KGK camps that Simon's wife participated in 20 years ago, 45% were male students.

Photo by Roddy MacKay

Brendan Thomas is in his third year studying a Master of Divinity at the Bible College of South Australia. He has a passion for Japan and student ministry and longs to see more Japanese men wholeheartedly committed to Christ.



Strange glimpses into the church in Japan

What we as a church can learn (and should unlearn) from how Japanese culture influences corporate life

Karōshi. Kigyō senshi. Mōretsu shain. Shachiku. Japan has no lack of trending phrases in the media for its straightlaced, all-demanding work culture.

But what about when it comes to the church in Japan? Phrases we hear are: *bata-kusai* (Western influenced) and *shikii ga takai* (“high threshold,” social barrier to entry). To the casual observer, it resembles something like a panda in the zoo: cute to look at in passing, but that’s about it, and unlikely to do much reproducing. To reach the Japanese, the church must resist negative cultural influences and engage in meaningful relationships one-on-one and with groups.

Contrasting church and the workplace

In both the workplace and the church, the lingering feudal influence of the lifetime employment system and hierarchical structure remains. Strong communal obligations create a powerful sense of loyalty, for better or worse. People want something bigger than themselves, a place in which they can find a semblance of security and purpose. And if it kills their soul and damages their well-being, that’s dismissed as necessary for the greater good.

The main difference between the workplace and the church is that one is a given in society, and the other is a strange, largely hidden-away curiosity. Even if you are looking for them, Christian groups can be difficult to find. There was a campus Bible study group that I was trying to get in contact with, and I emailed a number of people directly or indirectly related with them. However, I was basically given the runaround at each turn, as if

they didn’t really want to be contacted or attract new people. God may have been redirecting me, like Paul and his companions from Bithynia (Acts 16:6–8), nevertheless, isn’t it time for Christians to come out of hiding and into their communities? Consider how interconnected companies and neighborhood associations are in the life of the community in local festivals and charities.

Sadly, churches can hold a competitive attitude: criticizing other ministries, limiting contact from other churches, and maintaining exclusive control over their dwindling number of members. If you are not a member at a particular church, even pastors who know you (and like you) may require you to have their permission to contact an old friend who goes to their church. Being territorially competitive and wary of head-hunting may be standard business practice, but these have no place among the beloved family of God; these do nothing to recommend the church as an oasis of grace for the newcomer.

It’s also hard to connect with businessmen or women who work Monday to Saturday all day and into the night, and most Christians are at church on Sunday, often all day. While there are some church-planters who hold Bible studies with businessmen on the train commute and some pastors who do early weekday breakfast meetings, scheduling can be difficult.

Similarities between church and workplace

In the world of business, as in the world of the church, introductions are

key. If you don’t know someone who can invite you, you might not be welcomed in or feel like you would be welcomed, so it’s rather intimidating for someone to join a new group unless they feel compelled by some inciting incident—some personal crisis perhaps. When people know they have a standing invitation to come with you to church, your personal example of walking in the Spirit will “prime the pump” so to speak, when the times comes.

The challenge in Japan is to show a person that reality of the “corporate” Christ that is bigger and more purposeful than one person or the “company,” and that it is not stodgy, legalistic, or burdensome, but life-giving. Describing conversion “as if he were looking through a leper’s window,” Chesterton said, “only, when he has entered the Church is much larger inside than it is outside.”¹

Within the church community, one finds oneself in the alpine air of the high country, the upside-down kingdom. Instead of a priority on seniority and doddering traditionalism, we should see a special emphasis for the weak and downtrodden that Christ holds to his bosom, and in place of rigid formalism, a cup of cold water to people parched for real connection.

The church today, like many companies in Japan, is adverse to risk. It is reluctant to try new and ambitious programs, to retrain and rebrand itself, to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the community even if it makes it look a bit, well, strange. Of course, we

By Daniel Morgan



Japanese Christians of the past to check out

are painting with broad strokes here, and the church is not to slavishly copy corporate culture, but the same cultural influences, such as fear of failure and standing out, have influenced both company and church.

However, many people don't realize that much of modern Japan was formed behind the scenes by stout-hearted men and women in the past who were radical in their devotion to serving God and Japan, never minding the naysayers. At times, they broke taboos, swerved against the flow, sneaked around fusty laws (when needed), were misunderstood, and incurred the enmity of those around them. Some were respectable statesmen. Some lived in slums and hovels. And with all that, they shaped Japan. I love to read their stories.

These Japanese Christians of the past are heroes of mine, though largely unknown and forgotten now by much of Japanese society (look up the four examples pictured above). They had a vision of greatness for Japan, seeking after the kingdom of God to redeem and reform their homeland. Those heroic Japanese Christians of the past modeled an admirable, if sometimes imperfect, picture of the patriot-prophet (Acts 17:26–27). Rather than being hesitant, we should strive to emulate their examples of being salt and light to the Japanese and be clear about the message we share.

How can we do better?

What does the average outsider think when they peek through the doors of a church? It is important to be able to feel at home and not out of place, to feel you can be who you are and not on guard about what others may or may not think about you. Non-Christians desire a place where they feel like they can be themselves. Church at its best should be like this.

The idea of attending church for the first time can be unusually daunting. I often hear Japanese say about visiting a church, “Oh, is it okay? Even though I'm not a Christian?” They think they might be rejected at the entrance. Even though the church members might be quite welcoming, it can be hard to shake the feeling that one shouldn't be there without a specific purpose, as if one needs a passport and to be approved through customs to enter. This is similar to how you don't approach strangers in Japan to chit-chat with unless you have a good reason. Much of that uneasiness might be mitigated if, before inviting newcomers to church, we befriended them in their own groups. Of course, visiting a church for English lessons or other activities could also help give a rationale or convenient excuse for being there.

Pastor Kuroda, who used to smuggle Bibles past the Iron Curtain, notes that businessmen are under so much strain

and tension from overwork that music events work well to directly touch their hearts and bring relaxation and healing. He stresses that human relationships—that is, trust relationships—are fundamental. No one wants to do business with someone they just met or they don't yet trust. Take the time to develop *hadaka no tsukiai* (裸の付き合い, relationships where you can be yourself) so people can feel able to open up to each other.

Ultimately, the goal is not to get unbelievers into the church but Jesus into unbelievers, and if they are “in Christ,” they are de facto in the body of Christ. Japan doesn't need Sunday Christians and Sunday-service Christianity that fails to address the isolation endemic in Japanese society. But rather the church needs a more biblical ecclesiology that carries Christ wherever it goes as “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23 ESV) to the end that his “house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). **JH**

1. G. K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, (MacMillan Company: New York, 1926), 49.

Train station photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rush_hour_at_Shinjuku_02.JPG

Daniel Morgan was sent from his home church, Church in the Center, in Houston, Texas in 2013 and is currently helping out at Abide Calvary Chapel Osaka.

God's pursuit of the oikos

By Matt Parsley

What if we were to embrace a model of reaching out to relational groups in Japan?

God loves families. In Scripture, it's often the entire family at the receiving end of the Lord's salvation. Remember when God saved Noah—and his family? Or when God rescued Lot from Sodom—along with his family? God saved Joseph—and his family, even the brothers who sold him into slavery. And it wasn't only Rahab who escaped Jericho's fate. Her whole family experienced deliverance by the God of Israel that day. In the book of Acts, there's a recurring theme of entire households hearing the word of God, believing, and being baptized together.

The family, or *oikos*, plays a key role in God's kingdom expansion plan. In the New Testament, *oikos* is the Greek word often translated into English as "household." This would refer to one's immediate family, but it may also more broadly include one's relatives and close friends (as in the case of Cornelius—Acts 10:24, 11:14) and even an entire people group ("oikos of Israel"—Matt. 15:24; Acts 2:36).

We see this disciple-making strategy of pursuing the *oikos* in Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Luke 10 and Matthew 10. Upon finding a "person of peace" (Luke 10:6:5–6 CSB) or one "who is worthy" (Matt. 10:11 CSB), the disciples were to stay in the home of this person. So as we search for "persons of peace" among the Japanese, we are not simply looking for an individual who shows interest in the gospel, but one willing to open their *oikos* to the word of God as well.

This wasn't a new strategy Jesus was teaching, but one he had already modeled. Remember when Jesus called Matthew to follow him? Matthew obeyed, and in the very next scene, we see Jesus eating with Matthew and his tax collector friends—his *oikos*—in Matthew's home (Matt. 9:9–10). Or what about Zacchaeus? He shows inter-

est in Jesus, and Jesus boldly invites himself into Zacchaeus's home. "I must stay at your house today," Jesus said (Luke 19:5 NET). Jesus looked beyond one man's salvation. He went on to declare—"Today salvation has come to this household [*oikos*]" (v. 9 NET).

I have to admit, this perspective of seeing beyond the individual to one's family does not come naturally for this Westerner. I grew up in a culture of individuality, where personal choice often trumps family concern. And if I'm not careful, I transfer that worldview to my ministry strategies, which can inadvertently lead to the extraction of individuals from their relational networks. Not only do we see a contrasting biblical pattern, but these results stand in strong opposition to Japanese society.

Challenges of "one-at-a-time" conversion

For those of us who minister to Japanese, the challenges for individuals considering allegiance to Christ are painfully clear. Shame associated with a perceived betrayal of family and heritage is a favorite weapon of Satan, and he uses it to drive fear into those who would otherwise find following Christ attractive. Seekers may consider family tradition and societal responsibilities as barriers that simply cannot be overcome, and this can cause many to move towards Jesus with much caution or not at all.

The struggles continue for those who take that step of faith and receive Jesus. This is not just a Japanese issue, but across Asia there are many missionaries who can tell stories of those who have lost jobs, of marriages that have ended, or of family harmony broken by distrust and misunderstanding. We minister in Malaysia to the Japanese diaspora and others. One Chinese woman in my neighborhood moved to Malaysia

with her kids to give them an English education. She was led to Christ by some teachers here and recently returned to her homeland. Her husband and son are strongly opposed to this "Western religion," and she went home with much fear. We praise God for her salvation but grieve her difficult situation. What difference



When a family, circle colleagues decide to follow is immediate support

might it have made if her whole family were intentionally invited along on this journey to Jesus? I fear the tendency of Westerners like myself has been to encourage individuals to believe now and think about family later.

Though disciples of Jesus have a new spiritual family, Asian believers often continue to experience loneli-

ness and isolation. I currently minister to a single Japanese man who came to Christ in Japan and is now living in Malaysia. He works long hours and often becomes fatigued and depressed. He is lonely but finds connecting relationally into an already established group a significant hurdle.

We rightfully want to integrate new believers into the body of Christ; however, when we toss them into “discipleship” with a group of strangers, we may only heighten their feeling of isolation. I have been involved in a number of small discipleship groups over the years. It normally takes me a long time (sometimes years) to feel comfortable sharing openly and honestly in a new gathering—and I have



of friends, or group of Christ together, the result and accountability.

followed Christ for most of my life. How do new Japanese disciples feel when they are asked to leave their natural relational circles and join a group of strangers to grow spiritually? Could the biblical model of pursuing the oikos offer a fresh understanding to our evangelism and discipleship strategies?

Benefits of “group journey”

You’ve heard it said that there’s strength in numbers. It’s so important to have the encouragement and support of others as we seek to grow in Christ, and it’s outright perilous to navigate this journey alone. But what if we were to intentionally start relational groups on that journey collectively—even before they commit to Christ? If whole families learn of God together, they might very well believe together. I heard from a mission worker in Nagoya who has seen three families believe and be baptized simultaneously, just within his close relationships. Think about the challenges mentioned above in light of an entire family who surrenders to Christ. The struggles related to family pressure, marital distrust, and other strained relationships diminish or disappear.

When entire families follow Christ, *men* follow Christ. In cases when the wife initially seeks Jesus, what would it take to get the husband interested? A colleague shared that wives in India often hear stories from the Bible first and love them, but the husband is not interested. What do they do? The wives beg! They implore their husbands to come hear these stories, just one time, and promise not to bother them any more after that. Inevitably, the husband becomes intrigued (or worn down), and the whole family is soon engaged with the scriptures.

There’s risk in a disciple-maker pursuing the family of an interested individual. If the family is strongly opposed to the message, one might lose a continued witness with the individual. Is this risk worth the potential fruit? The same colleague I mentioned above tells the story of a disciple with a Muslim background who had an audience with five young ladies at his sewing center. While teaching them a new skill, he shared stories from the Bible with them. They loved the stories, but the disciple thought, *They must be terrified to tell their families.* As he learned more about the biblical pattern of reaching the oikos, the disciple made a decision to trust God’s way despite his concerns. He went to the families of the girls and asked them for permission to continue sharing these stories

with them, and in turn, the girls could share the stories with the family. As feared, two of the families objected and forbade the girls from ever returning to the sewing center. However, three of the families agreed to let the girls hear the stories and bring them home. Now, instead of five individuals learning from scripture, three families—close to twenty people—were hearing from God on a daily basis.

When a family, circle of friends, or group of colleagues decide to follow Christ together, the result is immediate support and accountability. The group becomes the body of Christ organically. The false notion that becoming a Christian means having to leave one’s relational networks is exposed. This group becomes a testimony to other groups. Men take up the role as spiritual leader of their households. Friends face hardship and persecution as one. Colleagues—well, I imagine it would be much harder for a manager to let go of an entire department!

Conclusion

“And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3b ESV). From Genesis to Revelation, the current of God’s heart and vision flows through families. Of course, there is “joy in heaven over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:7 NET). We celebrate every person who comes to Jesus. But knowing that God “does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9 NET), I have to trust there’s *more* rejoicing when *more* come to Christ! Jesus has given us the mission of making disciples of all nations, and he’s given us the strategies for accomplishing this mission. I envision the gospel spreading rapidly among the Japanese from household to household. I see men leading their families in obedience to Christ. The Holy Spirit is transforming whole communities, and an entire people group is being reached. Lord, may it be so in our generation! **JH**

Photo: <https://www.photo-ac.com/main/detail/4401717>

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Observations about men in church: from the Bible and experience

How can we avoid a gender imbalance in the church?

By Rod Thomas

Our church's congregation has as many men as women, if not more, though we have not tried to attract men particularly. On the other hand, most of our evangelistic events are attended by women. This is because the events are cooking classes, or wreath-making, or other crafts. (I suppose if I did a chainsaw maintenance class, I could expect a few men, and one day I'll try to pull that off!) And yet the worship service, Bible study, and prayer meeting have either more men or an equal number of men and women. I'm not sure why.

However, I do know that there are things that turn men off and, more importantly, displease God. It is always good to examine our ministry to see if we can do better, and that is the aim of these brief observations. How can we promote a balance of genders in the church in terms of numbers? Gender issues are an emotional topic, and some of what I say might be controversial. So I'll start on sure ground with observations from the Bible and then leave it up to you, dear reader, when to throw this article down!

Observations from the Bible

① We should not value men more than women. The Bible makes it clear that both are of equal value in the sight of God (Gal. 3:28). The conversion of a man is not a greater event than the conversion of a woman. The angels rejoice equally, and so should we (Luke 15:10).

② God is sovereign in his choices and Jesus himself is the church planter, not us (Matt. 16:18). If there are more women in church on average, this could mean that God has chosen more women to be saved. Has he not chosen the weak to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:26)? And might this apply to the genders as much as the other categories that Paul mentions? Having said that, Luke shows that the early church was not dominated by one gender: "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5:14 ESV).

③ All believers should have a virile faith. Paul tells Christian men and women to "act like men" (1 Cor. 16:13



ESV). This doesn't mean that women have to bang the table or talk in a deep voice. Rather, all believers are to put on the full armour of God (Eph. 6:11), be comrades in the battle (Rom. 16:3–4), wage war (2 Cor. 10:3), and wrestle (Eph. 6:12). They should be bold in telling the gospel, consistent in trials, cheerful in suffering, courageous in frightening circumstances (1 Pet. 3:6). Their faith should be based on objective truths of the Bible, not subjective feelings or people's opinions. Many women in the Bible outshine men with their virile faith (e.g., Deborah, Manoah's wife, Abigail, Bathsheba, and Esther). And along with "sons", daughters of God share the spiritual inheritance rights as first-born sons (Gal. 4:7).

④ God has ordained male leadership in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). If suitably qualified (1 Tim. 3:8–12), men should be encouraged to lead. It has been a trend in recent decades to ignore this teaching or explain it away. But it comes at a cost to not pay attention to this teaching. Is it surprising if churches where women are in leadership attract more women? And for those who believe that genders are irrelevant in church, why would this issue's magazine topic even be of interest?

Observations from experience

⑤ The key to any church ministry is to aim for a virile faith in our preaching

and teaching. We should clearly and regularly present Jesus as a crucified Saviour and the risen Lord with all the promises related to his salvation, using a straightforward exegesis of biblical texts. This will attract, keep, and grow Christian men and women.

Now, I read somewhere that, in a church where this is not the case, Christian men will more quickly leave a church than women will. I remember the same author said that men have a lower tolerance of teaching based on subjective ideas, religious exercises for their own sake, excessive sharing of feelings (in sermons or in groups), or non-biblical guilt-tripping and will quickly leave. I believe this to be very true.

Before we left South Africa for Japan many years ago, I used to have fellowship with an old Portuguese believer. Marco went to a large evangelical church where the gospel was preached very clearly. He said he liked it because often when he went, he was feeling sinful and sad, but after listening to the sermon, he saw afresh that he was a forgiven sinner and went home joyful with the assurance of salvation. Would Marco like your church?

⑥ All Christians like friendly, cheerful churches. But I think men cope less well with cold and complicated relationships. For example, it is difficult when there is a clear division between *nenpai* (elderly person) and *senpai* (more experienced person) among

church members, or when one can't talk to A-san about a subject because they easily get offended. Or even, "You can't sit there! That's B-san's seat!"

So let's show warmth and openness to men and quickly tell them the gospel if they are unbelievers. They will appreciate our honesty, faithfulness, and love. I try to go out of my way to show affection to the men in our congregation.

⑦ One rather sad observation is that some missionaries and pastors seem to prefer women in their congregations. Japanese women are often more attractive, better mannered, easier to understand, and more deferential than men. Also, I have noticed that when any couple is having marriage difficulties, some pastors routinely assume the man is at fault. This kind of bias is not likely to be blessed with large numbers of men.

⑧ For some reason, the men in our congregation seem to be more deeply humble, conscious of their sins, grateful for their salvation, and easier to correct than the women. This is not to disparage the women, all of whom have a genuine faith and are sincere Christians. But for me, the contrast is very marked. And I don't know why.

In conclusion, gender differences are a mystery known only to God. But if you have mostly women in your church, perhaps you should ask yourself why. Do you preach clearly and boldly the objective truth of the gospel? Are you warm and welcoming to all, especially men? Are you encouraging spiritual men to take leadership? Let us make sure we faithfully discharge our duty like watchmen on the tower who faithfully warn when the enemy comes. Let us be faithful shepherds who guard the flock with the Word of God and farmers who plant and water the seed. JH

Photo of author and men at church by Roddy MacKay

Rod Thomas and his wife Glenda are ministering in Sendai Evangelical Church. He has been in Japan for 34 years with OMF International.

Where are the men?

*“What is
happening to
all these men?”
I wondered.*

By Ginger Tobin

“We’re going to Church in the Park, and you’re coming with us!” Two classmates said this to me at college in the ’70s. My classmates were new believers and startled me with their eagerness. I’d been raised in conservative Protestant churches and had been warned against “that park ministry to hippies,” but found it useless to argue with my eager friends.

Missing persons

The sermons I heard in the park brought Scripture to life in living color, in a way I had never experienced before. Nearly all of us at Church in the Park were actively involved in evangelism and discipleship, even more than believers on my college campus.

Over the next few years, however, I noticed an alarming trend among my male acquaintances from the church: they started to die off! One of those two fellows who had hijacked me to worship in the park suffered a freak accident and went to be with the Lord. This went on, with accidents, suspected suicides, even one murder, plus a few deaths due to illness, including that of a six-year-old boy who succumbed to a malignant brain tumor—but no women. I wondered why it was young men that were stricken so hard.

As I reflected on these men who were dying, my husband, whom I had met at Church in the Park, cooled in his faith. He eventually stopped attending church altogether, then left me and filed for divorce. During those hard years, I started to write this article, but gave up, because I could find no light on the subject. This spring, when the call for proposals for this magazine appeared in my inbox, I deleted it, having nothing to offer in the way of a solution. Then, after I had read and deleted the final call for proposals, an important conversation finally brought things into focus. I will leave to others any statistical establishment of the under-representation of men in churches worldwide or in Japan, and share my observations from Scripture and experience.

The burden I’ve seen men carry

Many men I have known have felt unappreciated, hopeless, and trapped, even when there were doing their best. After our divorce, another couple from Church in the Park, with whom my former husband and I had been very close, was also having difficulty. He was offered a dream job at a university, teaching, counseling, and doing research. But seeing a move as a threat to their children’s education, she refused to relocate. One morning, their daughter discovered his body in his car in their driveway. He had shot himself. His widow phoned me the morning after I had returned from my first trip to Japan to tell me he was gone.

After my mother’s death, my father had a couple of unfortunate liaisons

with women. In the midst of the second, he gave up. His suicide note read, “She made me do it.”

In another example, a younger friend strongly took the initiative in her relationship with her husband before marriage. This concerned me, but made sense to her, as she considered him “too good a catch” to allow to escape. Since they married, she has blamed him for not continuing in church attendance, for not being more affectionate toward her, and for not participating more in the rearing of their children. At one low point in their marriage, they grappled with a kitchen knife when she discovered he was about to use it to kill himself. At the time of writing, she is divorcing him.

Blaming has also surfaced in Japanese couples I have known. For a number of years, I have read the Bible with a former English-circle student whose believing uncle had given her a Bible and told her to read it. Early in our journey, she blamed the conflicts in her marriage on her husband’s drinking and smoking, while not seeming to notice his kind gestures toward her.

Eventually, her level of marital conflict took us from the Gospels back to Genesis. We saw in Genesis 3 that the pattern of men and women blaming each other began with Adam, who blamed both God and the woman he gave him. Eve went on to blame the snake who deceived her. Only the snake was smart enough to keep his mouth shut when judgment fell. By this time, as I read with my Japanese friend, she was gaining a clearer understanding of her situation. My impression is that, with the insights she gained from this passage, and our subsequent reading of Scripture, her marital satisfaction has improved 100%. And that happened without her husband having made the changes she had felt were imperative.

Evidence that men carry a burden

Looking again at Genesis 3, we see that when the curses were handed out, on top of hard labor, it was upon Adam that the curse of death was pronounced (v. 19). My thought is that men are dying faster than women in various ways

because they have been bearing the brunt of the curse for us, while women try to shelter in place under their leadership (v. 16). Of course, Jesus, the second Adam, took the whole brunt of the curse upon himself for our salvation (1 Cor. 15:20-22), but how many men (or women) are fully appropriating in our daily experience the salvation Jesus won for us by his perfect life?

It is a well-known fact that worldwide, men have a shorter life expectancy than women.¹ Not so well-known is that some researchers are suggesting that the “Y” chromosome may disappear in another 4.6 million years. This deterioration is not found with the “X” chromosome.² The scientific community is currently divided on the issue of “Y” chromosome deterioration, with some saying that it has slowed.³ This scientific discussion makes me wonder whether it is related to the curse of death on Adam, though the Bible says nothing about the difference in life expectancy between the sexes.

Strategies

I’d like to suggest that we think about strategies for supporting men under the burden they each inherit from Adam and will carry until we each appear before Jesus in person. Examples like the above have convinced me that blaming is unproductive at best and lethal at worst. Relying on the notion that church attendance and service is women’s work will not complete the Great Commission. Neither will standing back and waiting for men to take

on the job. To my shame, I confess that I repeatedly stated that I did not want the leadership role in our international Bible study because I didn’t want the flak from the enemy. That was tantamount to dodging incoming fire and letting the soldier behind me get hit. Now, rather than bragging about looking out for my own skin, I’m working to support our male leader. I have a strong commitment to work as equal with him to confront the enemy of our souls, and we cover one another’s backs in prayer.

Teaching people the origins of “gender wars,” as recorded in Genesis 3, has been an effective tool in my ministry. Leadership development also shows promise. This February, JEMA and the Japan Navigators co-sponsored an online Leader Development Workshop which offers a comprehensive paradigm for the three aspects of leadership: Lead, Develop, Care.⁴ Where needed male leadership is lacking, women can step in to lead and develop male leaders, then step back to let men develop their leadership skills. Of course, all leadership development needs to be done in a caring atmosphere.

In my college days, my stateside prayer partner, Elizabeth Watkins, was an excellent role model of this paradigm. To my question about women in leadership, she responded in her North Carolina drawl, “If a man doesn’t show up for a job, God’ll raise up a woman!” Elizabeth’s 40 years of ministry in Japan included planting churches and turning them over to Japanese pastors.⁵

Since 2017, I have been working with my NPO, Aijalon Ministries International, to bring four-day HeartChange Workshops from the States in English to Japan in Japanese. The purpose of the workshops is transformation, as seen in participants’ salvation, deliverance, healing, and reconciliation. I am currently training two Japanese HeartChange Workshop graduates, one man and one woman, to present that workshop in Japanese.

In the time remaining before our Lord’s return, we have God’s power that raised the second Adam from the dead, as we cooperatively use Scripture and emerging leadership tools, to do better than we have thus far at affirming and encouraging men. **JH**

1. Robert Preidt, “Men Worldwide Have Shorter Life Spans Than Women”, HealthDay News, *U.S. News & World Report*, <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2021-03-15/men-worldwide-have-shorter-life-spans-than-women> (accessed July 30, 2021).
2. Darren Griffin and Peter Ellis, “The Y chromosome is disappearing – so what will happen to men?” *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/the-y-chromosome-is-disappearing-so-what-will-happen-to-men-90125> (accessed July 30, 2021).
3. Ibid.
4. Mark Rood, “JEMA Leader Development Workshop 2021”, February 16, 2021, <https://youtu.be/SU08setZuBk> (video summary).
5. F. Calvin Parker, *Precious Mother, Precious Crown: The Life and Mission of Elizabeth Taylor Watkins*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Professional Press, 1997), 238-253.

Photos submitted by author

Ginger Tobin serves with Aijalon Ministries International, adapting HeartChange Workshops, originating in her home state of Oregon, to Japanese people.

The 2019 HeartChange Workshop graduating class and the two Japanese trainees in 2020



Resuscitating the sons of peace strategy

Finding the ones prepared by the Lord to introduce us to their circle of influence

I encountered the “son of peace” strategy in Chiang Mai at a church planting training in 2005. How had I missed this son of peace throughout my years of ministry before then? Perhaps I missed him in my reading of the Scriptures, or perhaps I didn’t hear him emphasized by any pastor or missionary.

This son of peace is found in Matthew 10:11–13 and Luke 10:

“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10: 5–9 ESV).

In missionary circles, the son of peace has been highlighted in church planting and disciple-making movements. However, more attention on this is necessary in current church planting strategies amongst missionaries and the local churches.

Has this been unconsciously overlooked or seen as culturally unattainable due to differing cultural values? Jesus clearly asked his disciples to encounter and relate with the son of peace during their mission trips to the towns and villages. In fact, these are the most distinct evangelistic instructions uttered by Jesus.

Male, female, or neutral

The original Greek term *huios* means “son” (used by Luke), as the ESV has translated it. Other translations

use “man” (NASB). Gender-neutral language translations use “person” (CSB), “someone” (NIV), or “those who live there are peaceful” (NLT), deleting the masculine gender as well as pluralizing the singular “son”. The Japanese Shinkaiyaku version uses “子” (*ko*), a gender-neutral term that conveys the idea of a child, which is a limited meaning.

Interestingly, Jesus used the term “son of peace”, which reflects the patriarchy of Jewish society. Although this term has been translated in our modern context to man, person(s), or someone, we should not ignore the cultural context in which males were seen as the leaders, often the main providers, and the dominant gender in a hierarchical Jewish culture.

Many societies today do recognise the substantial roles played by women in all strata of society. Paul and his team approached a group of women in Philippi, and out of that group, we see Lydia as a woman of peace who set the stage for the growth of the well-loved Philippian church.

A person of peace is basically a person of repute who welcomes or hosts us, who listens to us share the Good News, and who opens their *oikos* (circles of family and friends) to us (like the centurion who invited Peter to his house). Thus, when a cross-cultural worker encounters a person of peace in a more traditional and collectivistic culture, an appropriate strategy would be to approach the man in a family, since a male person is likely to have more influence and less resistance. Generally, most Asian cultures belong to this category. The book of Acts records how the gospel had spread widely to all

By Louis Lau

regions (Acts 13:48–49, 19:10). More than likely, the son of peace strategy was used by the disciples, Paul, and his teams.

Search or encounter

The criticism of this strategy lies in the belief that Christians are to *find* that special person of peace, who may be elusive and could keep us from reaching everyone. I think the usage should not be in searching or finding (探す) but rather *encounter* or *connect with*. The verb *search* is not used in the Luke and Matthew passages. When we use the term *search* or *find*, our intent is often to find the special one but ignore all the others. This sidetracks us from sowing the seeds widely, leading us to share the gospel discriminately.

In evangelism, there are certain ones who stand out and make contributions that produce 30, 60, 100, or even more new believers. These are the persons of peace! It is not like searching for a needle in a haystack but more like finding a gem in a treasure mine. In dominant patriarchal and collectivistic cultures such as in Japan, it would be an advantageous strategy if persons of peace are males. This can be likened to casting a net for fishing rather than using a rod.

Raised in a Christian home, Shion was introduced by his parents to our youth church when he started university. He turned out to be a person of peace as he subsequently introduced



many of his university friends to the youth church and even started another group meeting in Tokyo city amongst working adults. Many got to know Jesus. More than half of the youth church attendees were his friends, and most of them were men.

Eating your way in

Jesus also taught his disciples to use the greeting “Peace be to this house” upon meeting someone. Perhaps there is a need to find an equivalent to the Jewish greeting “shalom” in Japan. This greeting portrays a positive image when translated into Japanese:

この家に平安があるように。(May the peace be with this house.)

In Japan, greeting one another with “konnichiwa” is common. However, it would not be frowned upon if people were to say “peace be on you” since “平安” (*heian*) is a well-loved word in Japan and peace is desired by all.

During one of our street ministries, we met a person of peace who introduced us to a home for the elderly. We were warmly welcomed by the supervisor, who allowed us to do monthly events for over a year. We led songs, played games, and shared gospel stories. All these were made possible by this woman of peace, a person of good repute and trust who opened the door to her oikos of colleagues and residents.

According to Jesus, once a connection has been made with the person of peace, the next step is to eat with them, without moving from house to house. Yes, begin with a house-to-house approach, but stop moving once a welcoming person or house of peace has been found. This goes against our training as we are conditioned to move on to cover as many homes or talk to as many people as possible!

Eating together often signifies that friendships have reached a higher level as it breaks down barriers and cements friendships. Spend more money eating with Japanese at homes or in restaurants! Shion’s parents run a house church where they build bonds by spending time in the Word and eating together regularly.

Heal and share

The ministries of healing and sharing the gospel upon meeting a person of peace are the starting points. In our experience, praying for healing is seldom rejected. In Japan, the hope for healing for themselves or for family members drives some people to seek out any deity. This gives Christians an advantage when reaching out to them. When the Lord heals through prayer, there will be an open door to meet other relatives and friends.

Our experiences of praying for people’s health have been positive. A neighbour was subsequently saved and baptized through an initial simple prayer of healing. Another time, a Japanese evangelist and I visited a sick elderly couple, prayed for healing,

shared the gospel, and baptized them there and then. We continue to pray for healing as we share the gospel in our ministry to the homeless and the poor in Ikebukuro.

Some may wonder if it is strategic to share the gospel at the first meeting with someone. Jesus clearly taught, “Say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near (Luke 10:9).’” This signifies that the gospel should not be put on the back burner. A mission trip to Utsunomiya in May 2021 brought us to a father of two children with whom we shared the gospel. I explained that his two children have believed in Jesus and asked if he minded if I prayed for his household. He replied affirmatively, and there were smiles when I finished praying. The pastor is following up with this family.

The strategy of encountering the persons of peace is being revived as a key component in reaching the Japanese. There is an exciting work amongst the pastors and Christians in Japan through the Train & Multiply (T&M) training (<http://www.oms-japan.org/tm/index.html>), which has equipped more than 1,000 pastors and leaders in encountering the persons of peace. The urgent task today is to seek the ones prepared by the Lord who will open his or her oikos to us, possibly leading to mass movements of people encountering Jesus, the Son of God. We just need to resuscitate this strategy again in its fullest form. **JH**

Louis Lau, with his wife, Chris, has served with OMF since 1992. Hailing from Singapore, he is a church planting facilitator and dean of Asian Cross-Cultural Training Centre (ACTI). He’s involved in homeless ministry and the LoveJapan project.

“Without alcohol?”

By Doug Woon

“Men’s Ministry” seems like a daunting challenge for churches, yet one committed believer can make it happen when it’s kept simple

While the old axiom says “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach,” in our case, the way to a men’s ministry was through a ministry to women. My wife, Carol, invited women from her mother and child programs to our apartment to meet together and talk about their lives and struggles. The women mentioned that they lacked a safe place where they could speak openly without fear of being judged. One of the women decided this weekly time needed a name, and so they called it “Mothers’ Café” since the women were mostly mothers of small children.

As the weeks went by and women shared, Carol and another believer there were able to show answers from the Word of God, and this led to Mothers’ Café becoming a Bible study. As a way for the women’s husbands to also hear about God’s work, we added a “Creation to Christ” study once a month on a weekend.

Baptisms initiate a change

In April 2018, four people were baptized on one Sunday, three of whom were Mothers’ Café women, and the husband of one of those women also was baptized. Four baptisms in one congregation on a single Sunday would be exceptional anywhere in Japan, but this was especially noteworthy as it all originated with women just having coffee together.

The Creation to Christ study, including the women from Mothers’ Café, suddenly turned into a congregation after the baptisms. We began meeting weekly and someone named the weekend event a “gathering,” and that name stuck. Shiohama Gathering,

meeting on Sundays in an apartment building activity room, was born.

Taking a risk

Jumpei, the man who was baptized that Sunday, came to feel that men also needed a place like Mothers’ Café, a place where they could share their life experiences and struggles, and where Christian men could naturally relate how knowing Christ has made a difference in their lives. An intern, who had been with us for eight months and who was a father of small children, had called together other fathers his age just to talk over issues. This was the pattern that Jumpei had seen and wanted to replicate. He asked our team about this idea.

This seemed to us like an Acts 11:20 moment. You’ll recall that in the early days of church expansion in Acts, growth was more organic than organized. Some men from Cyprus and Cyrene evangelized among the Hellenists in Antioch, and a church resulted, with the apostles and the church leadership in Jerusalem only finding out after the fact. This was the church that later sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (see Acts 11:20–26; 13:1–3).

Thus, if Jumpei wanted to try this new ministry, we should support rather than co-opt, define, and lead it. We should serve as coaches and mentors as he stepped out into this new thing. Our whole approach to ministry in Shiohama, southeast of central Tokyo and close to Tokyo Bay, was to keep things flat, simple, and reproducible so that believers could take the pattern and reach out to their friends and neighbours.

Of course, even with prior discussion and encouragement, the ministry

that results may not be done the way we would plan it. That’s perceived as a danger, but it’s better than the actual danger of clergy being central and lay-people becoming passive bystanders.

Jumpei took the initiative in promoting Fathers’ Café to the believers and pre-believers in our congregation. One of the pre-believers remarked that it was difficult to imagine men getting together for a discussion without alcohol being involved. The fear I had was that no one but believers would attend or that the discussion would be superficial or just awkward. Japanese men are not generally known for being gregarious, especially with those outside their close circle.

Fathers’ Café begins

Our initial meetings were at a bakery café, and we actually got a good mix of believers and pre-believers, usually between four and six, with a couple of missionaries sitting in as well. Initially, Jumpei didn’t have a theme or program for the time. Some good discussion came up, and afterward, we missionaries wished that the believers had been quicker to seize on the opportunities to speak of how knowing Christ had affected their actions.

There were some pauses and awkward lulls, and, of course, some sidetracks and people dominating discussions, but people came every month for Fathers’ Café. It was quite different from the Mothers’ Café, yet there seemed to be the same felt need for a chance to speak openly without judgment.

In time, Jumpei started to develop themes for each evening, and he and the other believer who came along became more proactive in speaking about the difference Christ has made

in their lives. What topics have we discussed? Marriage and the concept of love languages; parenting and, in turn, our own relationships with our parents; work and our challenges, frustrations and concerns; and recently our own strengths and weaknesses, a topic that would be strictly off limits just about anywhere else.

Of course, the pandemic has forced our meetings onto Zoom, but for busy men, this makes attending more convenient and feasible. The negative side is that salaried men have no shortage of Zoom meetings these days. In addition, the Zoom format hinders the free flow of ideas and responses. As my teammate has observed, the discussion resembles bowling, with each taking his turn to respond to the topic, rather than volleyball, where there is a natural back and forth discussion. As things open up post-pandemic, we'd like to get together face-to-face on a regular basis, if not every time.

While I may have wished for more structure—especially in the early times—it's quite likely that more structure in the form of doing some kind of presentation to define the topic or start the discussion might have caused the men to take a passive stance with even more awkward pauses than we had.

We have two pre-believing men who have been drawn in to studying the Word and participating on Sundays, and while they have not yet made a commitment, we're seeing progress toward Christ in their lives, and the times in Fathers' Café have played some part in the process.

What looks to an outsider to be a group of men just chatting informally is in fact a chance for a believer to exercise his gifts in reaching out to others. It also provides a natural way for the other believer who attends to "give an answer for the hope that is in you" (author's paraphrase from 1 Peter 3:15). As the Mothers' Café is for women, it's a nonthreatening first contact for men to come into contact with our congregation.

You can do it too

In thinking of an initial ministry to men for congregations that do not have anything, this is a very attainable first



step to take. All it takes is one individual to set the date, the topic, and the tone; and some word-of-mouth promotion among the people connected in any way with the congregation.

The big fear is silence or awkwardness, yet while we have had that and have one man in particular who is very hard to engage in conversation, even he has opened up over time. There's just something about an open, accepting atmosphere that is attractive and will bring even shy men out of themselves.

Believers should attend such a gathering with their spiritual eyes and ears open to opportunities to naturally

share from their own walk with Christ. This kind of natural expression of the practical outworking of one's faith is a low-key but powerful form of testimony. We are thankful for how the believing men in our congregation have been transparent, vulnerable, and ready to set the tone. With that essential element in place, this could be reproduced anywhere for making a difference in the lives of men. **JH**

Doug Woon and his wife Carol have been serving in Japan with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Canada) since 1987.

Connecting with Japanese men

By Dale Viljoen

God is at work loving and giving value to Japanese men

In her epic poem *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.¹

Could it be that every Japanese man is “afire with God”, but we (and they) don't realise this? Could it be that Japanese men are closer to turning to Jesus, the Light of the world, than we could ever imagine or believe? Maybe God's work in Japan is so slow that we don't perceive it.

Many years ago, I think I created distance between the Japanese and myself by only seeing Japanese as people who needed to be saved, as people who had no value outside of believing in Christ. How wrong I was! As Kōsuke Koyama writes, “Human value is illuminated by God-value.”² God created man in his image (Gen. 2), thus giving us all immense value. In his speech to the men of Athens, Paul says, “He is the God who made the world and everything in it . . . He himself gives life and breath to everything . . . His purpose was that the nations should seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:24, 25, 27–28 NLT).

Japanese are sensitive to the people around them. Japanese men know when we accept them as they are, as people of value who are loved and appreciated. Building genuine friendships with men creates bridges of trust that allow us to be open and honest about the reality of our relationship with Jesus.

God at work through me in Japan

Here are some instances of ways that I have interacted with Japanese men:

Onsens (hot springs)

Onsens are a great way to connect with men. The social pecking order pretty much ceases to exist when we are up to our necks in relaxing hot water.

One of my favourite places is Futamata Radium Onsen in Hokkaido. Once, I was in the outdoor bath with five other men. I felt constrained to say nothing for the first 45 minutes and simply listened to the men discussing the meaning of life and what might happen after they died. There was some disagreement. Then, one of the men turned to me and asked, “What do you think happens after we die?” I was able to talk naturally about Jesus and his kingdom moving into completion in the new heaven and earth!

One tip: go into the cold water bath often. Alternating cold water and onsen water will prevent overheating and headaches, allowing you to stay talking for a longer time, and it is helpful for your immune system.



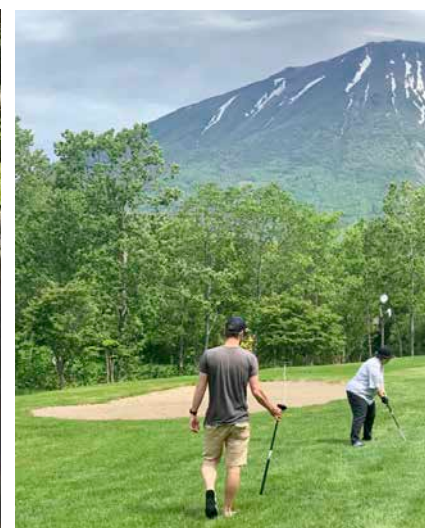
Sports and games

Sports club memberships enabled me to meet the same men repeatedly, calling each other by first names. Working out and sweating together creates a kind of bond!

In two different church plants I worked in, I asked not-yet-believing husbands whose wives were Christians to teach me how to play go and shogi. The act of submission, wanting to learn, lends itself to creating an atmosphere of openness (but don't blow it, as I did once, by learning too quickly!).

Running in Japan is different from South Africa. In my home country, there is a camaraderie among all runners. Most Japanese who participate in races are too focused on their personal best time to talk. In my case, I was always slow and thus able to enjoy talking with the stragglers and slightly injured men.

Park golf, a form of golf very popular in northern Japan, is another way to interact with men naturally, especially when one goes to the same course several times. My third son received his first park golf club from a kind man. Another time, while waiting for



the next tee to open, I got into a conversation with a man who quietly told me he was a Christian but had stopped going to his church. We enjoyed good fellowship and discussed his possible return to church.

Volunteer activities

I volunteered for the FIFA World Cup in 2002 and was the official translator for the Senegal team at the World Basketball Championship held in Sapporo in 2006. Training together and then serving together as volunteers in the actual events seemed to remove the distinction between foreigner and Japanese. Good times—good relationships formed.

Before becoming busy with my current ministry (Café COEN) and before COVID-19, my wife, Karen, and I volunteered one day a month to interact with older adults at their local adult daycare centre. One third were men with sharp minds. We learnt a lot and were surprised at the warmth and acceptance of the group. At first, they did not want us to talk about Jesus, but then they realised that Jesus was an integral part of who we were.

English classes

Teaching English is common among foreign workers. Keep on! One group of middle school English teachers I taught in Hakodate 35 years ago asked me to read the Bible with them and discuss it. We went through most of Genesis and Romans. One man (now retired) still keeps in contact with me. I got to spend some time with him in Hakodate on a prayer trip two years ago. Once, this man seemed so close to believing in the Creator God; now, he says he is content with traditional Buddhism. I keep on praying for him.



Officiating at weddings

Weddings create so many connections, so many opportunities to encourage men (the groom, the bride's father, some of the congregation). Through New Year cards and Christmas presents, I am still in contact with about 1,000 couples whose weddings I have officiated. During pre-marital counseling, many couples, including the guys, open up and speak from their hearts.

I continue to meet some of these people at the city office and hospitals, even having people come up to me in the street and ask, "Do you remember you married us in . . . ?"

Café COEN and COEN English

All my experience in Japan was God preparing me for my current ministry running COEN. We can connect with our regulars at a deep level, seeing them all as part of our "congregation" and entering into their joys and sorrows over coffee and cake. Although only one quarter of our regulars are men, they integrate well into the bigger group. One gruff retired professor is changing and comes to the café at least twice a week to read the Bible. We strive to be Jesus to each person, treating each person with value and dignity. Jesus gives us unique opportunities to talk about God's love.

My Monday evening elementary teachers' English conversation class (two men and a woman) is extraordinary. I am amazed at the compassion and care these teachers show for their students and each other. We are honest with each other. Almost every class sees one of us being encouraged

and affirmed by the others. And these are not yet Jesus followers!

Conclusion

To reveal God's love to Japanese men, we need to become as human as Jesus to value men who are not yet in the Kingdom. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

Ecce homo—behold God become human, the unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world. God loves human

beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, namely, real human beings, the real world, this is for God the ground of unfathomable love . . .

Only because God became human is it possible to know and not despise real human beings. Real human beings may live before God, and we may let these real people live beside us and before God without either despising or idolising them. This is not because of the real human being's inherent value, but because God has loved and taken on the real human being. The reason for God's love for human beings does not reside in them, but only in God. Our living as real human beings, and loving the real people next to us is, again, grounded only in God's becoming human, in the unfathomable love of God for us human beings.³

May we be those who see what God is doing among men in Japan and, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes in her poem, "take off our shoes" to worship in anticipated amazement! **JH**

1. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh," Book 7 (1856), text published at A Celebration of Women Writers, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barrett/aurora/aurora.html#7> (accessed Aug. 2, 2021).

2. Kosuke Koyama, *50 Meditations*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 62.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 31, 34.

Photos submitted by the author

Dale Viljoen is his 43rd year in Japan. He's the owner of Café COEN/COEN English in Sapporo. He was sent out to Japan by OMF South Africa and now serves the COEN Bible Community with his second wife, Karen.

The battle for

How do we engage Japanese men in community?

A quiet revival is stirring in the hearts of men all over the world. From best-selling books like John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart* to Exodus 90 (a Catholic spiritual exercise for men to live in freedom)—ministries and resources for men seem to be popping up everywhere. Men are different to women and require different environments and approaches. We see keys in the way Jesus walked with his disciples.

The success of Japanese mission “bands” from the early days of Protestant missions hints that Japanese men may see following Christ as being more Japanese than we think. Historically, many early Japanese Christians were from the warrior class and saw a connection between the Way of the Warrior (Bushidō) and following Christ. Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930) went so far as to say the following:

*Bushido is the finest product of Japan. But Bushido by itself cannot save Japan. Christianity grafted upon Bushido will be the finest product of the world. It will save, not only Japan, but the whole world.*¹

If Uchimura was right, we have an amazing opportunity to redeem ancient Japanese traditions and use them for the sake of the gospel.

Where are the men?

“How can I get men to come to church?” could be replaced with “How can I connect to men and help them connect to God?” This out-of-the-box

thinking is common in men's ministries—outdoor activities, camping, sports, and physical challenges. Or mission trips, outreaches, and service in the community. These practical activities can be the environment in which conversations, breakthroughs, and life-changing decisions are made.

Much follow-up and spiritual training can happen online so that relationship building can be maximised during face-to-face connections. Continue to ask how you can help men connect to God and let God guide them.

☞ How could you broaden your activities or environments to be able to reach more men or go deeper with the men you already connect to?

Real friendships

One *Spa!* magazine survey found that 35% of Japanese men in their 30s, regardless of marital status, said they had no friends.² One of the essential ingredients of a good friendship is vulnerability, but because men are primarily motivated by respect, the fear of being vulnerable and losing that respect is formidable.

This is a huge opportunity for Christian men to be friends to Japanese men and also model true friendship. One simple but proven key is older men modelling vulnerability by sharing openly about past or present struggles, failures, and sins, and how God has brought victory and healing. This shows that the discipleship relationship is a safe place to be real.

☞ How can I model true vulnerability for the younger men in my community?

Safe but intense environments

Sexual sin is possibly the most devastating for men and the lives of those around them. As a man comes to Christ there must be an aggressive assault on the strongholds of pornography and sexual sin, along with clear guidance on how to walk the path of freedom. (If you are currently struggling with sexual sin, don't wait, get help now! Ask God who you should talk to.)

Again, modelling vulnerability and openness sets the stage where younger believers can open up in one-on-one or small group situations. Use creative questions to intensify the environment—don't back down. Be prepared for some men to give up and stop connecting after showing that you're serious about these issues.

☞ Are you confident to mentor a young Christian brother through repentance of serious sexual sin, to restoration and wholeness?

Flat relationships

Japanese men are immersed in a hierarchical society from birth. Many are jaded by the need to navigate these complex social structures. Reliance on structures and traditions might create committed attendees, but will it transform lives that end up transforming society?

Scenes from Warrior Training Weekends



men's hearts

By Jef Linscott

Discipleship, however, is primarily a brotherhood. We call men to connect with one another deeply in the love of Christ and with mutual honour. We serve and stir one another along the journey, instead of controlling one another. We forgo titles and leadership structures so we don't hinder the intimacy that is needed for transformative discipleship.

- ☞ Do the men in my circle hesitate to open up with me or other leaders?
- ☞ How could I begin to shift the environment towards friendship and brotherhood?

Nurturing individual strength

Rather than asking, "How can I build a strong meeting/church?" you might ask "How can I nurture individual disciples to have a strong, intimate, obedient relationship with God?"

A temptation is to define success in numbers of attendees at meetings. Standing strong till the end, however, is true success. Perhaps we can take a lesson from Jesus who found it best to disciple and mentor only 12 men in three years.

- ☞ Are there men in my community who might benefit from more intensive one-on-one discipleship and mentoring? How might I do that?

Passionate worshippers

David was both a fearsome warrior and a passionate poet. He penned some of the most intimate expressions, and

we still use them in worship. Passion for God and passion for physical activities can go hand-in-hand.

Men need to nurture passion for God's presence, but it might not be in the usual way. It might be in the bush or on a mountain. It might be beside the ocean in a storm or while in the workshop restoring furniture. If we limit passionate worship to a worship service or a particular musical style, we will be limiting many men from finding their true heart as worshipping warriors.

- ☞ How are you modelling a passionate worship lifestyle to the men in your community?
- ☞ What are their passions? Take some time to find out.

Practical service and work

Radical obedience should be the standard for every follower of Christ. Men need an atmosphere where they are pushed to be their best. Think sports teams: coaches, trainers, and players all working together towards one goal.

It's difficult for a man to feel motivated when a clear goal is not in sight. Jesus took huge risks with the disciples and sent them out to represent him, but this became their training school and practicum all in one.

- ☞ How could we create opportunities for men to serve and engage in discipleship and mentoring while ministering outside the four walls of a church?

- ☞ How can they "own" their personal vision for ministry to others?

The 33 Day Men's Challenge

This is a discipleship and mentoring tool to help men connect to God and one another, and pursue some of these values mentioned above. Towards the end of this challenge, we recommend holding a Warrior Training Weekend with a small group of men. Contact me for more information about these ministry tools or check out the website: <http://33minute.com>

Engage!

The battle for the hearts of men is fierce, and it's on our doorstep. It's not a moment too soon—take time right now to ask God how you can more effectively engage with men in your life and ministry in Japan. **JH**

1. Uchimura Kanzo 内村鑑三, 「武士道と基督教」 [Bushido and Christianity] 『聖書之研究』186号, 『内村鑑三全集 22』 (1916), 161.
2. "Growing number of men have no close friends", *Japan Today*, <https://japantoday.com/category/features/kuchikomi/growing-number-of-men-have-no-close-friends> (March 9, 2010).

Photos submitted by author

Jef Linscott came from NZ with YWAM in 1992. He and his wife, Aya, are now independent missionaries working in online media, discipleship, publishing, and encouragement to prepare the church in Japan for harvest: <http://www.onfire.jp> Questions or comments to author: jeflinscott@gmail.com



Do you see him?

By Bethany Panian

The gift of the homeless ministry at Praise Community Church

In Japan, he may be hiding inside a makeshift blue sheet tent in the woods. Or he might be blending in. Maybe you've seen him several times at the Ichibancho shopping arcade in Sendai, wearing the same outfit or carrying his valuable possessions with him at all times. Maybe you're like me; you noticed him, remembered Jesus's words to care for the poor, and wanted to do . . . something but didn't. Then you said a prayer as you passed, asking God to help you respond better next time.

At Praise Community Church (PCC) in Sendai, thanks to the tenacity of one brother, the church family is learning together how to seek and save the lost.

Following a call

Travis Lear came to Sendai in 2009 specifically to find and care for the homeless. Through his own experience of God redeeming his life from addiction and homelessness, Travis has been passionate about serving those who live on the streets. He explained, "I was broken and hopeless, and I sought the Lord. He told me to love the broken and hopeless." Travis built his life around this mission.

That same year, Travis came to PCC and connected with Pastor Taka-hiro Ami and his wife, Frances. "At the time, it was mostly Travis doing outreach," Frances said. "Taka would sometimes go to visit the homeless with Travis in Aoyama Park. At the very beginning, only one or two people came to church regularly, and we only gave out food and let them be part of the community."

One of the men Travis befriended was Mr. Suzuki. Suzuki was not originally from Sendai but years ago had visited Pastor Taka's father's church in Kuroiso, Tochigi. When Suzuki first came to PCC and recognized

Pastor Taka's uncommon surname (阿見 Ami), he shared that he'd met the pastor's father. Suzuki's heart was open, and he became the first homeless brother to accept Jesus. Suzuki made PCC his home until the Lord called him to his eternal home in 2015.

The homeless community has become a characteristic trait of PCC. Makiko Takahashi, a visitor to PCC wanting to learn more about Jesus and the church, recently recalled meeting Suzuki years ago: "I remember being so touched. He told me about being homeless and sick. He had stomach cancer, but he was so content, so at peace, and at home in the church."

Travis and Suzuki built something into PCC that is vital for serving the homeless: a trust relationship. Pastor Taka didn't have the same experiences as Travis, so had to gain their respect and trust through repeated acts of faithfulness over many years. By God's grace, PCC earned a reputation of trustworthiness in this community.

Building a new community

God has used different seasons in the church to grow this ministry. When it first began, PCC met in a bar. Frances said, "It was dirty, and we had to cover up the alcohol bottles. But it was an easier barrier for them [the homeless] to overcome coming to church." This nontraditional church environment allowed the homeless to let their guards down.

Then in 2017, PCC moved out of the bar on the third floor of the building and rented the fifth floor. The church began to share fellowship meals every Sunday after the service. "The church space was open for anyone, with eating and fellowship," said Pastor Taka. "Through the fellowship, the homeless people started to feel like they belong here."

As the homeless attendees started to grow in number and become more regular, God put it on the hearts of Pastor Taka and Frances to do more. In 2019, they started a monthly Bible study and gave the homeless a new name and identity at PCC: Aozorakai (Blue Sky Group). This was a key shift. They were no longer identified by their homelessness, but instead were given a community and a place to be known.

Hiroshi and Michiyo Yokoyama joined PCC in 2018 and began serving with their gifting in the ukulele. Michiyo remembered how God called her and her husband into the ministry, saying, "I wanted to share the power of worship. I took my ukulele to Pastor Ami and asked if this was something I could offer. People who don't know Jesus yet, through worship, slowly feel something stirring in their hearts."

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced Japan's churches to go online, a curious thing happened. Instead of losing connection with these largely "offline" men, God shifted the once-a-month ministry into a weekly Bible study outside in one of the most well-known places in Sendai: the Green Belt of Jozenji-dori. "I really like the Green Belt," said Hiroshi Yokoyama. "You're in the middle of the city, and it feels like you're in a forest."

His wife further explained the spiritual significance of using the Green Belt, saying, "We are in a place where we are seen by everyone, singing worship, and studying the Bible. Jozenji-dori is a famous place for warlord Date Masamune; many Christians were persecuted during his time." It is believed that Jozenji-dori is named after a temple built by Masamune during his reign from 1600-1636.¹ And while Masamune seems to have originally opposed Christian persecution, he eventually gave into pressures from the shogun.²



Worship at the Green Belt

Michiyo continued, “But today there are also three big Christian universities in Sendai, and many graduates who are familiar with hymns might overhear our worship and wonder what’s going on.”

Seeing growth and change

Aozorakai has become a place for everyone to grow, both servants and participants. Iris Wong, a missionary from Hong Kong, has been serving at PCC for a little over a year. She said the ministry “makes me reflect about the pride I am holding: I am well educated, I am a ‘good Christian.’ When I got to know the Blue Sky members, I realized there’s no difference. We are all chasing the love of Jesus. I thank Jesus for the chance to know them.”

Another member at PCC, Moeka Adachi, started serving by making meals for the Aozorakai members last year. She said, “There might be people who think, ‘I have to do something really big for the Lord!’ But in my experience, doing something small like making bento meals, can be used by God to give many people the power to live. We have Jesus’ words—love your

neighbor—and this is a chance for us to put God’s words into practice.”

God has been using these “loaves and fish” offerings. Over the years, six men have been baptized, three of them in the last year alone. Many more have open hearts, and God is giving them renewed hopes and dreams of getting off the streets and restoring their relationships.

One of the men, Enomoto, said, “My heart was saved through PCC. I was able to discover and recognize my true self. It’s a place I can learn the facts about myself and grow.” Enomoto recently joined in baptizing Ojima, our most recent brother. Ojima had been coming for only a few months when he gave his heart to Christ.

Ojima said, “I couldn’t believe it. In such a short time, through Pastor Ami and everyone, to be with people and to be connected like that. I had a lot of cares and worries that I couldn’t tell people, but when I came to PCC . . . I began to change. And I began to wonder, is this the real God?”

“What I felt through this journey,” said Pastor Taka, “is that God’s mercy has always been for these people, for me, for all of us, and mercy changes people. I can see through their smiles, through their talk, through their relationships, caring for one another. They found their true selves in God’s mercy and how he is transforming them.”

About the challenges of reaching men in Japan, Hiroshi shared, “Japanese men don’t have a place for their true self to be known. They



Enomoto and Ojima

don’t have many opportunities to open their hearts.”

Frances added that the stereotypical image of the church in Japan is that it’s “only for losers. That is difficult for men who are in the world of winning and losing. Recognizing your own weakness is difficult. That is why it’s hard for men to come to church, but they are looking for relationships. And we have that.”

The openness and honesty of the Aozorakai men have shaped and encouraged our church community. This reminds me that we serve a God who uses the weak to shame the strong. It humbles us. My brother Travis likes to share how God uses all things, saying, “I can’t believe he uses a jerk like me to share his love.” **JH**

1. “Jozenji Street,” *Live Japan Perfect Guide*, https://livejapan.com/en/in-tohoku/in-pref-miyagi/in-sendai_matsushima/spot-lj0012223/ (Accessed August 14, 2021).
2. Hubert Cieslik, S.J., “The Great Martyrdom in Edo 1623: Its causes, Course, Consequences,” *Sophia University Media Center*, http://pweb.cc.sophia.ac.jp/britto/xavier/cieslik/cie_greatmartyrdom.pdf (2010).

Photos submitted by author



Bethany, Moeka, and Iris making bentos

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.

Asylum seeker ministry in Japan

By David Badger

Jesus told us to visit those in prison. How can we do that in Japan?

I recently received a letter from a Nigerian detainee in a detention center. It began: “Belated Happy Easter! Greetings in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.” And it concluded: “Sir, thank you for your heartfelt kindness and concerns. God bless you.”

Biblical mandate

In Matthew 25:35-36, Jesus mentions feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, and visiting those in prison. In Isaiah 42:7, the Lord says about his servant, “You will open the eyes of the blind. You will free the captives from prison, releasing those who sit in dark dungeons” (NLT). And in Hebrews 13:3, “Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies” (NLT).

These are strong words. We should be ministering to those who are in prisons and detention centers. We should be serving the Lord by ministering to those who find themselves in need of companionship and hope and, above all else, love. And minister to them in a way that they will know that their lives matter, that they are loved without condition, and that they are created in God’s image. Those who are imprisoned are so important to Jesus that he even tells us that caring for them can lead one to eternal life.

Prison ministries

There are prison ministries throughout the world, many having their beginning in Prison Fellowship founded by Chuck Colson. This ministry aims to bring the gospel and the Lord to prisons and prisoners in countries throughout the world. However, Prison Fellowship is not ministering

in Japan. At a chance meeting with Colson in McLean, Virginia, where both he and I lived, I asked him why they don’t work in Japan, and he said that Japanese prisons only allow one visit by one visitor each month. And, even if this has changed since my meeting with Colson, the conditions in Japanese prisons are severe—isolation at almost all times is central to the sentence imposed.

Refugees in detention in Japan

A number of churches in the Tokyo area have taken the initiative to bring the Lord to those who are imprisoned, not to those in jails, but to those in detention centers awaiting a decision on their request for asylum.

Almost without exception, the detainees did not anticipate their misfortune in Japan as they sought a different life. They sought relief from governments where many were killed including their family members and friends. They saw Japan as a safe country and a place where better opportunities for gainful employment existed. Little did they know that, on arrival, they would be sent immediately to a detention center where they would be imprisoned in conditions that are arguably in violation of their human rights. And they might stay there for months, if not years.

As of the end of June 2019, there were 1,253 detainees, 54% of whom had been in the centers for six months or more, and 20% for two years or more.¹ In 2020, only 47, or 1.2% of applicants, were granted refugee status in Japan.²

The conditions in these centers are only slightly better than the typical Japanese prison. A number of people have died by suicide or harmed them-

selves. Detainees are placed in small rooms with other inmates, and they are allowed out to exercise for only short periods each day. They can have visitors for only thirty minutes at a time in rooms which have a plexiglass barrier between the detainee and the visitor. Medical help seems almost nonexistent, and they can only make phone calls out, with no one allowed to call them. There is no way in which detainees can earn money. All packages sent in are carefully screened. No photographs are allowed.

Almost without exception, detainees feel abused and forgotten. They are frustrated, bored, lonely, and often without hope. Many have no visitors and no contact with the outside world. They are not in prison, in the criminal sense, but prisoners nevertheless.

Stages for refugees in Japan

There are several stages that detainees can go through after arrival in Japan. The most fortunate ones are given Refugee Status, receive a residence card, and enjoy all rights and privileges of residents in Japan which include the right to work, health care etc.. Those who do not receive Refugee Status are sent to a detention center. No one is allowed to leave the center unless it is to return to one’s home country, to be deported, or they are granted a provisional status.

Provisional release or *karihōmen* (仮放免) is the main provisional status granted; while not as severe as a detention center, it is essentially as restrictive and confining. No work permits are granted and there is no health insurance. The detainees cannot own housing and are not allowed to leave the prefecture in which they live without permission. Their status must be renewed every two months, and if

not renewed, they are sent back to a detention center.

Moving through the various stages is time consuming and fraught with legal pitfalls and confusing rules. Reviews and decisions are given arbitrarily without explanation and not rendered in a timely manner. Of course all of this happens in Japanese, which most of the asylum seekers don't understand well. Most of those in detention seek asylum. Applications typically take two months to evaluate, during which deportation is illegal. There is no restriction on the number of times applications can be filed, so avoiding forced deportation can be done by submitting successive applications. This leads to some being imprisoned for many years with consequent effects on their mental and physical health.

Our response

How can we embrace the teachings of Jesus about caring for captives? Can we minister to those in detention centers? It does not require vast resources. Here are ten suggestions:

- Get a list of detainees at a detention center through a church which is active in this ministry (e.g. Tokyo Baptist). You can then visit the center, individually or in pairs, and arrange for thirty-minute sessions with detainees on any day of the week.
- Enter into penpal relationships with detainees.
- Send weekly or biweekly shipments of newspapers, books, and Bibles, which can be shared with all at the center.
- Distribute prayer cards with verses from Scripture to detainees as points of reference, guidance, and sources of hope.
- Obtain used appliances, and things like TVs, DVD players, and rice cookers to send to people with *karihōmen*.
- Lobby those in positions of decision-making in Japan, to effect change in the laws and procedures relative to asylum and detention.
- Highlight incidences of abuse and maltreatment to members of the broadcast industry and newspapers, encouraging them to publish articles.
- Contact other countries' governments and authorities to encourage them to provide asylum for detainees who give up in trying to get asylum in Japan, and who seek a new life in another, more asylum-friendly, country.
- Encourage relevant international agencies, like UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—the UN refugee agency) and international NGOs and NPOs, to influence change in Japanese laws and procedures.
- Pray for our brothers (and sisters) who are detained against their will. We can all pray for their health and

well-being, for them to know God's love, for them to know and follow Jesus, and pray for their release from detention in order to lead more purposeful faith-based lives.

We are led to believe that changes are “in the wind” in Japan in regard to all aspects of the detention of asylum seekers, and hopefully they will be—sooner rather than later.

In the meantime, following the commands of Jesus to visit those in prison will, at the very least, result in hope and love being brought to all who are detained, and joy to those who are following his words. Jesus said: “I was in prison and you came to me” (Matt. 25:36 ESV).

Please consider how you can be involved. **JH**

For further information on reaching out to asylum seekers in Japan, please contact either Tokyo Baptist (email: info@tokyobaptist.org, web: <https://tokyobaptist.org>) or the author (dhbadger37@gmail.com).

1. Amnesty International Japan, https://www.amnesty.or.jp/human-rights/topic/pdf/topic_refugee_jp_graph01.pdf (accessed August 3, 2021).
2. “Japan Accepts 47 Refugees in 2020 as Applicants Fall by 60% Due to Pandemic,” Nippon.com, <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00991> (April 30, 2021).

David Badger is a retired US business executive. He and his wife are members of St. Alban's Anglican-Episcopal Church in Tokyo. David's an active member of the church's ministry to detainees, the Deeper Service Group.

By Joel Loewen

Go to them! Take them to God!

God gave opportunities to reach men through onsen, exercise, and hobbies.

I am privileged to spend 15–20 hours per week with men in Japan (both Japanese and expatriate). For the most part, these relationships have been developed through simply placing myself where they are and asking God to work. The following stories illustrate how God led me to these particular men.

Ministry at the *sentō*

We lived in the city of Tachikawa for seven years. During that time, I frequented the local *sentō* (public bath). As I went pretty much the same time, I met the same guys and developed a connection with one in particular. As our friendship grew, we would sometimes go to a restaurant afterwards. He was curious to know why I came to Japan. That was an opportunity to share my story. I invited him to our church, and he came a couple of times.

I ran across another guy at the same *sentō*, who turned out to be my neighbor. We both liked to run, and so we would go down to the Tama River, run, and then hit the *sentō*. It was a lot of fun. Through that, I shared

with him about our church, and he and his wife attended together one time. That same afternoon, he and I went to the *sentō* (of course!). I asked him what he thought of the church worship service. He replied, “The music was good, but I didn’t understand the message.” That was a good chance for further conversation about the Bible story.

We moved to Watari, Miyagi, in 2014. Soon after we moved, the local *onsen* (hot springs) reopened. It’s near the ocean and was inundated by the tsunami of 2011. An additional challenge of spending time with men there was understanding the Tohoku dialect. So, when one man told me that he had lost his son in the tsunami, I really had to focus to understand the details. I was able to invite him to our church.

Building relationships through sports

I met another man at that *onsen* in Watari who introduced me to a tennis club. It was daunting at first to go to the tennis courts and make myself

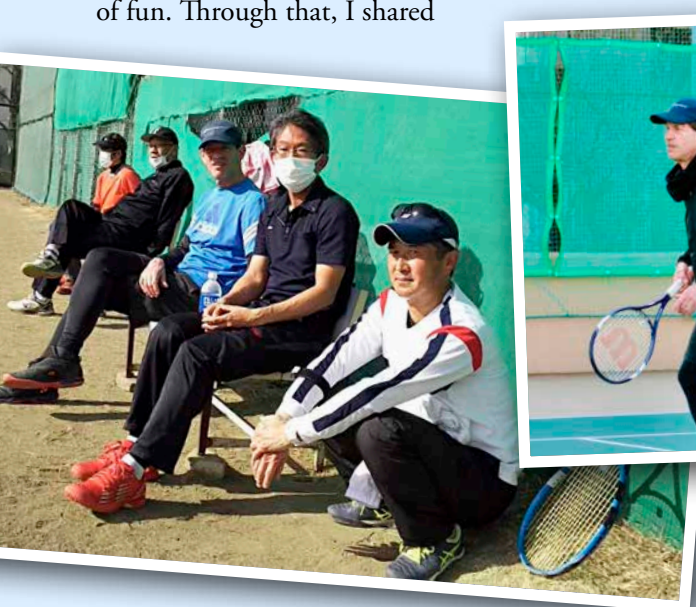


With gospel choir friend

known to the guys there. But I began to play tennis with them and several others twice a week. I would often have contact with up to 15 guys throughout the week. Their hearts were hard to the gospel, but they were able to experience it through my life. A married couple who were a part of those groups came to a Christmas worship service at our church and heard the gospel.

I was introduced to the local dentist through a Christian couple who lived in the Watari area. He enjoyed running, and so we decided to run together twice a week. It was a great time. He taught me various routes, which inevitably took us to the ocean around the time of the sunrise. It was a beautiful way to worship God, although he wasn’t worshipping the creator God that I was. We had many good talks about the Bible, and he and his wife also attended our Christmas worship service.

Since moving back to Tokyo in 2019, I have become a part of two tennis circles. One came about as I was hitting the ball against a wall at the park and saw a man playing on a court by himself. I prayed and worked up the courage to ask him if I could join him. After we played for a while, he asked me to join his group the next week. I’ve been playing tennis with these four to seven guys every week since then. We usually go eat after we play. Some



of them have watched our church worship online.

The other tennis circle I'm in is located closer to where I live in Higashi Kurume. Through playing in a tennis social network called "Tennis Off," a man introduced me to the Higashi Kurume circle. Every weekend I get to play with 40–50 people from this area. I have had many conversations about the church and Christianity. There is even a Japanese man there who is a Christian. I have introduced them to our church worship online.

Also, since moving back to Higashi Kurume, I have found many public baths nearby. It has taken a while, but gradually I have been able to have conversations with some of the men. Recently I went with a couple of them to a restaurant afterwards. We were able to talk about our families.



Dinner with the dentist and his wife

Meeting men through gospel music

On a different "note" (pun intended), I have realized a dream to be part of a gospel choir. The first time I went, I met a young man there and we quickly developed a friendship. Through singing and sharing time together, we have been able to talk about the origins of gospel music and also my motivation for praising God. He joined my pastor, another staff member, and me for a gospel-song virtual recording. Afterwards, we got to know each other better at a local restaurant, and my pastor shared the gospel with him.

It is true that many churches have very few men in them. However, in the church that my wife and I are involved in now, there are more younger men than average. Being a church in downtown Tokyo contributes to this, plus the church is specifically targeting the 20–40 age group in their style of worship and in the types of ministries offered. In my small group, there have been up to six men, plus a few women.

In this society, it is natural for men to compete with each other and compare themselves with each other rather than to cooperate and collaborate. I am afraid that if we are not careful, we missionaries and Japanese men believers can become the same

way. We must humble ourselves and repent of our competitive and comparative nature, and then help each other believe the gospel together. When men experience unity in the body of Christ, this becomes a key to reaching other men with the gospel. Psalm 133:1 says: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (ESV).

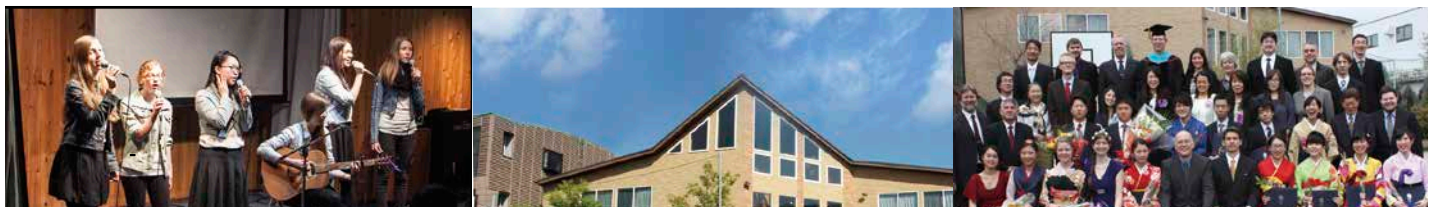
Every one of these opportunities was given to me by God. My love for these people is given to me by God. Any impact I have on them is from God. Oh, and you may have noticed that I'm having fun doing it. This is significant because, as many of you know, in Japan, it takes a long time to develop a friendship and to earn the right to share Jesus. Therefore, it helps to enjoy and have passion about the activity where you engage people. Actually, when other guys notice that I'm having fun together with them, they let their guard down. Any suspicion about why I'm there fades away. They begin to be attracted to Jesus in me. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Joel Loewen has been playing tennis, running, and enjoying ofuros in Japan for 35 years as a missionary of SEND International. He and Elaine live in Higashi Kurume, and are a part of Grace City Church Tokyo.

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Conversation with a cult member

God used an attack on our faith to encourage us

When my wife and I went to a park to view the cherry blossoms, we had our first encounter with a Japanese cult member.

At first, she seemed like a friendly lady trying to make conversation, but the mood changed very quickly when she tried to convince us to recite a special Buddhist prayer. We politely declined and explained that we are Christian and pray to the God of the Bible. The conversation took a turn for the worse when she started to attack our faith and tell us that Jesus has no power to save anyone, and that although there are many Christians, there is no proof for the authenticity of our faith.



We very quickly realized that we were in a spiritual battle and, with our limited Japanese, we disagreed with her views and methods. We shared how Christ has changed us and others through the power of the gospel. From there, the conversation moved to different topics like heaven, reincarnation, and suffering. After 30 minutes we were simply going around in circles with someone who was not open to listening. So, when things got too heated, we gave a clear declaration of the gospel, thanked her for her time, and walked away.

What evidence do we have?

In the car, we both felt flustered. We prayed for the lady and asked for peace, but one phrase she kept repeating still raced through my mind, “根拠がない” (こんきよがない、no evidence). This bothered me for a

while. What evidence is there for my faith? How can I share this effectively with Japanese people?

I discussed this with my Japanese pastor. We decided that I should preach a sermon called “信仰の根拠” (しんこうのこんきよ、evidence for faith), at our church’s monthly welcome service, which is aimed at non-Christians who don’t know anything about the Bible.

I spoke from 1 Corinthians 15 and focused on Biblical evidence, eyewitnesses to the resurrection, and the testimony of a changed life. God was pleased to use this sermon to challenge and encourage people, including non-Christians. Many with doubts said the sermon helped them.

After a few weeks, I preached that same sermon at a different church. Again, the response was extremely positive and one Japanese lady told me that she sent a copy of the sermon to her non-Christian parents. God was praised and his gospel advanced through a sermon that was birthed by a cult member’s words of contempt!

God works in mysterious ways

After the positive responses to God’s Word, I was reminded how God works in mysterious and beautiful ways. I would never have prepared that sermon if it wasn’t for the lady belittling our faith. While God is able to change the heart of that cult member, it is still amazing to see how he used that encounter. Whether the response is positive or not, we are called to be witnesses in every situation. There is a happy assurance that in all things God works for our good and his glory. Nothing he does is meaningless, and this gives us the confidence to continue in faith, doing the good works he has prepared for us.

As a new missionary in Japan, I often feel powerless and wonder if I am making any difference. If only I had better Japanese! If only I were not so lazy! If only I were bolder! But God shows up at the right time to encourage us with fruit from the work that he helps us to do. From uncomfortable conversations in the park to nervous proclamation from the pulpit, God is our help and strength. Maybe you are also facing difficult or uncomfortable situations in your ministry. Have confidence that God is able to turn your difficulty into something beautiful. He is the God of mysterious yet beautiful providence. 卍

AJ Meiring is married to Aven. He served as a youth pastor in South Africa before moving to Japan in 2018 to work with OMF. They are currently training for ministry by serving in a church in Saitama.

New technologies for communication and language learning

Technological advances are providing useful tools for getting over the language barrier

Recent advances in information technology are spawning new tools for communication and language learning. Here are three that may be helpful.

Online translation (DeepL)

DeepL.com is a free online translation service similar to Google Translate (paid plans are also available). You write or copy and paste text into a box and it is translated nearly simultaneously into the target language. It currently has 26 languages, and Japanese has been available since June 2020.

What sets DeepL apart is the quality of translation it provides. It claims to be the world's best machine translation service, using "neural networks that are able to capture even the slightest nuances and reproduce them."¹ That claim has been borne out by people I've spoken to. A Japanese colleague was highly impressed by the quality of



DeepL's translation and joked about how glad she was that she had decided to change careers and not continue as a

professional translator! Rochelle Kopp, managing principal of Japan Intercultural Consulting, considered that the quality of DeepL's translations is about 70% that of good human translations.

You can use DeepL to read Japanese material. Just drop the text into DeepL and it generates a translation alongside the Japanese text. On the free plan, you can also upload up to three Word or PowerPoint files per month. If you want to practice reading, you can read the Japanese text and check your understanding by reading the translation. Clicking on an English sentence highlights the equivalent Japanese sentence, while clicking on an English word brings up alternative translations for it that you can select from.

Another use of DeepL is for writing Japanese. You can write text in your mother tongue and translate it into Japanese. To check that the translation accurately conveys the meaning of the original text, back-translate it by copying and pasting it into the left box. Even though Kopp is fluent in Japanese, she saves time by using DeepL in this way to write emails, after which she edits the Japanese. If I (Simon) am not in a rush or feeling lazy, I will write something in Japanese, translate it into English, then translate the English back into Japanese. That helps me identify errors and teaches me better ways to express my thoughts in Japanese.

This raises all kinds of exciting possibilities. The ability to edit a reasonable machine-generated translation promises to greatly speed up the translation process. If you want a bilingual website for your ministry, you could translate it

into Japanese using DeepL and then ask a Japanese person to edit the Japanese. It could also fast-track the translation of English Christian books into Japanese and vice versa.

Automatic transcription services

Transcription is another area that has advanced a lot recently thanks to artificial intelligence (AI). Manually typing out the text is a laborious, time-consuming task, but automatic transcriptions are now reaching a point where they just need some minor editing to make them usable. They are many online transcription services available.



Most charge about US\$10–20 for a one-hour job. One tool that I have found to be good for Japanese is Sonix (sonix.ai). It allows you to edit the transcribed text in your browser while replaying the audio or video file. The quality of transcription depends a lot on the sound quality of your file and on how clear the speaker is. This type of tool can help you add subtitles to videos and generate the text of recorded sermons (which you could then translate into another language using DeepL).

Rikaikun browser extension

The free browser extension Rikaikun runs on Chrome and Edge, and there are similar extensions for Safari and Firefox. When one of these extensions is installed and activated, you can hover over any Japanese word in your browser and a pop-up box will appear with its reading and meaning. This is a great way to read Japanese online. In any of the browsers' extension/add-on store, search for "rikai".



Rikaikun
(Chrome/
Edge)



10ten
(Firefox)



Safarikai
(Safari)

Looking ahead

AI is really taking off and being applied to many areas of life. I anticipate it won't be long before AI is used extensively in language learning. It could do things like select reading material based on your interests and reading level, automatically correct things you've written, and provide a conversation partner who gives feedback. Exciting days ahead! **JH**

1. DeepL, <https://www.deepl.com/pro?cta=header-pro> (accessed July 30, 2021).



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

Praying for others

"Prayers offered in the Name of Christ are scrutinized and sanctified by His nature, His purpose, and His will. Prayer is endorsed by the Name when it is in harmony with the character, mind, desire, and purpose of the Name."¹

Samuel Chadwick

James 5:16 tells us: "The prayer of a righteous person [a Christian] has great power" (ESV). So how are we to pray? I think we can learn a lot from Paul since he spent much time in prayer. He told the Colossians he was always praying for them (Col. 1:3). And in verses 9 to 14, we get a glimpse into his prayer life.

Paul's basic request

Jesus came to do God's will (Heb. 10:7), and it's what we are here to do, too. So, the best thing we can pray for someone is to pray like Paul does for the Colossians—that they "would be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will" (v.9). Paul wasn't praying for some new knowledge (as the Gnostics in Colossae preached), but for a fuller development, a deeper comprehension and appreciation of what God's will is in a given situation, and not just regarding the "biggies" like college, marriage, and a job. This is a prayer for a practical awareness of what God desires us to do in every situation.

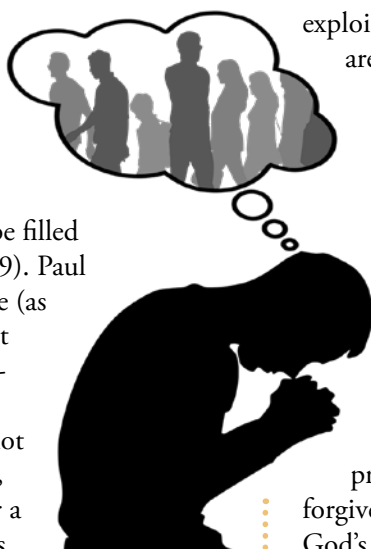
Prayer is not trying to get God to do what we want, but learning what His will is and accepting it. We find God's will in His Word. So, we need to pray that people would get into God's Word and that God would reveal His will to them.

But it's not enough to know God's will. We must have "all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (v. 9).² We need wisdom—"insight into the true nature of things,"³ and we need understanding—"quickness of apprehension, the penetrating consideration that precedes action."⁴ We need to know what to do and how to accomplish it, that is, how to apply God's Word to our specific situation.

The purpose of this knowledge

The purpose for knowing God's will is "so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects" (v.10). Real knowledge transforms character so that we live in a way that pleases God. I can't walk in a God-pleasing manner unless I know how and in which direction I'm going.

God answers our prayers for others, enabling them to bear fruit—to be productive. As we do God's will, we learn more about Him and His will for our lives. It's a constant process of going deeper and deeper into our relationship with God.



The power we've been given

Paul prays that they would be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might" (v. 11). This power we have been given is to the limit of God's power, which is limitless. It's continuous, and it's for us!

Why do we need this power? Not to do fantastic exploits, but to know God's will and persevere in it. We are to pray that others would have perseverance and patience in dealing with the people and situations they face and that they would have the strength to do God's will.

Our relationship with God as our Father (v. 12) enables our prayers to be heard and answered. God qualifies us to have a father-child relationship where He loves us and answers our prayers.

This qualification comes at salvation (v. 13) when we were transferred from darkness to light—Jesus' kingdom. This relationship comes because of our redemption—the payment of the price paid by His Son to buy us (v. 14). Through the forgiveness of our sins, we have the privilege of knowing God's will and the strength to fulfil it.

How should we pray for others?

Christians often pray: "Lord, bless so-and-so." But Ephesians 1:3 says, "God . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." That is, we are already blessed. And sometimes we pray, "Lord, be with so-and-so." But God has said, "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20) and "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5 NKJV).

Rather let's follow Paul's example, and pray that others be filled with the knowledge of God's will. And when we ask others to pray for us, it should be the same—that we may know God's will and have His strength to do it. **JH**

1. Samuel Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 52.
2. All scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible 2020, unless otherwise specified.
3. W.E. Vine, "Wisdom," *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1936), Vol. IV, 221.
4. W.E. Vine, "Sunesis" under "Prudence," *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1936), Vol. III, 229.



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.

Church planter, don't forget your job!

God's Spirit works through the power of his word as you preach it

No matter what phase you're in, if you're involved in a church plant in Japan, you are busy. You might be busy preparing to launch. You might be busy pastoring a two-year-old church with new converts. You might be working to send out another church plant from your mature church plant. Regardless, as a busy church planter, you are in danger of forgetting one of the main parts of your job as a pastor: preaching the word of God.

In all the rush of launching a church, we can shortcut the sermon process and deprive our hearers of what they most need: the gospel. A church plant without thoughtful preaching is like a meal without the main course. Don't forget to set aside time to prepare the sermon.

The Bible on preaching

The importance of preaching leaps off the pages of the Bible. At the outset of Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:43 he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (ESV). The eternal Father sent the eternal Son to preach the good news to mortal people.

After our preaching Savior was killed for our sins and raised for our justification, he told his followers that "repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Central to the mission Jesus gave his followers was the task of preaching or "proclaiming" the way to be reconciled to God. In the book of Acts, the early Christians did just that. Peter preached in Acts 2. Those scattered after Stephen's death "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Philip is said to have preached the gospel (Acts 8). Paul, Barnabas, and others planted churches by first preaching the gospel to make disciples (Acts 14:21).

However, one could ask: I understand that the gospel was preached to start a church, but was preaching a part of

the ongoing life of a church? Acts 2:42 lists the practices to which the church was devoted and the apostles' teaching is first. In Acts 6, seven men are appointed to care for widows so the apostles can focus on the ministry of the word. As Paul writes to Timothy about "how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:5), he tells Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2) in the church in Ephesus and do the work of a "gospel proclaimer" or "evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). We cannot deny it—preaching is central to our mission in the pages of scripture.

Embrace the folly

You might preach in Japanese, English, Korean, Portuguese, or a Sign Language, but all of these languages will, at one time or another, feel completely inadequate to change the hard hearts that sit before you. In 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the *folly of what we preach* to save those who believe" (emphasis added). In some ESV Bibles you will find an alternate translation in the footnotes that says, "it pleased God through the *folly of preaching* to save those who believe."

We have to admit that on the surface it does seem foolish to put so much time into preaching. Preaching is a sinful man standing in front of a group of sinners trying to put together syllables that will reveal the truth about the God of the universe. What folly! And yet, when someone is born again and transformed into a follower of Jesus after a stammering sinner proclaims the death of a man, nearly 2,000 years ago, on a tree in Jerusalem 9,000 kilometers away from Japan, that transformation is truly a demonstration of the Spirit and power (1 Cor. 2:4). Outside of the power of God, there is no way to explain the regeneration of a sinner through the folly of preaching a foolish message. Preaching the cross is God's ordained way to bring people to saving faith.

So, church planter, remember your job. Hone your craft. Study your material. Buy study tools or have your mission buy them for you. Read the text in your first language and in Japanese. Memorize the text if time permits. Analyze your audience. Contrast the text with the spirit of the age. Apply the text to yourself first and then your hearers. Bring everything back to the gospel. Pray. Preach. Watch God build the church through the power of his word. **JH**

Jay Greer is working to plant Mustard Seed Christian Church (MSCC) Tokyo. He was the pastor of MSCC Osaka since its founding in 2011. Jay and his wife, Caitlin, also served in Nagoya after moving to Japan from the USA in 2008.



Online communication tools, part 2

God stories from online platforms and LINE's little-known features

As a follow-up to my previous article on a survey about how JEMA members use communication platforms (*Japan Harvest*, Summer 2021, 36), this article celebrates stories of God working through these technologies during COVID.

Church or team fellowship

During the pandemic, LINE and other communication platforms have helped maintain the dynamics of church life and enabled missionary teams to continue interacting. One aspect of Christian life that grew noticeably was prayer. God used the limitations of in-person meetings to increase the frequency and intimacy of corporate prayer among JEMA members, their churches, and their sending organizations.

Another aspect of church life that the platforms enabled was the livestreaming of weekly church services. One respondent noted that their church members displayed love for each other through younger people joining services online so that elderly members could safely attend in person. For many churches, livestreaming has engaged people all over Japan and the world who might not normally go to church. Some people actively sought out churches online, whereas others stumbled upon them.

Continuing Bible study

Online platforms have also been a tremendous help for Bible study. Increased familiarity with online socializing has made virtual Bible studies more achievable. Some JEMA members have been able to maintain Bible study commitments in Japan while out of the country as the digital platforms know no geographical bounds (though time differences and bandwidth can cause difficulties).

Outreach

After Christians came to grips with the “new normal” of virtual ministry, they started to see how these virtual platforms were being used by God. One participant reported that “a non-Christian family member began to sit in with his wife and children on Zoom worship services and came to Christ and was baptized. Another young man, a son of a believer, came forward to profess faith as well.”

Another participant reported that “a husband of a recently converted woman in our church became a Christian during lockdown because the women’s Bible study group decided to invite their husbands as they continued the Alpha course online!”

Another respondent said that LINE had allowed them to renew connections with students they were ministering to after periods of being out of touch. The Lord used this connection point and this person to reengage when these students were going through challenging times.

The survey produced too many stories for me to share them all here. Praise God for his faithfulness in our limitations! **JH**



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

Little-known LINE features

Beacon: Approved Bluetooth transmitters send messages to LINE users near the location of an event. This feature can allow you to engage passersby in Sunday morning services and other public events.¹

Translation accounts: These accounts can be added to any chat, and they automatically translate anything that is typed.

Money transfer: Using LINE Pay and LINE Cash, you can send and request money from others and even split a bill. This could be very useful for sharing ministry costs, collecting event payments, or simply repaying someone.²

Polls: You can make multiple-choice, anonymous, and time-locked poll questions that chat members can answer. This is a great way to get group consensus. It is also an easy way to engage a group with fun or thought-provoking discussion questions.³

Event scheduling: This allows you to create a calendar in your chat for events. You can set times, see RSVP lists, and get notified when an event is about to begin. Like other platforms, this is a good way to know numbers of attendees, communicate event details, and invite others.⁴

OpenChat: Groups OpenChat can contain up to 5,000 people. This allows people to jump into free discussions based on common topics. You can use common topics that bridge to spiritual conversations.⁵

1. “LINE Beacon,” LINE, <https://help.line.me/line/android/?lang=en&contentId=50001492> (accessed June 13, 2021).
2. “Sending/Requesting Money and Splitting Bills,” LINE, <https://help.line.me/line/?contentId=20000700&country=JP> (accessed June 13, 2021).
3. “Poll,” LINE, <https://help.line.me/line/android/?lang=en&contentId=20003458> (accessed June 13, 2021).
4. “Schedule Those Important Moments with Friends Quickly and Easily with Events!” LINE Official Blog, <http://official-blog.line.me/en/archives/1067370213.html> (August 18, 2017).
5. “OpenChat Broadens LINE User Experience,” LINE, <https://linecorp.com/en/pr/news/en/2019/2883> (August 27, 2019).

Unclear writing

It's important that our words communicate what we want them to

When I edit, I look for a lack of clarity. Very often when we write, our words don't convey exactly what we mean. I often ask writers, "What does _____ mean?"

Here's an example I made up:

I went for a walk to see some friends, this afternoon. They were blooming beautifully as I walked past the trees. I met Jill in the park and she was so excited that her eyes jumped out of her head when she saw what I was holding.

Much is unclear in this short example. Who was Jill? Was she one of the friends that I walked to see? Is "they" my friends or the trees? Trees don't usually bloom except in spring—is that when this happened? And where were "the" trees? Not to mention the scary concept of eyes jumping out of Jill's head—that's anatomically difficult and certainly not literal, so it's not helpful in realistic or nonfiction writing (which is of course different to fantasy or sci-fi).

Here's one way to rewrite the above (with some added detail), so that it's clearer:

This afternoon I walked to meet Jill and Kara at a local park. On the way, I saw some beautiful flowers blooming. Jill was happy to see me. When she realised I'd brought her a present, she jumped up and down.

How might you rewrite it? Here's another one to try:

The backpack contained many items I considered essential to air travel: a bottle of water, a pair of old, battered reading glasses, my fully charged Kindle that had several books primed to read at my convenience, eye drops, because my eyes frequently get dry in a plane and because you can never find a recharging station when you want one a battery to recharge my devices.

This one is more of a punctuation challenge than a rewording challenge. It's also a long sentence. If I were to rewrite it, I'd split it up into two or three shorter sentences, or make it into a bullet-pointed list. Long sentences can easily get tangled and aren't kind to readers.

Take care that you don't exhaust your readers or cause them to say: "What does that mean?" Ask a competent writer, or at least someone who is a discerning reader, to look through your work before you publish it. **JH**

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



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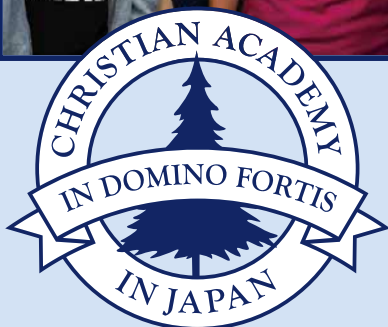
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