



***Evangelism in an  
Honor-Shame Culture***

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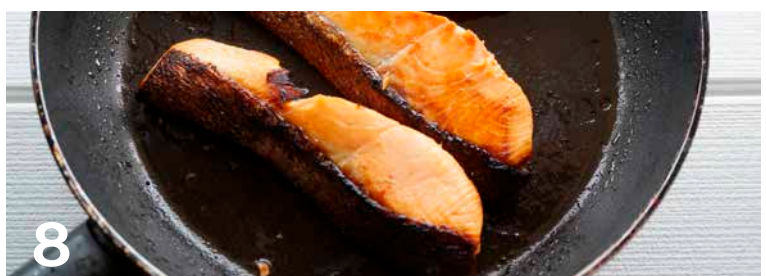
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Please note that event details are subject to change at this time of uncertainty. Please check with JEMA or organizers for confirmation.

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## November

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## February 2023

### JEMA Connect

February 27-March 1, 2023  
Ochanomizu Christian Center

## March

### WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 6, 2023  
Mustard Seed Christian Church, Osaka

### WIM Annual Spring Retreat

March 8-10, 2023  
Fukuin No Ie, Okutama



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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The editors welcome unsolicited articles. Non-JEMA members are also welcome to submit.  
Writer's guidelines are available at: [japanharvest.org/submissions](http://japanharvest.org/submissions)

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# Growing in our understanding of Japanese culture

I knew I didn't know a lot about this topic of guilt and shame when I began preparing for this issue, but I've discovered that I knew even less than I thought. I learned that the idea of Japan as a "shame culture" originated from a book by an American anthropologist who neither visited Japan nor spoke Japanese. Ruth Benedict wrote *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* during and after the Pacific War, under contract with the United States Office of War Information. It was published in 1946, the year after Japan was defeated.

I borrowed the English-language book from a library and was both fascinated and surprised. From the perspective of 2022, it reads like history, and it's interesting to see that much has changed within Japanese society. I was also surprised that the book seems to talk as much about America as it does about Japan. But I am no anthropologist and confess that I haven't read the book from cover to cover. This book has been influential around the world, including Japan. But it's also, I learned, controversial.

Millie R. Creighton wrote this in 1990: "Many Japanese have reacted strongly against being labelled a 'shame culture' and have interpreted Benedict's work as a pejorative account of their culture written by an outsider asserting the superiority of Western traditions. Many Westerners have also viewed Benedict's juxtaposition of 'shame' and 'guilt' cultures as, at best, irrelevant to contemporary Japanese and, at worst, as ethnocentric chauvinism. For over 40 years Benedict's interpretations have been repeatedly denounced, denied, refuted, and reclassified, but the issue is certainly not dead."<sup>1</sup>

One of our authors in this issue (Hallur Mortensen) points out in his article (p. 22) that, despite the controversy surrounding Benedict's work, she did show us that the avoidance of shame is important in Japan, and he notes that that hasn't changed. Therefore the notions of shame and honour are still relevant to those who want to be Christ to Japanese people. A number of our authors also point out that shame is a key theme in Scripture, even though it is often not a key theme that comes out in the way people from Western nations generally talk about the gospel.

This magazine is a forum for sharing what we have learned with each other. I'm glad, once again, that we have a wide diversity of people within the JEMA community who can share what they have been thinking, studying, and experiencing. Through sharing their thoughts in this magazine, they're fulfilling *Japan Harvest's* mission to encourage, inspire, and equip members of the JEMA community.

## Member care

In addition to the feature articles about our theme, we have three articles about member care. We have our usual one-page column but also an article about the 2022 JEMA Member Care survey as well as a glimpse of the JEMA Still Waters Spiritual Retreat held in May. Over 150 people filled out the member care survey, and 17 people attended the retreat. It's good to hear back on both these JEMA activities; our JEMA Member Care Committee has indeed been busy in the first half of this year.

I'm also glad to report that 76 people participated in our *Japan Harvest* reader survey in the middle of the year. These responses will help us as we make decisions in our magazine annual planning meeting in September. Thank you!



Blessings in Christ,  
Wendy  
Managing Editor

1. Millie R. Creighton, "Revising Shame and Guilt Cultures: A Forty-Year Pilgrimage," *Ethos*, 18, no. 3 (1990): 279–307. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/640338>, quote from the preview.

### The themes for the upcoming issues are:

**Winter 2023:** Arts and Ministry

**Spring 2023:** Ministry in an Aging Society (proposals due by October 31)

**Summer 2023:** Japanese Church History (proposals due by January 31)

**Autumn 2023:** Singleness (proposals due by May 31)

## Even in the harsh desert, a sense of peace can grow

*Christian Shimbun, April 24, 2022 Translated by Hiromi Terukina*

“If I didn’t believe in God, I would be dead many times over,” shares Misako Ōba, an artist and photographer based in the United States. Since 2004, she has sold numerous works of art in Europe and the United States. Her artworks, including the latest FAUSTUS, are in permanent storage at public institutions such as the European House of Photography and the National Library of France. In recent years, Ōba has been combining encaustic painting (an art style that uses beeswax and damar resin) with watercolor, oil painting, and lettering.



Her career began as a TV reporter. After graduating from university with a major in Spanish, Ōba worked with Japanese TV stations and in New York. She also enrolled in a graduate school in the United States where she majored in journalism and photography. She said, “I was able to work as a newscaster while also developing my photography. My dreams were coming true one by one. Both my career and my private life were fulfilling.”

But, even though she had everything, she felt empty inside. Then, while studying, she came across a verse from Ecclesiastes, “Everything is meaningless.” Ōba says, “King Solomon had everything. Hundreds of wives, authority, wealth, and wisdom. But he still felt a void within himself. I empathized with him and began reading the Bible. I came to realize that God alone can fill the hole in our heart.”

Ōba married and gave birth to a son, however, she lost him to a heart condition. She also went through a divorce not long after. Although ex-

hausted, inside and out, she overcame each challenge with prayer and faith.

In the hopes of making good out of her experiences, she took up a new career as an artist. Her road in art took a sharp turn when a rare disorder developed in her right pinky finger a few years later. Despite three surgeries, her finger had to be amputated. Ōba’s fine art

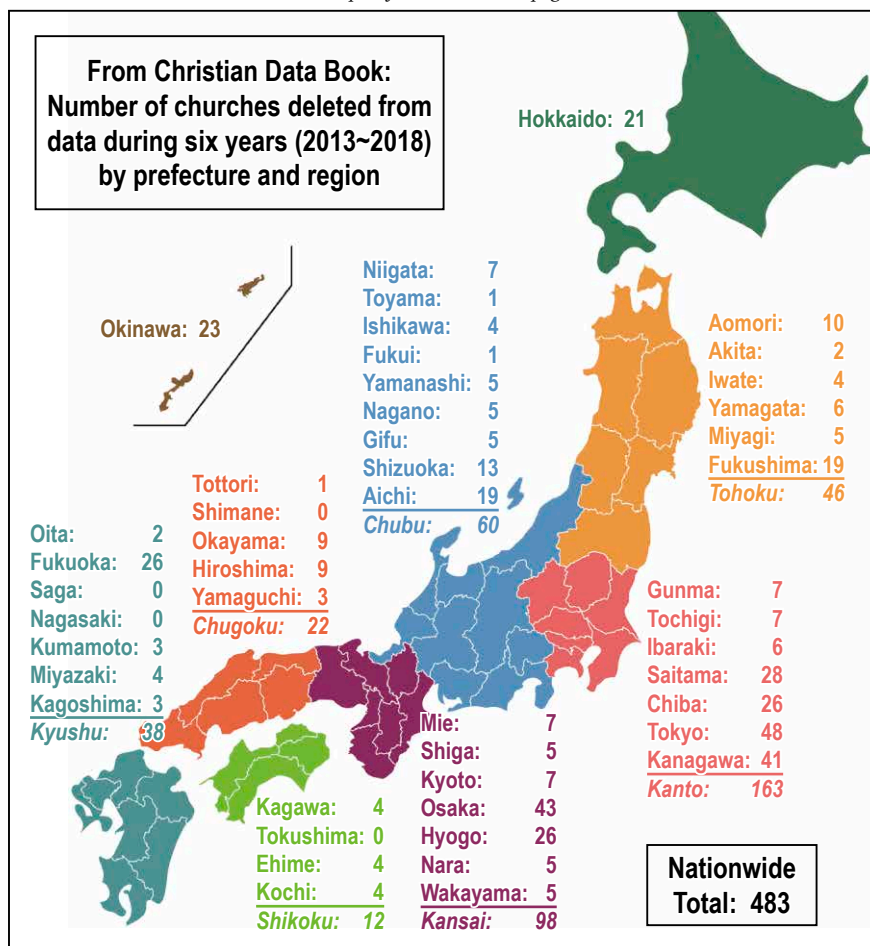
book “FAUTUS” (which means ‘favorable’ or ‘fortunate’ in Latin) records this tragedy with a message that “what seems at first glance to be a sorrow can

turn out to be a blessing if you look at it from another angle.”

Ōba’s recent artwork focuses on the journey of life, the transitory nature of things, and on light. In her painting series Stars and Desert, she overlaps her life with that of Job from the Old Testament. “Life can be cruel. Once I was overly blessed, but then lost my child, my family, and my finger . . . But believing and trusting in Jesus brought forth love each time and allowed me to give thanks for everything. Even in the harsh desert, a sense of peace can grow.”

Despite the hardships she went through over the past two decades, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. ■

*Graphic for article on next page*



# West News

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

## The sustainability of the church—despite it all, churches must survive

*Christian Shimbun, April 22, 2022 Translated by Tomoko Kato*

Decreasing population, declining birthrate, an aging population, a society with high mortality—these truths have of course also been surging through Christian churches, and we rarely recognize that the growth of our mission force has started slowing down, even diminishing. The data on the previous page on the number of churches removed from national church listings, based on numbers from the Christian Data Book over six continuous years, was collated in order to get a sense of how many churches actually disappeared each year.

The *Christian Data Book* (published annually by Christian Shimbun from 2000 to 2018) provided concrete information about every Protestant church across Japan, according to the data collected by questionnaires answered

by their staff. From 2010, the book arranged the number of churches by prefecture and mapped the increase and decrease compared with the previous year as “the aggregated data of the number of people attending church.” Their recent work, “The number of churches removed from church listings,”<sup>1</sup> focuses only on reduced numbers by region. “Reduced numbers” means the number of churches which had been listed in the data book previously but were not found in subsequent years, so their information was removed.

Many deleted cases were found through questionnaires answered, e.g. “This church does not exist now,” while some were confirmed to no longer exist from other information sources. The numbers do not include the churches which moved to other prefectures.

Some prefectures over the six years have had no deletions reported.

In the six most recent publications of the *Christian Data Book*, the information about 483 churches was deleted, which is 80 per year. Some readers may feel from their own experiences that there should be a more pronounced decrease in the number of churches. Regardless, it is clear that all churches need to continually renew themselves in order to survive, such as by increasing younger church members, training new pastors, maintaining organization, consolidating resources, and solving all of the subsequent issues that will be caused by taking these actions. At the least we need to call pastors to churches without pastors. ■

1. Christian Shimbun, April 3, 2022.

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**Fall Day of Prayer plus**  
October 5, 2022  
Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome

**Winter Day of Prayer**  
January 17, 2023  
SEND Center, Higashi-Tokorozawa

**Kansai Christian Women's Conference**  
March 6, 2023  
Mustard Seed Christian Church, Osaka

**Annual Spring Retreat**  
March 8-10, 2023  
Fukuin No Ie, Okutama



*Vulnerability and humility are an underrated way to do evangelism*

# Live with

# authenticity

By Sue Plumb Takamoto

Last year, as I sat in a Nozomi Project meeting with two coworkers, Yui\* and Karena, Yui asked me if I had gone shopping that weekend to look for a certain cup. I'd promised to do this but had completely forgotten to go, and I didn't want to admit it. And so I muttered, "Yes, I went a bit but I didn't find anything."

A few minutes later, the Holy Spirit started whispering in my heart. I had been asking Jesus to show me my sin; he had been faithfully revealing my tendency towards deceit in order to look good.

It took me two hours, but I told Yui and Karena that I'd lied because I wanted to look better in their eyes. They were both surprised but very gracious.

Later that day, Yui opened up about her struggles with parenting. She said she'd been embarrassed to tell me before. In those special moments, we experienced genuine open relationship, without shame.

A week later, I was leading a Nozomi staff meeting, and I shared this story and my struggle with deception. I shared that I am recognizing my need to not worry so much about looking good. Leading with integrity for me meant choosing honesty and vulnerability.

A short time after that meeting, Mari,\* another Nozomi staff member, told me that she was dealing with anxiety and depression. She ended up spending several days at our home, and I connected her with a Christian counselor who has helped immensely. We are thankful that she is getting better and still open to Jesus.

My purpose in sharing my yucky sin with my Japanese friends was not for the sake of evangelism. But because I

chose vulnerability, it freed me from shame and gave others permission to share things they'd been hiding. It opened doors for the reality of the gospel to break forth.

Shame is such a barrier builder! It keeps relationships from blossoming. It smothers personalities. Shame forces people to stay cloaked under secrets.

It requires repentance for anyone to come to Jesus; vulnerability is needed for true heart-turning. Yet the very private nature of Japanese people may be one of the factors that make conversions difficult. Much has been written about the Japanese people, shame, and their sense of self. We know that most Japanese have a "highly private self. It may not even be expressed to one's own family members."<sup>1</sup> A Japanese person who is expected to yield him or herself to Jesus, naming and confessing their sins, is not going to have an easy time. As one researcher stated, "self-exposure itself can be said to amount to a norm violation."<sup>2</sup>

## *Be authentic and humble*

Christians modeling authenticity and humility can assist the Holy Spirit in leading Japanese to Jesus. Vulnerability is not easy. And contrary to what we think, being vulnerable is the opposite of being weak. It's an act of courage. The researcher Brené Brown, in her famous work on shame and vulnerability, says that "we can measure how brave you are by how vulnerable you're willing to be."<sup>3</sup>

One of the most formative books I have read in a long time is Paul Miller's *The J-Curve*. He writes about the need for us to choose daily to follow Jesus in the "J-Curve"<sup>4</sup> of humility: "I learn patience down low. Love always pulls

me down into other people's lives . . . An act of repentance or love reenacts the dying of Jesus in the present. Our J-Curves complete what Jesus started. In this strange borderland where beauty and brokenness live side by side, the beauty of Jesus shines through us and we lose sight of ego. His self becomes our self."<sup>5</sup>

Choosing acts of humility and vulnerability can be beautiful ways to model the truth of Jesus to our Japanese community. Doesn't Paul say it best? "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 12:9 NIV). The more we boast in our weakness, the more Christ's power will rest on me. And there is no better ingredient for evangelism than the power of Jesus Christ!

## *Allow others to help us*

When my husband and I moved to Japan, our coworker Takeshi Takazawa gave us great advice: Allow Japanese people to help you. Don't come in as the teacher; rather create a humble posture where they can help you. A second way that we can demonstrate a posture of humility is by finding genuine opportunities which allow Japanese to help us. These proactive actions can erase the formal barriers that often exist here.

When we first moved to a new home in a new neighborhood in Hyogo Prefecture, we didn't know anyone. A few days later, our doorbell rang and an elegant, gray-haired lady introduced herself. Her daughter had lived in the US and had been helped by Americans, so she wanted to help us.



We were touched by Mrs. Ishida's kindness and the vegetables she brought. Shortly after this, we took her some homemade muffins. Then she brought us some grilled fish. And so the "okaeshi competition" continued. This exchange of goods was fun, but it wasn't getting us deeper in relationship.

One day, on a whim, I rang Ishida-san's doorbell. I explained that my husband and I had had a fight, and I'd realized it was mostly my fault. I wanted to make him a Japanese-style salmon dinner because I knew it was one of his favorites. But I didn't know how to make it like his mom (who had grown up in Japan) might have done. Could she help me?

She ran to her cupboard and pulled out a can of white sauce. She told me how to cook it. I thanked her, happy for this interaction, and went home.

Ten minutes later, she was at my door wearing her apron. "No, no, Sue! Not a white sauce! What was I thinking? I need to come into your kitchen and show you how to do a shōyu-mirin salmon!"

I was thrilled to have this time with Ishida-san! We cooked and laughed and talked about husbands and fights and a hundred ways to cook salmon.

That was the beginning of an amazing friendship. Six months later, when their daughter was going through a hard time, they sought us out for prayer, and they saw God remarkably answer. The Ishidas are still like Japanese grandparents to our children.

Choosing a posture of need can break through the stiffness of relationships and forge new friendships.

### Be willing to confess

Finally, choosing a posture of vulnerability among fellow Christians can provide much-needed fellowship, as well as make it easier for Japanese to feel comfortable entering the church. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful" (NABRE). Churches are good at communion, Bible teaching, and worship—but not very good at confession. Perhaps we are afraid of looking bad in front of one another?

In my doctoral research of missionaries adjusting to Japan, I found that while most of us who move to Japan desire genuine relationships, many do not find them. One man said that the other missionaries "were not ready to share vulnerably or honestly and you didn't admit to sin in front of them. It was like you just had to put on this face and be a really wonderful missionary."

Confession and authenticity are part of the intimacy that we crave. And it's the perfect antidote to shame. If non-Christians could witness truth and vulnerability being practiced among Christians, wouldn't they be more likely to want to join our communities?

I remember a friend who had the chance to visit Bethlehem and the place where they think Jesus was born. She

said it was like a cave—one had to crawl to enter.

I sure do not naturally enjoy such a lowly posture! But as we engage in our relationship with Jesus and each other, a humble heart is still our best means of honest fellowship. As Christians, and as missionaries, choosing authenticity and vulnerability can help us to set aside the human tendency of shame and experience genuine relationships. Vulnerability can help knock down barriers and possibly even provide openings to share our faith with non-Christians. **JH**

\* Not her real name.

1. James Sack, *Shame in Japan* (Departmental Bulletin Paper, Japan Lutheran College, March 2004), 120. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/228945916.pdf>
2. Takie Sugiyama Lebra, "Shame and Guilt: A Psychocultural View of the Japanese Self," *Ethos*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (Autumn 1983), 192–209. <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1525/eth.1983.11.3.02a00070>
3. Erin Jensen, "5 takeaways on vulnerability from Brené Brown's 'The Call To Courage'", <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2019/04/19/brene-brown-call-courage-netflix-vulnerability/3497969002/> (April 19, 2019).
4. J-Curve: "Like the letter J, Jesus's life descends through his incarnation and then death, and then upward into his resurrection and exaltation." From: <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-j-curve/> (June 29, 2019).
5. Paul Miller, *The J-Curve* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 114.

*Sue Plumb Takamoto and her husband Eric, missionaries with Asian Access, live in Ishinomaki, Japan and are partnering with Be One. Sue is overseeing the Nozomi Project.*



# God covers our nakedness

By Tim Boyle

*The Old Testament contains powerful imagery for communicating the gospel in a shame culture*

When it comes to communicating the gospel in Japanese to people whose cultural worldview focuses on such themes as shame and saving face, missionaries raised in a very different cultural context often encounter barriers to communication. Thus, the question we face is how to communicate the life-giving message of Jesus Christ in an honor–shame culture.

A cardinal principle of communication is that we can only do our best to put the meanings we intend into words, tone of voice, gestures, and so on, and hope that the other person can decode all of that and understand the meaning we intend. But the person receiving that message can only do that within the framework of his or her own culture and personal experiences. So how does that play out in real-life situations in Japan?

## Lost in translation

If I try to communicate the message in terms of “you are a sinner and you need to receive God’s forgiveness,” the typical Japanese person will usually not perceive that as a message relevant to their situation. For one thing, the Japanese language has not developed in a way that clearly communicates such a concept. The word used to translate “sin” is *tsumi*, but that same word can also be translated as “crime.” There is no clear distinction between the concepts of our “sin before God” and criminal activity. You can, of course, explain the difference, but the concepts themselves are not differentiated in Japanese. Thus subconsciously, a typical Japanese person will react to a sin-and-guilt-oriented message with

indifference because, after all, “I’m not a criminal.”

The difference between shame and guilt orientations is not that great when one is talking about actual crimes. But the difference becomes much greater with more so-called subtle sins. In a group-oriented culture, the fear of shame provides for strong social control. Shame is a far more relevant and recognizable feeling for people living in group-oriented cultures.

Suffice it to say that no matter how one categorizes Japanese culture with respect to shame and guilt, when it comes to communicating the gospel using traditional Western concepts—such as all human beings standing guilty before a holy God and therefore needing a Savior to take away their sin so that they can be made acceptable to God—adequate communication is rarely achieved. When there is no concept of a last judgment before an almighty, transcendent, holy God for the sins one has committed, then an evangelistic approach based on that—no matter how biblical it is—will bear little fruit since the cultural soil has not been prepared to receive and nourish that kind of gospel seed.

Sin and the forgiveness of sin

are central to the Christian message. But since there is no distinction made between the concepts of sin and crime in Japanese, Christian ministry has had to limp along with an inaccurate translation for sin that doesn’t express its biblical meaning. Thus, for the typical Japanese who has little or no biblical understanding, using this aspect of the gospel as one’s basic evangelistic approach will produce little fruit. I’m not saying that we should not talk about sin but only that it should be discussed in a context where its true biblical meaning can be understood, which isn’t feasible in initial evangelism in the Japanese context.

## Old Testament paradigms of shame

In thinking of how this barrier can be overcome, I’ve tried the approach of using the concepts of “shame” and the



“covering of shame” to present these same truths. Shame is a very important aspect of Japanese culture, and it is also an important Biblical concept, particularly in the Old Testament. The Hebrew culture of the Old Testament was a very group-oriented culture with many points of similarity with Japanese culture. These all point to a shame orientation rather than a guilt orientation, and thus shame is a far more important concept in the Bible than most Western readers are aware.

A look at a few references will give us an idea of how the Bible deals with the concept of shame. Traditionally, Western theology has emphasized the original sin that taints all of humankind. It is interesting to note, however, that the term “sin” does not even appear in the Genesis narrative until chapter 4 when Cain kills Abel (v. 7). The Fall of Man narrative does not use this word but instead describes humankind’s disobedience in terms of “shame” and “nakedness.” Thus, instead of “original sin,” we might just as well formulate the effects of Adam and Eve’s disobedience in terms of “original shame.” After all, it is rather difficult to think of a newborn infant as “sinful” since, to use the biblical symbolism, they have no “filthy rags” of their own deeds yet. All of us, however, are born into this world totally naked, and that symbolism naturally points to our “original shame.” Hebrews 4:13 points to this when it says, “There is nothing that can be hid from God; everything in all creation is exposed naked and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves” (GNT).

Adam and Eve’s physical nakedness is also symbolic of their spiritual condition before God. Before their disobedience, they were in perfect harmony with their Creator and had nothing to hide. Afterward, however, their feelings of shame led them to try to cover up with the only thing available to them—fig leaves! This is symbolic of all humanity on the spiritual level as we try to cover up our shame before God with our own efforts. It is just like

trying to make clothes out of fig leaves. They fall apart at the first move!

### How God covers our shame

As the narrative continues, however, it is God who takes the first step to solve this dilemma. He does not banish Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden naked but instead clothes them with “garments of skin” (Gen. 3:21 NIV). This is only the first step in God’s great plan to solve this problem of shame and to restore harmony again to his creation. While not explicitly stated, it is obvious that an animal or two had to be sacrificed to provide a symbolic means of covering Adam and Eve’s shame. From that time on the sacrifice of an animal became a central part of the worship of God.

## The Hebrew culture of the Old Testament was a very group-oriented culture with many points of similarity with Japanese culture.

With the establishment of Levitical law, God instituted through Moses an intricate sacrificial system with various festivals and sacrifices for a variety of situations. The purposes of these sacrifices were multifold as they served as object lessons through which God could communicate truths about himself to the Israelites. And they all, in some sense, pointed back to that original sacrifice in the Garden of Eden when God took the first step to cover humankind’s shame and restore harmony between himself and his creation. They also pointed ahead to the final sacrifice on that hill overlooking another garden when God would complete what was necessary to give us eternal garments to cover our shame—our spiritual nakedness before him.

Isaiah 61:10 uses the symbolism of being covered by the robe of righteous-

ness to describe salvation: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God: for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (ESV). On the other side, then, our own righteousness in the presence of God becomes nothing but “filthy rags.” Zechariah 3:3–4 says, “Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to Joshua he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your sin away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel’” (RSV). The filthy garments God removes symbolize sin, and he replaces them with clothes that symbolize righteousness.

Shame is similar, except that, instead of filthy rags, its symbolism is the nakedness beneath those rags. In this sense, it is the more fundamental of the two as it cannot be removed, only covered. As we stand before God, if we say we have no sin and take off our filthy rags according to the symbolism, what is left is the shame of our nakedness. Either way, the only covering that will do the job is the robe of righteousness Christ offers us in faith. Christ counsels us to receive from him “white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen” (Rev. 3:18 RSV). Those garments are Christ’s “robe of righteousness,” which we receive by faith.

### Creating cultural resonance

This only scratches the surface of the treasure trove of biblical resources we have available for reformulating the message of salvation through Christ in terms that can resonate with people in an honor–shame culture, if we only search it out with culturally sensitive eyes. Happy treasure hunting! **JH**

*Tim Boyle first came to Japan from the US as a student and later as a missionary under the United Methodist Church in 1971. He served in Hokkaido, Ibaraki, and Hyogo until retirement in 2016.*

# Freedom from shame before the dead

By Dan Ellrick



**“They could not bear the shame of letting down the ancestors by discontinuing their Buddhist memorial services”**

After fifteen minutes of chatting over coffee, Yukiko<sup>1</sup> dropped her gaze and scratched the back of her head in embarrassment. I sat silently, waiting to hear why she had asked to meet. After a minute, she said, “Um . . . since I’m getting baptized soon . . . do you think . . . well, maybe I don’t need to keep sending monthly payments to the temple for my child’s memorial services (*mizuko kuyō*)? I mean, I know it’s strange for a Christian to send money to a Buddhist temple. But . . . for my child . . . I’m not sure what I should do.”

As we talked, Yukiko’s story came out bit by bit. Years earlier, she’d had a brief love affair and gotten pregnant. Her boyfriend had pressured her to get an abortion, and she’d given in. But she was ashamed and wanted to “do something for the child.” So she’d consulted with a Buddhist monk and decided to pay for a small stone *jizō* statue dedicated to the child and for monthly

memorial prayers. Now, as a Christian, she knew those things were useless, but she was unsure what to do.

Together, we brought the situation before the Lord in prayer, giving thanks for the forgiveness we have in Christ and prayerfully entrusting her child to him. Yukiko rejoiced in God’s love and the hope of meeting her child in heaven.

Yukiko may have felt guilt, but her dominant feelings were of shame. She thought she was a bad person because she shirked her duty to raise her child. She was worried what I and others would think of her, but, most of all, she was worried how her child would judge her. These feelings are typical for honor–shame cultures like Japan.

## **The deep root of shame in Japanese culture**

The roots of this focus on shame likely lie in Confucianism, but it is

most visible in Buddhism. The website of the Midwest Buddhist Temple (True Pure Land) in Chicago, US, provides the following explanation:

Guilt is not really found in Buddhism. Buddhism teaches us to take responsibility for our thoughts, words and actions. If we make our decisions with the best of our abilities, then as long as we also take responsibility for those decisions, then there is no guilt.

Culturally, many Buddhists and especially Japanese Buddhists live in a society that is strongly biased by shame. One does not do things that bring shame to the family or to the village or to the group. Shame can function much like guilt, but one should know the difference.<sup>2</sup>

Given the above, and Buddhism’s influence on Japanese culture, it is not surprising that Japanese tend to express their negative feelings in terms

of shame rather than guilt. Nor is it surprising that Japanese find gospel presentations that focus on sin and our guilt before God difficult to relate to. These realities challenge us to reframe our message of God's love in terms Japanese can more readily understand. The cultures of the Bible understood shame, and Scripture provides abundant support for such efforts (e.g., Is. 54:4, 61:7; Rom. 5:5, 9:33, 10:11).

### Rituals of remembrance

On one occasion, I visited Isshin-ji (One Heart Temple) in Osaka, which is famous for its eight *okotsu butsu*—Amida Buddha statues made from the bones and ashes of about two million people.<sup>3</sup> While there, I observed the daily memorial service (*eitai-kuyō*). The smells, bells, chanting, and the ritual movements of the monks blended to create an atmosphere of sadness and solemnity. People were wiping away tears as they remembered departed loved ones. Later, I talked with a few people in the temple graveyard and heard their stories. Stories about lost spouses, parents, and siblings—stories occasionally tinged with shame over how they had treated a family member years ago or for their failure to visit a grave more often.

Yukiko's story, the stories of the people in the graveyard, and the daily *eitai-kuyō* ritual of remembrance share a common thread. It's the Japanese sense of continuing bonds with the departed and their concern for how the living and the dead might judge their failure in fulfilling their obligations through the rituals of remembrance. To many Japanese, the dead are not really gone. Rather, they are an integral part of the community whose needs and feelings should be respected. Because of this, a common and formidable obstacle to the gospel is the desire to avoid being shamed for failure to conduct the ancestor rituals. On multiple occasions, Japanese have told me they could not become Christians because their obligations to maintain ancestor rituals outweighed their personal beliefs. Many Japanese feel they are doing right—and therefore are being good people—by maintaining the rituals for the dead.

### Reducing the distance in our worldviews

The doctrine of the communion of saints, especially as envisioned in Hebrews 12, has much in common with Japanese thinking. Indeed, the Roman Catholic church's expression of this doctrine through memorial masses bears considerable resemblance to Isshin-ji's *eitai-kuyō*. Also, some of the ideas of Bishop John Zizioulas, an influential Greek Orthodox prelate, are striking in their resemblance to Japanese thought. In his lecture entitled "The Doctrine of God," Zizioulas wrote, "The person is the identity born of a relationship and exists only in communion with other persons."<sup>4</sup>

Many of us might rightly hesitate to adopt ideas from the Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox traditions, but the doctrine of the communion of saints is also found in the Apostles' Creed and is well worth careful consideration.

I think we would do well to develop our own expressions of this doctrine as bridges between Western and Japanese thinking. When we speak of the dead in Christ as living people with whom we will enjoy fellowship in heaven, we reduce the distance between worldviews and offer membership in a vibrant and vast family of faith.

To the extent allowed by our theological convictions, we might also want to be as generous as possible in our comments about who might be in heaven. For example, I never say any individual is in hell—only God has the authority to declare a person's eternal fate. We do not need to slide down the slippery slope of universalist teaching to allow that God's grace may extend to many who have not made a clear, public confession of faith in Christ. A few quotes suffice to show that this is well-trodden theological ground:

C. S. Lewis: "We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him."<sup>5</sup>

Dale Moody (Southern Baptist theologian): "It is possible to say that this general revelation of God has only a negative function that leaves man without excuse, as I understand Emil Brunner to say. But what kind

of God is he who gives man enough knowledge to damn him but not enough to save him? The perception of God in creation has both negative and positive possibilities."<sup>6</sup>

William Lane Craig (apologist): "God will judge the unreached on the basis of their response to His self-revelation in nature and conscience . . . Now this does not mean that they can be saved apart from Christ. Rather it means that the benefits of Christ's sacrifice can be applied to them without their conscious knowledge of Christ."<sup>7</sup>

I know Japanese who considered and ultimately rejected Christianity because they could not bear the shame of letting down their ancestors by discontinuing their Buddhist memorial services. None of them suddenly became Christians when I shared with them the possibility that some of those ancestors might be in heaven fervently hoping that they would choose faith in Christ. But I sometimes felt that they were taken aback by this idea and that it might grow in their hearts with time.

Perhaps the words of the prophet Hosea are even deeper than we imagine. "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God'" (Rom. 9:26, cf. Hos.1:10). **JH**

1. Name changed to protect privacy.
2. See: <https://mbtchicago.org/buddhism-say-guilt/> (accessed May 25, 2022).
3. See: <https://www.isshinji.or.jp/nokotsu.php> (accessed May 30, 2022).
4. John D. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God," in *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 57.
5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 65.
6. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 59.
7. "Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?" (Reasonable Faith, 1994), <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/can-a-loving-god-send-people-to-hell-the-craig-bradley-debate> (accessed May 30, 2022).

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# The nail th

## Learning to live out kingdom values in Japan

“The nail that sticks up gets pounded down!” I cannot remember the first time I heard this chilling assessment of Japanese culture, but it struck dread into the soul of this rugged individualist. I had heard that Asian culture was group oriented, which also gave me serious pause. However, one thing that had attracted me to Japan was the sweetness of my first Japanese homestay guest, who received Christ at an annual passion play we attended in Puyallup, Washington. For three and a half years, Sumiko kept inviting me to Japan. Once I got here for a two-week visit, I was dazzled by the warm reception I received. I felt welcomed as a unique individual (as I discovered later, perhaps because I was a foreigner). Delighted, I brought several of my new Japanese friends to the 1994 Billy Graham Crusade in the Tokyo Dome in hopes that they, too, would give their lives to Christ. To my own surprise, I went forward to dedicate the rest of my life to serving Christ in Japan. My friends went forward with me but only to support me in my decision.

When I got home, I filled out an application form to serve in Shizuoka and was shortly on my way. Only after I moved here did the hammer hit the nail. Gradually, I realized that I wasn't fitting in as well as I had as a tourist. In a staff meeting one day, I related an incident from my high school years when I asked my mother's permission to do something. She hesitated to say yes, so I said, “Everybody's doing it!”

She retorted, “Are you a girl or a sheep?”

“I'm a girl,” I said.

“Then don't act like a sheep!”

Hearing this story, my Japanese supervisor exclaimed, “But sheep are good!”

“Only if their shepherd is headed in the right direction!” was my instant reply, which did not smooth the waters. The time came when this “nail”

was not permitted to attend a weekly working people's fellowship that was conducted in my own home, because I was not Japanese.

It soon became clear that the situation was much worse for Japanese than for me. One of my former university students wrote about having been kicked out of class, merely for having given the wrong answer to the teacher's question. Thankfully, rather than giving up, he resolved to pursue excellence.

One by one, Japanese members of a secular self-help recovery group I belonged to were ejected, because they were found to be “consorting” with other self-help organizations. Eventually, because I too was a member of another group, I was accosted after one group's meeting, stripped of the funds I was about to use for literature I had ordered for our group, and all other accoutrements of the organization, and told never to have anything to do with that organization again.

Even if they manage to stop short of such a harsh reaction, many Japanese people seem to be doing their best to stay invisible, and hopefully safe. (A recent example of when someone did act out was the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe.)

Although my discomfort as a protruding nail was not life-threatening, the pain did drive me to Jesus's feet, asking him what to do. I felt him say to me, “Anyone who pounds on you, pounds on Me, and anyone who pounds on Me will be broken. Even if the whole society pounds on you, it will be broken, and it needs to be broken in order for Me to raise up My Kingdom.” That took the pressure off! I was comforted in knowing that “the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Rom. 9:33 NIV 1984).

It has been my privilege to extend Jesus's protective covering over women seeking something better than their



# at sticks up

By Ginger Tobin

societies have offered them so far. Bible Discovery Group is a weekly gathering now composed of five women—three Japanese, one Chinese, and one American. They appreciate an atmosphere of acceptance of various ideas, with no question being seen as foolish and no answer being rejected as wrong. In the group, we are seeking truth, who Jesus is, and making various discoveries as we adventure together, checking the validity against the standard of God's Word. We choose our study materials together, according to individuals' needs and preferences.

Recently, a scripture I heard growing up in church kept coming to mind: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16 NASB 1995). When I first heard the verse, I felt ashamed because my "works" certainly weren't perfect. What glory could that bring to God? Although concerned about pride, I had to consciously remind myself that seeking God's glory is the opposite of pridefulness. I suddenly realized that I hadn't heard or shared that scripture for a long time. *Have I been slipping?* I wondered. *Have I subconsciously been seeking to become invisible in order to dodge the descending hammer?*

Since beginning to write this article, I have been blessed with an opportunity to stick up: the leader of our *kumi* (neighborhood association unit) visited me, asking 2,000 yen in annual fees. I was surprised, because I had been paying 9,900 yen per year, but had noticed that my *kairanban* (circulating community bulletin board) hadn't been showing up on my doorstep. When I inquired, Ms. M. explained that while the 2,000 yen covers trash and recycling pick-up, the *kairanban* is only for those with membership in the community association. I said I had been a member for the past 20 years since

I moved here. I learned that, because the other three families renting houses in this complex where I have lived for five and a half years opted not to join the association, it was assumed that I had dropped out! I had unknowingly become invisible. When you're invisible, you might be safe, but it's often difficult to know what's going on, let alone to have a say in it. I was delighted to be a shiny nail sticking up, reaffirming my desire for full membership in our neighborhood association and paying the full fee for it!

Three nights later when I came home from class, I was happy to see a *kairanban* on my doorstep containing information of great interest to me about the Shimizu Port Festival Kappore ("Celebrate Life" street dance). The next morning, I was glad to carry the *kairanban* down the hill to the kind neighbors I had previously lived next door to for nine years. They were surprised to hear my story, having also thought that I had dropped out of the association. To my amazement, that night our *kumi* leader dropped by again with a personal invitation to the *kappore*, for which no one in our *kumi* had yet signed up. Declining regretfully, I explained that I had asked God and received guidance not to let the good squeeze out the best in my schedule.

Reminders like the theme of this issue of *Japan Harvest* can help us to keep free of cultural restraints, so that we model God's values for those who are watching us and stick up like shiny nails for Jesus! **JH**

Image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cog-dog/24634911426/>

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# Saving faith is saving face



Seeing mankind's condition in light of Japan's shame culture is a bridge for communicating the gospel

By Paul Clark

Recognizing the significance that shame plays in Japanese culture may be far more relevant than has previously been recognized. A Japanese seminary professor, when asked how he came to be a believer, responded immediately, “First, I had to think like a Westerner!”

## The original Greek word *hamartia* translated as “sin”

What has not been a problem for Westerners poses as an immediate stumbling block for Japanese; in that the words for “sin” and “sinner” (*tsumi* and *tsumibito*), respectively, mean “crime” and “criminal” in Japanese and therefore makes one guilty of breaking the law. Sin is used many times in the Bible, and though the word “guilt” is commonly used in English for “sin” it is rarely used in the New Testament in that way.

The Apostle Paul says that the actual root human problem is “disobedience” (Rom. 5:19). In order to know the primary use of the Greek word, *hamartia*, translated as “sin” or “tsumi,” one needs to consider it along with the Greek word *parakoe* or “disobedience” (Japanese is *fujūjun*), meaning the failure or refusal to listen to or to obey. When taken together the full nuance of

*hamartia* would be better understood as “failing to be perfect by disobeying directions in a free self-willed action.” This was the primary meaning of the word, with its second meaning coming centuries later as a “theological” term! A more correct reading of *hamartia* in the often-referenced Romans 3:23 would be “All have failed to be perfect and fall short of the perfection of God.” This may be understood, then, in the manner of a child disobeying his or her parent, as it was with Adam and Eve in disobeying their Heavenly Father.

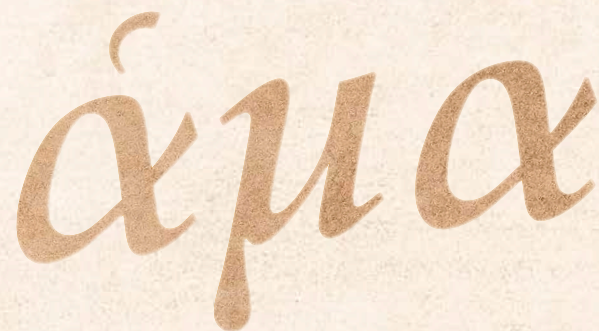
Understood in this way, *hamartia* does not have to do with being guilty of breaking any law as such. Making everybody “criminals” in Japanese or in English doesn’t make sense! In the Hebrew Old Testament, the topic of guilt is basically limited to actually being guilty of breaking the Levitical law.<sup>1</sup> This nuance of *hamartia* would be common to the Koine Greek “Septuagint” (the earliest Greek translation of books from the Hebrew Bible still in existence), in use over two hundred years before Jesus.

Thus “sin” as a word was an arbitrary translation of *hamartia* centuries after Peter, John, and even Irenaeus

(130–202 AD).<sup>2</sup> In some way, like *baptizo* and *ecclesia*, *hamartia* experienced a Westernization process from its original use. The “Septuagint” translates fifteen Hebrew words as “*hamartia*” (with no less than thirty variations).<sup>3</sup> In the English New Testament, “sin” is the single translation of “*hamartia*” for over thirty different instances.<sup>4</sup> There is no denying that the narrowed and singular nuance of the word “*hamartia*” translated as “sin” has a broader range. Further, the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testament speak rather to a disobedience and shame culture from Genesis to Revelation than a sin and guilt culture. Like Japanese, the Hebrew people of the Old Testament lived out a shame culture.

## Shame is part of the human condition

From Tim Boyle’s *The Gospel Hidden In Chinese Characters*, there is fresh insight into the vocabulary dilemma as





viewed from his singular work on the history of kanji characters. He shows the interesting connections with much of the Genesis story being found in the characters, especially when considered from a believer's point of view. As with Genesis, it is to be particularly noted that, in the historic Chinese characters, the original result of "the Fall" is found to have been shame (*haji* in Japanese) following from Adam's and Eve's free exercise of their own self-will. Becoming aware of their nakedness they experienced shame, i.e., the "original shame," so coined by Boyle.<sup>5</sup> This historic evidence in keeping with the Genesis account flies in the face of the pervasive "sin and guilt" orientation of Western-influenced theology which resulted in an unforeseen wall to Japanese hearing and responding to the gospel.

Adding to this, a recognized scholar of Japanese culture and religions shared at the 1982 Hayama Missionary Seminar that there is nothing in Japanese religion or religious literature that accounts for the fact that Japanese culture is a shame culture.<sup>6</sup> He came to his conclusion based on his interviews with Shinto and Buddhist priests and scholars and reading their works. The fact that Japanese culture is a shame culture without it having anything of a religious nature leads us to the consideration that the "original shame" is embedded in our human DNA until the end of the age!

It was not, however, Adam and Eve's nakedness that was primarily exposed; it was their failure and refusal to listen to and to obey the Word of God that was exposed! In this manner, the first of mankind brought shame to the whole human race in seeking to become like God. Coming to know the difference between good and evil, they recognized their nakedness, were ashamed, and experienced loss of face before God. They

lost the immediate presence of God the Creator and Heavenly Father.

### Applying this to ministry in Japan

In an effort to resolve the *tsumi* and *tsumibito* problem in sharing the gospel with Japanese, the root problem is found to follow from the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The greater significance is that, having acted contrary to the essence of God and being created in the image of God, their action would come to define the common ground or state for all mankind. This was not over the breaking of any law as such, but in violating their personal relationship with God. From this understanding, a reasonable explanation can be made for mankind's condition and the way for an individual to work out their own personal relationship with God. This truth leads to the reasonableness and understanding of the truth of saving faith in Jesus Christ from one's need for a Savior and is therefore for all cultures and not just for the Japanese culture. On the other hand, deferring to the emphasis on the graciousness evident in the use of *hamartia* (failing to be perfect over against guilty as sin) with Japanese rather than waiting for them to comprehend the misconception of being *tsumibito*, will assuredly realize more results from the gospel.

Therefore, it is important to recognize how the same self-willed failure of Adam and Eve is evident in all from the womb. The first breath of life for the newborn baby is a cry for their own selfish need to be met! This is not a calamity of itself but is rather a manifestation of the common sense of self-preservation leading to a self-serving life for all (except Christ) born after Adam and Eve (Matt. 16:25–26).

Further, all are born naked, and though that nakedness may soon be covered in a warm swaddling blanket at the time, all cultures will come to experience shame from nakedness, as it was with Adam and Eve. This strongly suggests, from all said above, that it is the result of the "original shame," the original disobedience.

Egocentric, self-willed man having lost face with the presence of God, the Planner, the Creator, the Organizer, and the Sustainer, is explanation enough for the otherwise inexplicable preponderance of the effect of Adam's disobedience on mankind in all relationships. This is evident in the chaos around the world today. Governments cannot contain or eradicate pandemics nor eliminate man's inhumanity to man as wars and rumors of war persist.

The good news: Mark says Jesus came preaching the gospel: "Repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15), proclaiming that in himself (Luke 4:16–21) mankind can be restored to the eternal plan and purpose for the kingdom of God! Reconciliation or the restoration of face with God comes through repentance. Repentance is the simple but profound, life-changing response to the call to repent of the self-willed, egocentric life for the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The repentant believer, having the Heavenly Father's forgiveness and accredited with Jesus's righteousness, will realize the restoration to God's presence (justified, made perfect by his sacrifice and resurrection, Rom. 4:24). Faith in Jesus becomes the personal restoration of face with God the Creator and Heavenly Father! Then comes the call for the believer to live life as a living sacrifice to His glory (Rom. 12:1). For Japanese, for *all*, saving faith is saving face! **JH**

1. Tom Worden, "The Meaning of 'Sin,'" Catholic Biblical Association (UK), *Scripture* 9, No. 6, April 1957, 45.

2. Paul Axton, "Death as Containing Sin in Irenaeus," *Forging Ploughshares*, <https://forgingploughshares.org/2022/02/10/death-as-containing-sin-in-irenaeus> (February 10, 2022).

3. Tom Worden, "The Meaning of 'Sin,'" 44.

4. *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* based on Semantic Domains, eds. Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Vol. 1, 2nd Edition (New York: United Bible Society, 1989), 773–777.

5. Timothy Boyle, *The Gospel Hidden In Chinese Characters*, (USA: Xulon Press, 2015) 68.

6. Clark B. Offner, "The Place of Shame, Guilt and Grace in Japanese Religions: A Comparative Study," Hayama Missionary Seminar, 1982, 33.

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ρτία

# Your feet are disgusting!

*But Jesus's feet are not!  
How Jesus cleanses our guilt and shame*

By Rod Thomas

John 12 and 13 both have foot-washing stories. Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus's feet with ointment and wipes them with her hair, and Jesus washes the disciples' feet. These stories might be related, don't you think?

Mary, who delighted to sit at Jesus's feet, seemed to be one of the few followers who believed in the crucifixion and resurrection. Perhaps because of her understanding and as a sign of gratitude, love, and humility, she anointed him with oil and washed his feet with her tears. To her, Jesus was to be worshipped, and even his feet were beautiful. The disciples, however, felt this was unseemly and extravagant. But Jesus defended Mary and established her as a model to be remembered wherever the gospel would be preached (Mark 14:9).

We who know more than Mary about Jesus's saving work should love him at least as much. Jesus is the spotless Son of God and is worthy to have his feet washed with our tears and anointed with precious ointment. His entire being is glorious, and every facet of his nature is perfect. No sacrifice is too great for him. He is the unending spring of all our joy and blessings. There is nothing shameful about him. And he is the one who later washed the disciples' feet. Peter expressed his discomfort at this: "Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share with me'" (John 13:8 ESV).

To have the holy Son of God wash his feet made him ashamed. But Jesus

insisted, using the symbolism of this cleansing to show that there was no salvation for Peter without Jesus's sacrifice. This foot washing was symbolic of his death on the cross by which our sins are washed away. Christians have always spoken about being washed in the blood of the Lamb. Exactly so! This is the true significance of the foot washing in John 13. Jesus cleansed our guilt and shame by dying for our sins.

## What is shame?

Shame can be defined as a feeling of intense discomfort at being ugly, dirty, sinful, or lacking in something important. We read of it first in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:7 we read that Adam and Eve felt shame, because they had sinned and were naked. So their shame was directly caused by their guilt. We read of shame



at the general resurrection: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Here, too, the connection with guilt is obvious. On Judgement Day, unforgiven sinners without Christ will be fully exposed to the anger of God in its full horror. What shame!

Between these two events in this present age, we feel shame for a range of minor things, for example, “I have caused a scandal,” “my nose is too big,” “my shirt is dirty,” “I failed my exam,” “I’m 25 and still unmarried,” “I’m different,” etc. You can decide if shame in these cases is appropriate, but these are undeniably minor issues compared to our guilt before God. If you understand that and receive forgiveness through the gospel of Jesus Christ, all other minor causes of shame will fall into their proper perspective.

## Ashamed of Jesus?

Sometimes our shame is plainly wrong. The New Testament has many warnings not to be ashamed of Jesus: “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the

testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:7–8).

This fear is in all of us. We are afraid of people and by nature ashamed of the gospel. What is this cowardice? It is the fear of man. Some brave men who are unafraid of dangerous adventure sports or even modern warfare do not have the moral courage to stand up to wrongdoing and criminal behaviour. And some who do have the moral courage to stand up for some good cause in the world entirely lack gospel boldness. In short, we do not tell the gospel. Why? Because we are afraid of people.

Now Paul tells us that God did not give us this fear of man. It is emphatically not from God. Yet how often we excuse our fear of man by calling it spiritual names like “wisdom” or “tact” or “love”. Paul tells us that this fear is induced by shame.

Paul warns Timothy not to be “ashamed of the testimony about our Lord”. In other words, do not be ashamed of preaching Jesus as Saviour and Lord. To be ashamed of Jesus Christ is shockingly inappropriate. It’s the same as saying that our beautiful Saviour and victorious Lord is ugly, sinful, and a failure. If we do this we call good evil, white black, and night day. No wonder the Lord so absolutely condemns it (Luke 9:26). Instead, the Holy Spirit teaches us to glory in the gospel and to boast in the cross (Gal. 6:14).

## False shame

Paul also warns Timothy not to be ashamed of him in prison and in general to share in the suffering for the gospel. Why would Timothy be ashamed of Paul in prison? Because prison is for bad people, and so in

most people’s judgement, Paul must be bad (see 2 Tim. 2:9—“for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal”). An extension of this is shame of suffering in general. It is human nature to despise those who suffer as bad people suffering the judgement of God. Job experienced this from his three friends and eloquently expressed it (see Job 12:5, 16:20, 30:10). The disciples assumed the man born blind must have had sinful parents or sinned himself (John 9:2). The crowd assumed that disasters strike those who are more sinful than others (Luke 13:2, 4).

When we lose sight of the cross and forget that Jesus suffered mocking and shame for us, our value system becomes distorted and worldly. So let us glory in Jesus Christ, and as we teach the gospel in this land, let us pray that God will transform us and those who hear us to be like him. May we share his values and sit at his feet like Mary. **JH**

*Rod Thomas, OMF missionary and author of Gospel Boldness, pastors Sendai Evangelical Christian Church. He came to Japan in 1987, and he’s learned not to put his feet on tables or point them at guests.*

# A Japanese theologian's perspective on suffering

*Honor and shame  
in Kitamori's*

Theology of the Pain of God

“You mock my pain!” the princess berates the man in black.

“Life is pain, Highness,” the man in black offers, his gloved hands folded behind his head. “Anyone who says differently is selling something.”<sup>1</sup>

So goes one iconic interaction from *The Princess Bride*, a movie close to so many of our hearts. And yet we often dismiss the early musings of our jaded antihero who quickly turns his gaze from existential suffering to true love. I submit that most of us do the same. Victory, optimism, and celebration are prominent in this beloved film and are also hallmarks of Western culture; we love a winner! Losing, pessimism, and grief, on the other hand, make for glum companions. For Western missionaries, evangelism often rides along the same cheerful highways; Christ’s suffering makes an early appearance, but with glorious victory on the horizon, we say in the spirit of Prince Humperdink from *The Princess Bride*, “Skip to the end!”

Meanwhile, in Japan, instead of *The Princess Bride*, the hearts of the people are touched by the forty-seven ronin.<sup>2</sup> In perhaps the most Japanese of stories, an honored samurai is goaded by an upstart bureaucrat into committing a capital offense. The samurai is killed, and his subordinates are scattered and fall into lives of vagrancy and dishonor. After a year, all seems forgotten. But when their return is least expected, we find that their demise was a ruse! The forty-seven masterless swordsmen returned to avenge the insult done to

their leader, killing his antagonist and being allowed an honorable death by ritual suicide. The story never fails to produce tears.

When I look at the tale of the forty-seven ronin next to *The Princess Bride*, the amount of time spent on suffering compared to hope is astounding. The Western hero laughs in the face of a shameful defeat while the Japanese heroes embrace their shamed existence. Perhaps this is why Western missionaries find Kazoh Kitamori’s *Theology of the Pain of God* so unpalatable. Perhaps it is also why many Japanese find Western theology to be the same. While Kitamori’s book is certainly dense, I would suggest that there is much in it for Western thinkers to gain as we seek to convey the beauty of the gospel to the Japanese people and broaden our own understanding of an infinitely beautiful God.

## What is the “pain” of God?

What is salvation? Kitamori writes, “Salvation is the message that our God enfolds our broken reality. A God who embraces us completely—this is God our Savior. Is there a more astonishing miracle in the world than that God embraces our broken reality?”<sup>3</sup> The pain of God is God embracing our broken reality. Just as a person who grasps a handful of razor-sharp seashells can’t do so without causing injury to themselves, so God takes our pain upon himself when he enfolds our broken reality. “It is obvious that a God who does not embrace is a God without pain.”<sup>4</sup> For Kitamori, the love of God collides

with the wrath of God, producing the pain of God, which is most visible at Calvary. God’s love for sinners, for that which must not be loved, causes God to take on his own wrath on the loved sinner’s behalf. The concept is a lot like penal substitutionary atonement but less lawyerly.

## Three orders of love

In chapter 10 of his book, following Augustine and Pascal, Kitamori systematizes the love of God using *ordo amoris*, orders of love. For Kitamori there are three: the love of God, the pain of God, and love rooted in the pain of God. The first order, the love of God, is God’s love for the deserving, or at least for those who are not disqualified. This is most easily seen in intra-trinitarian love between the Father and the Son and the Spirit. It also describes the love of God for humanity before the arrival of sin in the world. It is right and good for a loving God to love that which has not lost God’s favor.

The second order, the pain of God, is the result of God’s response to human rebellion: “Love betrayed can only turn to anger. When love is confronted with duplicity, it becomes angry and rejects its object.”<sup>5</sup> By all accounts, it would have been right and good for God to destroy those that betrayed his love. But “God did not repulse those who should be repulsed; he enfolds and embraced them. God appears to become spineless!”<sup>6</sup> Here is where Kitamori’s contribution to a Japanese understanding of honor and shame really shines through. In forgiving those

that shouldn't be forgiven, God himself accepts shame.

To the devout older son, the father who joyfully welcomed back his prodigal son must have seemed spineless (Luke 15:28). Thus God suffered pain in his forgiveness. 'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart is troubled for him' (Jer. 31:20). This pain appeared in the shame of the cross which God accepted in the person of his Son.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the pain of God is the result of the collision of the wrath of God against sinners and the love of God for sinners. In Christ's death, our pain is healed by the pain of God.

Kitamori classifies the third order as love rooted in the pain of God. As the first order of love, immediate love, is only proper for sinless parties, a mediator is necessary for disqualified parties, or sinners, to receive God's love. The mediator is Jesus, achieved through his death on the cross. This mediation is the pain of God, which paved the way for sinners to be loved by God once again and become beneficiaries of love rooted in the pain of God.

The cross of the Lord is a sheltering rock from the tempest, a hiding-place in the desert. When we are within the pain of God, we are protected. How does this happen? What actually smites and destroys us is the wrath of God. But the 'pain of God' results from the love of the one who intercepts and blocks his wrath toward us, the one who is himself smitten by his wrath.<sup>8</sup>

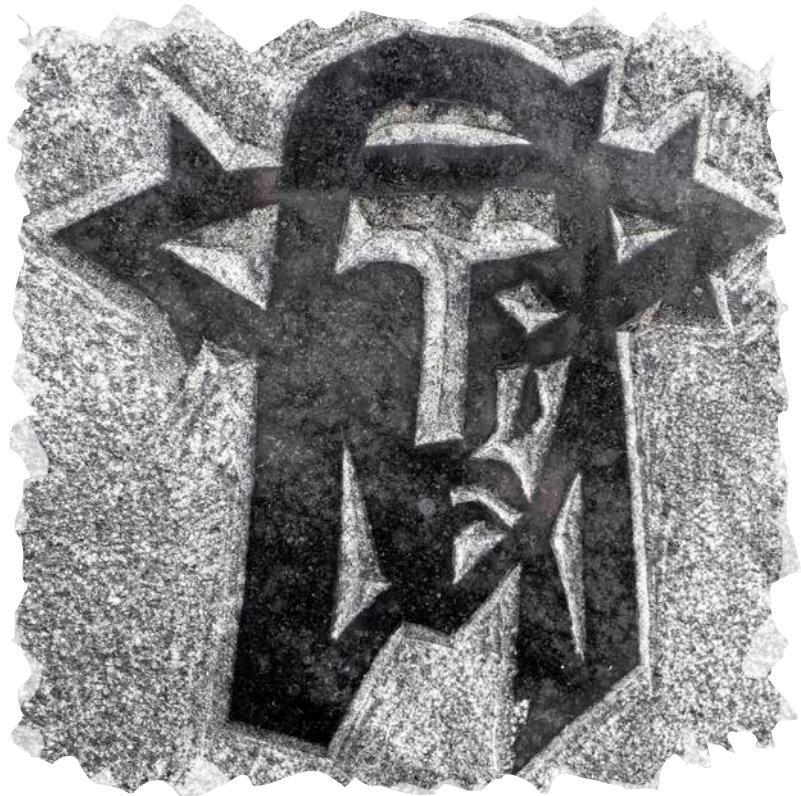
Simply put, this third order, which qualifies sinners for God's love is possible because of the pain God accepted on our behalf. God's love drives him towards us, which causes him pain.

## Honor and shame in Kitamori's theology

There are two prominent blessings within the framework of the honor-shame gospel presentation: status reversal and group incorporation. Within Kitamori's book, we see these elements but with a Japanese flair. In status reversal, a redeemed person's shame is removed, and they are

given honor by their new position in Christ. While these concepts are true in their mooring to God's perspective, Kitamori takes a much more practical and immediate approach to honor and shame. He makes multiple references to the book of Hosea as it clearly illustrates the shame of a rejected and cheated-upon spouse. Hosea marries a sex worker and raises multiple children born of infidelity. It's rare for someone to name their child Hosea because, honestly, nobody looks at him as a role model. But Kitamori indirectly points out that we should. In a remarkable

hope of glory, Kitamori gives readers a tangible way to identify with Christ in the midst of the sufferings of everyday life. We can bear the shame of being wronged and forgive as we have been forgiven. While Western theologians are tempted to skip to the end and talk about glory and perfection, Kitamori positively savors the hard road of the Christian in this world that mirrors the hard road that Jesus walked. The road is difficult, but the group association with a God that loves that which must not be loved and forgives that which cannot be forgiven by embracing our



twist to the typical honor-shame paradigm, Kitamori shows that we achieve group incorporation by shouldering shame as Christ did. When Christians forgive those who sin against us, we love that which must not be loved (e.g., God loving sinners and Hosea loving his wayward wife). This identifies us with Christ, and we achieve group incorporation; we do what Christians do because it is what Christ does. Our group incorporation is achieved by accepting shame as God does. According to Kitamori, in this way, our pain is healed by the pain of God.

I have called Kitamori's approach practical and immediate because, rather than focusing on an eschatological

broken reality and healing our pain with his pain is a refrain that speaks to the Japanese sentiment and, upon proper reflection, to mine as well. **JH**

1. *The Princess Bride*, directed by Rob Reiner (1924; Beverly Hills, California: MGM, 1987), DVD.
2. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forty-seven\\_rōnin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forty-seven_rōnin)
3. Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 5th ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 20.
4. *Ibid.*, 23.
5. *Ibid.*, 118.
6. *Ibid.*, 119.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 123.

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# Jesus is our model in discipleship

Our cultural context influences how we minister, but our eyes should remain fixed on Christ

By Hallur Mortensen

Wherever missionaries go, one of their main tasks will likely be discipleship training. However, a question the missionary encounters is whether discipleship and discipleship mentoring will necessarily look the same everywhere.

Japanese culture has been labelled as a shame culture since Ruth Benedict's famous *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) was published immediately after the war. Notwithstanding her oversimplifications, such as her unnecessary juxtaposition of external shame and internal guilt, Benedict did identify the avoidance of shame as an important social phenomenon that affects people's behaviour. While her interpretation has been both celebrated and challenged, the notion that shame and honour are influential in Japanese society is still true and thus relevant for those who want to be and make disciples of Jesus in Japan.<sup>1</sup>

## Discipleship and values

The main purpose of this article is to ask how a context of honour and shame could affect, whether for good or bad, those who would live as disciples of Jesus. As missionaries, we surely desire both to live as disciples and make disciples. But how do we help and encourage others on their journey of following Jesus? How do we teach and train new believers in cultures that are different from our own?

Definitions of bad and good behaviour differ among cultures. This is not to argue for relativity, for although there are clear absolute standards, there may be differences in how they are applied in various cultures. For example, what does it mean to honour one's parents? Or what constitutes lying? Especially, the commands to love

your neighbour (Mark 12:31) and the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) will need to find culturally appropriate expressions in every place.

We must also be alert to how values such as space and time, punctuality and cleanliness, family, treatment of animals, smoking, and gluttony vary between different cultures. It is too easy to just assume that our values are the biblical ones. In Japan, how should a believer view anger? Communal discord? Kinship obligations? Preserving peace and harmony? Giving honour and shame? These are all biblical virtues or vices that may very well be taken more seriously by Japanese followers of Jesus than by Westerners, and these may affect how one lives as a follower of Jesus in Japan. What if my own Western set of values and virtues is actually detrimental to my Japanese mentee's life and witness? How do I refrain from inadvertently imposing my own culture and values on Japanese believers? I suggest that a conscious imitation of Christ would give us a way forward.

## Discipleship as imitation of Christ

The imitation of Christ is a powerful vision of discipleship that is relevant to every culture. It proposes that the New Testament Gospels are not merely a recollection of Jesus' teaching or a neutral account of his life; they proclaim who he is and present him as a model to imitate. This is in accordance with the typical function of biographies in Greek culture where the virtuous lives of great men were "a significant factor in the training of moral character."<sup>2</sup>

Besides Christology, discipleship is a key theme in the Gospels. But while the twelve disciples are not always ideal

examples of discipleship, it is ultimately Jesus himself who is the true model worthy of imitation. As Peter reminds his readers, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21, NRSV). The imitation of Christ, becoming like him in character and virtue, honours him.

## Discipleship in Japan

In East Asia, the idea of a master is a very important concept for teaching and mentoring—the focus is on personal learning. The goal of the training is not simply to achieve a certain result; it is a matter of being and becoming. In Japanese training—whether in kendo, archery, or calligraphy—the training and mastery of form is highly significant. One might hit the bullseye, but if the form is wrong, the sensei will not be satisfied. The disciple learns from the master to be and do things in a certain way that honours both the craft and the master. On the contrary, failure to follow the master is likely to induce feelings of shame.

## Redefinition of honour and shame

While the mentoring ideals found in the New Testament are culturally relevant for ancient Greece and Israel, as well as contemporary Japan, it may also, in fact, prove to be countercultural in content because the actual teaching of Jesus can also be contrary to cultural norms.

God is the ultimate arbiter of good and bad, right and wrong, as well as what is honourable and shameful. Jesus, with his word and deeds, demonstrates the ultimate good and what is honourable and, thus, also the meaning

of true discipleship. This has the potential to subvert both Western and Japanese values. Disciples of Jesus in any culture might well find themselves to be countercultural when they re-evaluate true honour and shame in light of Jesus' example. True virtue and honour is to imitate Jesus while sin and shame is a failure to emulate him. Believers from honour and shame contexts may be particularly well-tuned to hear such connotations in Jesus' life and ministry while Westerners may have cultural blind spots and could benefit from the insights of our sisters and brothers from different cultures.

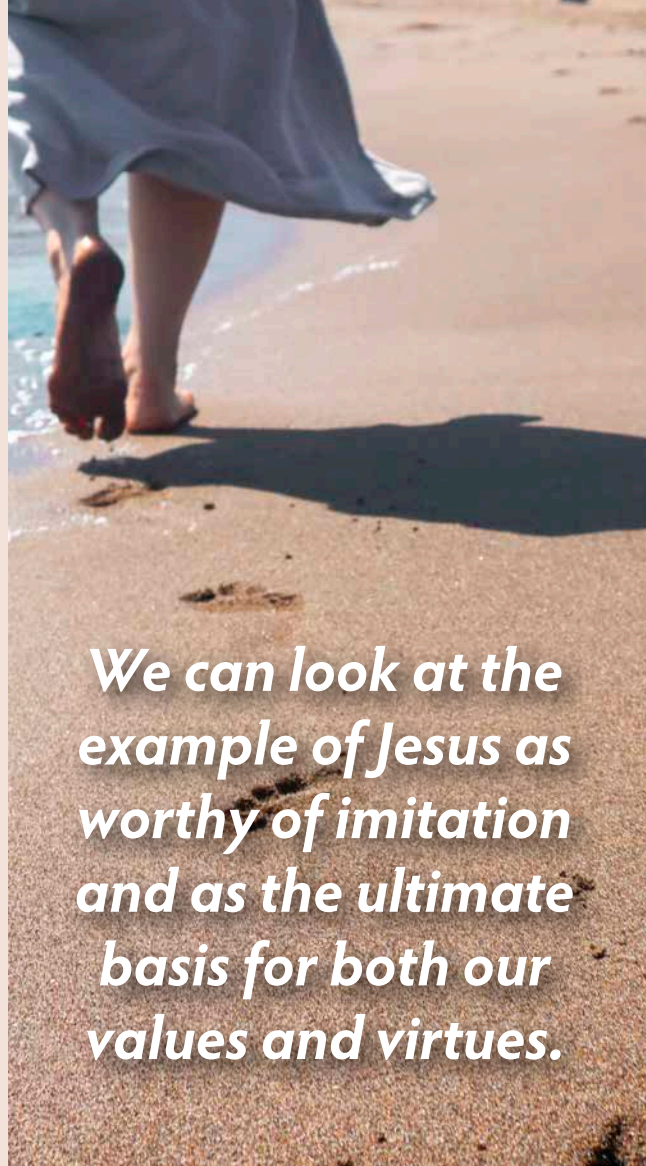
### Discipleship is more than ethics

The question is perhaps not so much how Christian discipleship is fundamentally different in various cultures. The difference is simply in the way that discipleship is carried out in practice. The command to love and the fruit of the Spirit are the same everywhere, but the way they are applied in specific situations would be different. For instance, kindness in an honour and shame context might involve refraining from shaming someone. To love someone may include honouring him or her.

To be a Christian is, in essence, to be a disciple and imitator of Jesus, the master and model. The disciple is committed to Jesus as a person and not simply his teaching. In fact, being a disciple of Jesus is more than simply a question of right and wrong or ethics. It is a matter of being and becoming like him. It is a matter of imitating Jesus appropriately in the context we are in, which affects our identity, community, and ministry.

### Community and identity

While each Christian is a disciple individually, discipleship also has a communal dimension. Disciples of Jesus are not intended to be disciples alone or to trek solo. This has special



We can look at the example of Jesus as worthy of imitation and as the ultimate basis for both our values and virtues.

relevance in honour and shame cultures which are more community oriented. Now, in Christ, there can be no differentiation based on former evaluations of worth which were based on their society's values. Rather, all are reflecting the honour of their master and honour him by giving public allegiance to him. Evangelism and discipleship must change the identity of the person, first as disciples of the master Jesus and then as fellow disciples with others. Once a person's primary identity has changed, honour and shame are redefined according to the new community and ultimately in light of the example of Jesus.

Shame is also closely correlated to a person's moral responsibility to his or her group. The fact that the disciple lives and learns in community with other disciples encourages that person to imitate Jesus better. However, if someone "lets the group down" or struggles to live according to his or her identity as a follower of Jesus, this

moral dissonance can cause experiences of shame, whether psychologically, socially, or before God. The desire to avoid shame and gain honour from God thus has the potential to be a formative power for Christlikeness.

### Ministry

If we, and those among whom we minister, want to live as disciples and followers of Jesus, his ministry must surely be an example for us. We would do well to share the gospel, which justifies the unrighteous and honours the dishonourable, with the most shamed in our society. These groups may be the same across many cultures—criminals, sex workers, drug addicts, and the homeless. In Japan, there are also specific groupings of people shamed or excluded by society, such as the *burakumin*.<sup>3</sup>

### Epilogue

Jesus is our ultimate model and mentor, and just as he suffered shame, those who follow him may also be shamed in their society. Contexts where the social function of shame and honour are more pronounced can have significant implications for what it looks like to be and make disciples of Jesus. But we can look at the example of Jesus as worthy of imitation and as the ultimate basis for both our values and virtues, which will be a testimony to all around as we imitate him. JH

1. However, it has increasingly been recognized that experiences of shame are also prevalent in the West. Cf. the work of Brené Brown.
2. David B. Capes, "Imitatio Christi and the Gospel Genre", *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (2003), 6.
3. Burakumin are descendants of outcastes during the Edo era who had occupations considered to be associated with *kegare* (穢れ, "defilement"), such as undertakers, butchers, or tanners. Burakumin can be victims of severe discrimination and ostracism.

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# How to restore honour with the gospel

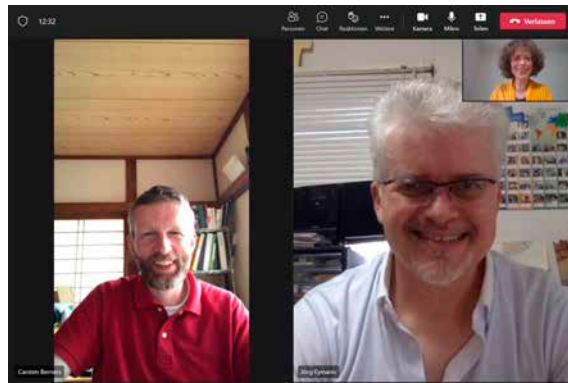
By  
Carsten Berners,  
Jörg Eymann,  
and Judith Ricken

Three missionaries from Germany learned together  
about shame and how to preach about it

In summer 2021 German Alliance Mission (GAM) started a think tank—a place to just jot down ideas and think widely. Three members (Jörg Eymann, Carsten Berners, and Judith Ricken) participated. They decided to dig into “contextualization,” specifically how to present the gospel in Japan in a way that it can be culturally understood. After reading various books on the topic, each member of the think tank selected a Bible passage about honour and shame to share with the think tank. This article is a summary of some of the ideas they discovered and talked about.

## Judith: concept of shame

I remember the first time I shared Romans 3:24 with Japanese university students: “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (ESV). Excited, I said, “You are justified!”—and was met by blank faces. The students had no wish or desire to be justified and therefore couldn’t rejoice about the fact that they were. I pondered this for weeks. How do I present the gospel if justification is not desired? When on furlough in Germany, I asked a Japanese friend who lived in Germany for more than 20 years. He said, “I don’t want to be justified. It is clear that I am a sinner—



I want to be accepted.” Coming from Martin Luther’s inheritance, I was stunned and wondered if you could even be a Christian without a clear understanding of justification by grace.

I decided to dive into the topic and discovered that forgiveness is the answer to guilt, but honour is the answer to shame. I read *The Global Gospel*<sup>1</sup> where Werner Mischke explains that shame is more harmful than guilt because if you feel guilty, you can apologize and receive forgiveness. But the person feeling shame cannot “un-shame” him/herself. They need a person from outside giving them honour, accepting them into the group, reinstating their status.

Part of the problem is that shame is a kind of taboo word in Japan. I learned the Japanese word for sin (罪 *tsumi*) in my third week in Japan. It took many years for me to learn the

word for shame (恥 *haji*), but even when I finally learned it, I never heard it mentioned. This puzzled me. My Japanese coworkers explained that it is felt deeply but not necessarily verbalized. Some students might not even connect what they feel with the word “haji”. It seems shameful to even talk about it. So people who feel ashamed remain hidden, and it is hard to recognize or find them. Many people also carry a sense of shame without expressing or identifying it.

Furthermore, for a person who feels guilt, it is possible to distance themselves from their sin. We perceive sin as a deed. “I *have* sinned,” we say in English. Whereas the person who feels shame most often doesn’t feel shame for a deed but rather in their entire being. “I *am* ashamed” is the expression used. That’s why the force of shame and its destructive power is stronger than that of feeling guilt.

Werner Mischke wrote that the topic of shame is far more often mentioned in the Bible than the topic of sin. This puzzled our think tank as again the word “shame” doesn’t appear so often. Shame and honour are often in stories, expressed through images and not through the literal word “shame.” Mischke shared a list of words that express the concept of shame without



using the term. Most of these words are relational in character: for example, Father, honour, accepted, renewed, and crowned.<sup>2</sup>

Psalm 113 has been on my mind for a long time, and so I chose it to study for this think tank. Often when we don't reach the same level as others or don't reach what we perceive as the common standard, we feel unworthy. We think things like: "Everyone is married but me, everyone has children but me, everyone has a position of influence but me". After praising God and proclaiming his greatness, Psalm 113 talks about God who "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (Ps. 113: 7-9 ESV).

Coming from a guilt culture (Germany), I realized that this feeling of "not fulfilling the standard" is indeed shame. But in this Psalm, God fulfills the standard for the poor and needy and also for the barren woman. In those days barrenness was a huge shame. We read how Hannah suffered from it in 1 Samuel 1.

The images in Psalm 113 are so vivid it is easy to imagine. Images from stories like Joseph, who was taken from prison and made the second-most important man in the state within mere moments of having explained the dreams to the pharaoh. This is not a rags-to-riches story where someone slowly works himself up in society, where the poor refugee becomes a famous doctor. The biblical promise is different: the poor and needy person is taken by God and put in the midst of princes, among the noble of his society and treated *as if* he belonged there! Wouldn't that be amazing if you or I suddenly found ourselves among the noblest of the city—not as an outsider but as a cherished member? That is what God is doing for us. He takes our

"lack" away, that failure to fulfill the standard that makes us feel ashamed and unworthy.

After I presented my Bible passage and explanation, we thought, *Yes, this is great news, but how does it influence and change the lives of Japanese people who might be bullied by their co-workers or who indeed are childless among mothers?* I think imaginative prayer is really helpful to grasp this new reality. It helps to imagine myself on the ash heap, a place that poor people could sleep to get warm, and not even daring to enter the city gate thinking myself unworthy of normal society. And then suddenly there is a tap on my shoulder, Jesus smiles at me and I find myself

A Japanese pastor once told me, "In Japan, if you make a big mistake, there is no forgiveness, no second chance for you." But the God of the Bible is a God of second, third, fourth chances, of forgiveness.

dressed in robes among the noble of my society and everyone is eager to include me in the topic they're currently discussing. How amazing that would be! And yes, indeed that is what happened. God invited me into his kingdom where I have an important role and he shows me that he cherishes my presence every day. I still live on earth, but my citizenship is indeed in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Carsten worked the "status change" out in more depth.

### Carsten: from strangers to citizens

For our meeting I read the book *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures* by Jason Georges and Mark D. Baker. It gave me some essential insights into this interesting topic.

Sentences like "The removal of shame and the restoration of honor lies at the center of God's salvation"<sup>3</sup> really widened my understanding of

this theme. For missionaries serving in Japan, knowing about honour and shame is of utmost importance because we encounter this way of thinking in our daily lives.

When I was doing my internship in a church in Nagoya, the Japanese pastor shared that in his view, for many Japanese "belonging comes before believing". There were some people in church at this time who were not Christians yet. But it was obvious that they enjoyed the warm atmosphere at the church. We often sat together after lunch talking about many different topics. I am convinced that this fellowship helped some of the guests to become Christians.

I chose a text from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" (2:19 NIV). I especially find the fundamental differences between the two central pairs "foreigners/strangers" vs. "fellow citizens with

God's people/members of his household" eye-opening for our study of honour and shame.

I approached the text in the form of a spiritual meditation, noting associations that came to mind while looking at these four central words (foreigners, strangers, fellow citizens, members of his household). I believe for many missionaries these expressions ring a bell.

The expression "foreigner" (他国人 *takokujin*) led me to think about when and where I am a foreigner. How do I feel being foreign to some place?

Missionaries all over the world can easily connect with this term. Since I am from Germany, I am a foreigner in this beautiful country of Japan. This is not my place of birth, and even after many years of serving as a missionary in Japan, some cultural aspects are still foreign to me. I look like a foreigner, I speak Japanese like a foreigner, and my whole appearance makes it

immediately obvious that I am not from this country.

“Strangers” (寄留者 *kiryūsha*): How does this word sound to me? What are some of the thoughts that I connect with this term? Is there anybody in the world who likes to be called a stranger?

This term is familiar to me as well. I am a stranger in Japan, and I feel like an outsider, which sometimes can be a painful experience.

The second pair is very different: “fellow citizens with God’s people” (聖徒たちと同じ国民であり *seitotachi to onaji kokumin de ari*) and “members of his household” (神の家族 *kami no kazoku*).

In comparison to the first two groups of people, these men and women have more rights and privileges. They have more protection and can easily access other members of their family. Being called a “fellow citizen with God’s people” sounds clearly like an honour to me.

Finally, the expression “members of his household” is a wonderful description of our state of belonging to God’s family. What a privilege it is to be described like that! The Japanese translation underlines this truth in a direct way: (神の家族 *kami no kazoku*) God’s family!

## Jörg: the God of second chances

For my Bible passage, I chose the story of Jacob (Genesis 25–35). We all know this story of honour and shame. Jacob disinherits his older brother, Esau, and dishonours his old, honourable father, Isaac. He changes the order of succession that no one was ever allowed to change in this ancient society. He brings shame on the whole family and becomes a disgrace to the entire clan. He should be severely punished for his shameful acts and be cast out of the community never to return. Esau wanted to kill Jacob, so Jacob flees.

Are we (as Westerners) aware of how shameful and hurtful his behaviour really was? Do we understand how shocking this story might be for our Japanese friends? And another thing: Where is God in the story? What does he think about Jacob’s shameful and

deceitful behaviour? Later, he calls himself the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”. How is that possible?

Before Jacob flees from Esau’s anger, something extraordinary happens: Although Isaac was badly deceived by his son Jacob, he blessed him a second time. “May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers” (Gen. 28:3 NIV) Why? When Rebekah was pregnant, the twins were already fighting in her womb. “Why is this happening to me?” she asked.

God answered, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Gen. 25:22–23 NIV). Surely Isaac heard of this story and was aware that God had elected the younger son over the elder.

Hebrews 11:20 says that Isaac prayed in faith for the blessing of Jacob and Esau (see, the order has been changed!) in regard to their future. Isaac needed faith in God’s provision and guidance when, as patriarch of the clan, he was deceived and hurt by the shameful behaviour of his son Jacob. He needed faith to forgive Jacob and to give him a second chance because he trusted in the God of the second chance. He trusted that the LORD could use bad to bring forth good.

## Conclusion

**Judith:** I was surprised how easily I could relate to many things we discovered about shame. Germany is often classified as a guilt culture, and I still think that is the main feeling I have. But shame is universal and a feeling everyone can relate to. In the Japanese honour-shame culture, it is all the more important to address this topic in our sermons and everyday conversations. How to do so wisely whilst knowing that shame is rarely spoken about remains a challenge, and I hope we will continue to find new ways to restore the honour of our Japanese friends and teammates.

**Carsten:** I was delighted to study with my teammates in the think tank about honour and shame. Be-

ing restored from a position of shame into a state of honour, being called a member of God’s family, is a wonderful way of describing that we belong to the living God.

**Jörg:** From the story of Jacob, I have learned the following truths that help me to share the gospel within a culture of honour and shame:

1. God is sovereign. He has the authority to challenge cultural values and social standards, including honour-shame cultures like Japan.
2. God uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect plans.
3. A Japanese pastor once told me, “In Japan, if you make a big mistake, there is no forgiveness, no second chance for you.” But the God of the Bible is a God of second, third, fourth chances of forgiveness.
4. Like Isaac, I often do not understand God’s plans and his way of leading people, so I need an “Anyway Faith”, a faith that trusts in God’s goodness and wisdom without understanding and knowing everything. I need to learn to trust that God is good and can make good out of bad, even shameful things (Rom. 8:28). **JH**

1. Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World*, (Scottsdale, Arizona: Mission ONE, 2014).

2. Werner Mischke, “Four steps—and a free guide—to help you read the Bible in the language of honour and shame,” *Culture Learner*, <https://werner-mischke.org/2013/01/28/read-the-bible-in-the-language-of-honor-and-shame-in-four-steps/> (January 28, 2013).

3. Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 24.

Zoom screenshot submitted by authors

*Carsten Berners is a missionary of the German Alliance Mission (GAM), serving in Nagoya. He and wife Iris have served in Japan since 2003.*

*Jörg Eymann has served together with his wife, Dorothea, with GAM since 1997. In partnership with a Japanese pastor, they are leading the Ai Hope Church in Inazawa, Aichi-Ken, and have just started a disciple-making ministry.*

*Judith Ricken (GAM) lives in Nagoya and ministers with KGK to university students. She enjoys reading, hiking, and meeting with friends.*

# Live Your Faith Be Excellent at Work

## Who are we?

Orient Strategy exists to impact the work culture of Japan with the Gospel. Our aim is to model Biblical values through demonstrating both grace and professional excellence. Our vision is to “plant” other companies that share this same basic DNA, transforming Japan one startup at a time. Through our work with business partners and clients we are able to live out our faith in a practical way and in the process develop organizational culture that is healthy, vibrant and balanced. While not expressly “Christian” in the products that we provide, our companies seek to earn the right to speak about who we are by providing high quality professional services that meet people’s specific needs, regardless of their beliefs, background or situation.

オリент・ストラテジー株式会社は、聖書の価値観を基盤とした企業として、恵みとプロフェッショナルリズムのバランスを取ることで、日本の社会や働き方に福音を届けることを目的としています。私たちのビジョンは企業・組織を立ち上げ、一つ一つの企業を通して日本社会に影響をもたらす、質の高いサービスや商品をお客様に届け、信仰を具体的な形で示し、健全で、生き生きとした、バランスの取れた文化を作ることを目指しています。



## Interested in joining one of our teams?

### Interviewer (Focus Group Facilitator) インタビュアー(フォーカス・グループ・ファシリテーター)

**Orient Market Insight** is a market research agency specializing in the healthcare space. Our interviewer's role is to engage with research participants and uncover clinical, social, and emotional insights that will become the key to unlocking marketing strategies for pharmaceutical clients. This full-time, paid position is based in Kobe and will involve facilitating market research interviews with doctors and patients and creating strategic reports for clients.

### Child Psychologist 小児科 臨床心理士

The **KENTO Center** works with families and schools in the Kansai area to provide educational and therapeutic support for kids with special needs. We are looking for an additional child psychologist who is certified to do psychological/developmental evaluations (e.g. WISC, WPPSI, ADOS, BASC, etc.) as well as provide counseling and therapeutic services for English-speaking children. This full-time, paid position is based in Kobe and would part of a small team of professionals serving the community in Kansai.

### Translator/Interpreter 翻訳者・通訳者

**LAMPS** is a translation and interpretation firm specializing in the healthcare and marketing space. Interpreters and translators help interpret interviews and translate several types of documents related to market research. Help bridge the gap of language and culture, optimizing the communication between companies and healthcare professionals. This full-time, paid position is based in Kobe and will involve interpreting market research interviews and/or translating market research documents from English into Japanese, or vice versa.

### Barista バリスタ

**MOYO Coffee** is looking for baristas who are passionate about serving great coffee and loving people. MOYO is located on Rokko Island and shares a space with the KENTO Center, interacting with their clients as well as members of the local community. These paid positions are based in Kobe and will involve creating coffee, as well as managing the operations of the cafe and planning events to reach those in the community.

## For Inquiries

Info@OrientStrategy.com

OrientMarketInsight.com

MoyoCoffee.jp

LAMPS-LSP.com

KentoCenter.org

# What you told JEMA about member care

Results from the 2022 member care survey

By Alan Steier

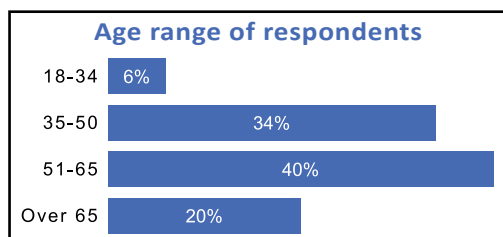
Ed Koch (d. 2013) was a three-term mayor (1978-1989) when New York City was in deep financial trouble. Koch brought the Big Apple from the brink and injected new hope. He had a penchant for going out to the streets of New York and engaging folks with his trademark, “How’m I doin’?” He wanted to hear how his administration was impacting everyday people on the street.

In January 2017, in preparation for speaking at JEMA Connect that year, I conducted a survey of missionaries in Japan on their perceptions of member care and shared insights from those results. Five years down the road, it seemed appropriate to do another “How’m I doin’?” update. What follows are the results of the 2022 JEMA Member Care Survey. Instead of summarizing the entire survey, I chose six points which stood out as the most relevant for evaluating member care in Japan, along with commentary and recommendations.

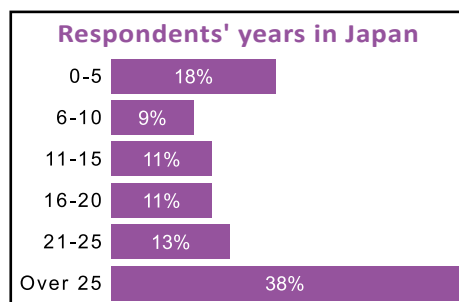
## Participants in the 2022 survey

The survey was taken by 157 people. The gender breakdown was even with 52% male and 48% female. Over three quarters of the participants were married.

The age range was a clear factor in the survey results. Only 6% of respondents were under 35 years of age, and 20% were over 65. There may be no clear reason for this distribution, but it indicates a need to creatively reach out to younger missionaries.



Another area of interest was the time spent serving in Japan. Over a third of respondents had spent over 25 years in Japan, with over a quarter having served in Japan for ten years or less. It is important to pay attention to the member care needs of people whether at the beginning or end of missionary service. This coincides with what I learned in my doctoral studies in member care, that those in the first term of service need more attention than those who are more experienced. New missionaries need support as they adjust to a new culture and language setting.



It is not that other groups don't need member care; they have just been able to adapt to ministry following their first term. At the end of a missionary career, tools for adjusting to their passport culture will allow them to land more softly into the place with which they may no longer be familiar.

A number of people didn't answer all the questions because the survey was weighted towards people who belonged to a mission organization. Those who consider themselves independent missionaries were unable to provide responses about being in an organization.

## Positive spiritual engagement

Being a missionary doesn't necessarily mean one has a vibrant spiritual life. The survey, however, revealed that 81% consider their spiritual lives as either “vibrant and alive” or “growing steadily.” Another 18% said their spiritual lives were “on again, off again,” and only two people said their spiritual life was “dry and lifeless.”

What keeps missionaries spiritually healthy and alive is often related to their spiritual practices. More positive news is that a full 81% noted that their spiritual practices had grown during missionary service. On the other hand, nearly 20% said that their practices remained unchanged or declined.

Staying healthy and resilient includes having spiritual friends, who can provide a sounding board and with whom missionaries can share. About half of the respondents said they have someone in Japan with whom they regularly share about their inner world. A fifth (19%) said they have at least one person elsewhere in the world. One in four said they “occasionally” unburden their heart to a friend or colleague, and 5% had “no one” with whom they can freely share.

## The reality of conflict

Whether working with a team of people from one's own culture or other cultures, conflict is sure to make its presence known sooner or later. Conflict within a mission organization is often given as a reason people leave the field. Responses to this question were generally positive, with conflict handled in intentional and healthy ways (27%) or through talking things out (50%). However, nearly a quarter of respondents felt left on their own or avoided conflict at all costs—which demonstrates that more work needs to be done in this area.

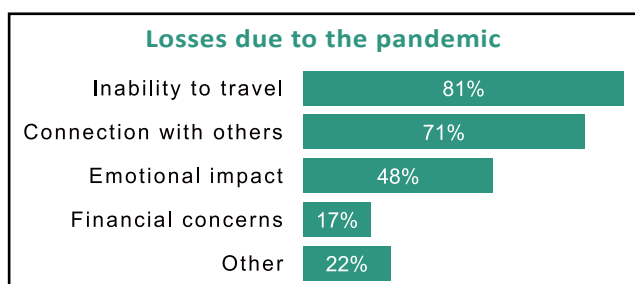
## Trust in leadership

While it may be one of the most important areas for members of an organization, trust in leadership is an area missionaries may have challenges with. Just over half of respondents felt personally valued and heard by leadership and could share freely with them. About one third noted that they trust their leadership but hesitate to share things of a personal or spiritual nature. Concerningly, 14% weren't sure their leaders had their personal well-being on their radar, but did trust them to do their best for the organization's goals. Only 2% believe there was a spirit of distrust in their organization.

The majority trust their leadership for general things within the organization e.g., crisis management, communication, general member care services, children's education, but the troubling statistic for me was that nearly one third didn't feel they would share things of a personal or spiritual nature. Although job descriptions may not necessarily be designed to include these things, relationships between people and their leaders must be built on mutual trust.

## Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic personally touched all missionaries to some extent. By far the greatest loss felt was the inability to travel, followed by connection with others, and emotional impact such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness.



We also asked about how a missionary experienced their mission organization's assistance. Of those who responded to the question, 46% said their organization had been a positive source of encouragement and help, being available for questions (28%), or at least minimally communicating with them regarding the pandemic (19%). However, 8% said that their organization didn't do much at all regarding the pandemic.

Whether or not their organization cared for people during the pandemic, missionaries had to find ways to cope. Most (62%) noted that they found various ways to cope emotionally, spiritually, and relationally as the pandemic dragged on. Over one third found a few ways to cope, about 1% had a difficult time coping, and 2% felt overwhelmed at times by the ongoing pandemic.

## More support or training requests

One question on the survey was about where missionaries desired more support or training. The results were surprisingly similar to the 2017 survey. The top request remained the same in 2022: "Opportunities for spiritual and physical refreshment." The next four selections in 2022 were 2)

staying connected to God in life-giving ways; 3) effective team relationships; 4) healthy conflict management and resolution; and 5) good cross-cultural communication. Clearly there is an ongoing desire for support and training in three vital areas of missionary service that relate to personal well-being, connection to God, and handling relational conflict well.

## Reflections on the results

1. While there are always ways to improve member care within organizations, the vast majority of responses were positive. The following quote characterizes much of the survey: "I'm so grateful to be part of an organization that takes member care seriously. I am sure that people fall through the gaps, but I have benefitted so much from what has been provided—from devotions to help with the pandemic to pastoral visits and support, and great TCK support."
2. We need a concerted and more creative effort to gauge what the younger generation is thinking in terms of member care. Very few of those who have recently arrived on the field participated in this survey, so it is difficult to know their needs.
3. In the busyness of missionary life, it is important to provide avenues of rest and renewal. The Still Waters and Refresh retreats demonstrate how important this is. Missionaries need times of quiet, periods of solitude for reflection on Scripture, fellowship with other missionaries, and times of worship. One means to providing rest and renewal is via retreats. One cannot continue to pour out of an empty cup. These types of opportunities need to be spread out throughout Japan to provide for as many missionaries as possible.
4. A key to longevity on the mission field often relates to the health of relationships: with God, with other missionaries, and with local churches. Finding ways to stay in intimate relationship with God seems so obvious, yet it can become a casualty of getting the job done. Also, dealing with conflict in healthy ways should be a priority of every organization's member care goals.
5. Future surveys need to be more inclusive of the entire missionary community, not just those who belong to mission organizations. Independent missionaries make up around 13% of the missionary community within JEMA (as reported in the 2021 directory).

If missionaries are to be cared for well so they can be healthy servants of Christ, then an Ed Koch gauge of "How'm I doin'" needs to be taken periodically. **JH**

1. "The importance of trust in leadership," *Journey to Leadership Blog*, <https://journeytoleadershipblog.com/2018/04/02/the-importance-of-trust-in-leadership> (April 2, 2018).
2. Anonymous response from the write-in section of the survey.
3. To view the full results, please go to this link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y2fPDm6XX\\_Sp2dMi\\_wbxBDz1bDF27ofj/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y2fPDm6XX_Sp2dMi_wbxBDz1bDF27ofj/view?usp=sharing)

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

# Still Waters Spiritual Retreat

*Have you ever wondered what a spiritual retreat might look like?*

**By Janet Dallman**

“Being able to get away for a few days and spend time at beautiful Lake Yamanaka was in itself refreshing, but attending the retreat enhanced the spiritual and physical refreshment I experienced.”

My husband, Peter, and I led the Still Waters Spiritual Retreat, at Yamanaka Chalet from 25–28 May, 2022, with 17 participants.

Our time was spent alone with God, as well as in small groups for reflection and prayer. The biblical reflections focused on the theme of ‘water’, and the retreat included time to share spiritual lessons, as well as to relax and play games.

We participated in Compline, a night service originating in the 6th century, and Lectio Divina, a style of Bible reading and meditation. Retreat participants also had the choice of participating in a:

- Spiritual Awareness Walk: using the five senses to engage with God’s creation and listen for his voice.
- Spiritual Collage: focusing on God through art.

This article shares reflections and comments from some retreat participants.

## Time carved out to listen to God

One person said, “What I appreciated about the retreat was the relaxed atmosphere and rhythm. There was a good balance of interaction with other ‘retreaters’ and time spent alone for personal reflection. Each morning we had a short session together as a group to focus our thoughts, followed by personal time to spend quietly meditating, listening to the Lord, journaling, and so on.”

Another wrote, “As with the rest of the world, the past two-and-a-half years have taken a toll on my life. I arrived at Still Waters weary and grieving, desiring a place to truly rest and process. Janet and Peter, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had prepared such a space. I appreciated the times of reflection and experiencing new spiritual practices. Each one who attended had a story to share and also provided a listening space. I was able to sit with the lover of my soul, cry and laugh, and just be in a beautiful place with fellow travelers on this journey.”

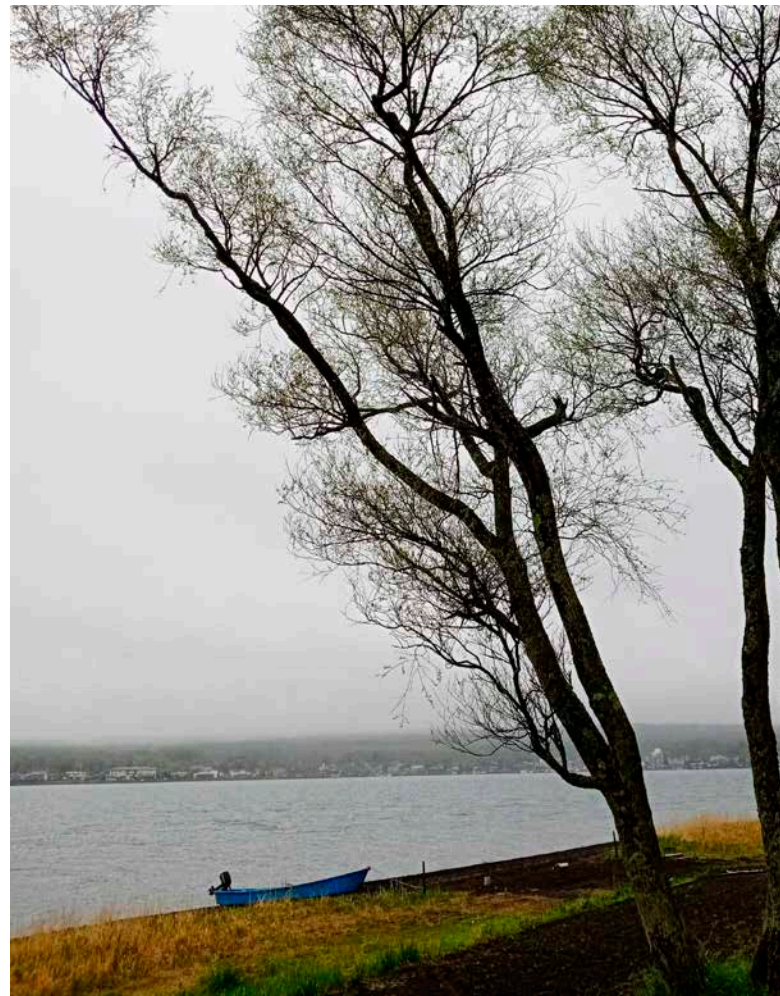
One person commenting on the Spiritual Awareness Walk said, “As I walked and observed the lake, the clouds, the birds, and trees on a blustery, rainy day, I could not see Mount Fuji because it was covered by clouds. [See photo at right.] God spoke to me about the storms of life and reminded me that, even though I could not see Mount Fuji, it was still there. In the same way, when I experience storms in my life, I may not always feel the presence of God, but he is always there. And just like I saw a glimpse of Mount Fuji

when there was a break in the clouds, if I look for God in the midst of difficulties, I can see glimpses of him working. Although these revelations were not new to me, the visual reminder gave me a deeper and more lasting impression that is staying with me.”

Reflecting on the cleansing rituals in the temple from Exodus 30, another participant wrote this poem:

### **The Bronze Basin**

The water falls  
and I want to flinch—no, not just flinch, but flee  
run away and take my shame-stained hands with me  
hide them from the gaze of God  
before Satan can accuse me  
but it is too late  
The water flows  
over my hands  
and through my soul  
washing away my shame into the depths of the sea  
hidden forever from the gaze of God  
Satan comes to accuse me  
but it is too late  
The water fills me  
and I am free.

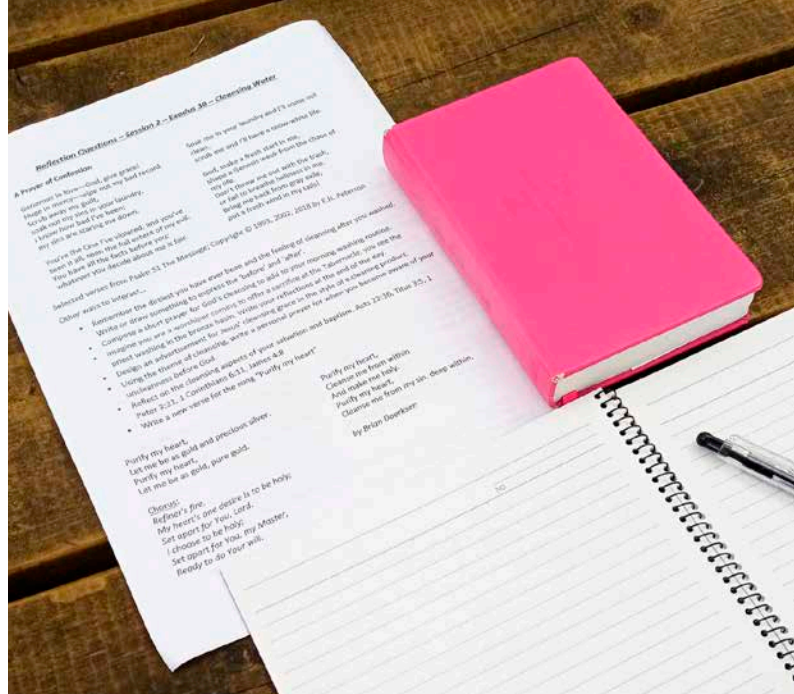


Exploring the phrase “Come to the waters” in Isaiah 55:1 through collage, one person said, “I was struck by the use of the plural. This doesn’t mean that there are different streams for different people . . . Rather, I think it means that there is LOTS of water for all who are thirsty. No matter how thirsty a person is, there is always enough water available to quench their thirst. So, I looked for pictures with lots of water in them . . . to remind myself that if, or better, when I am thirsty, then I can go to the true and living God of the Bible and have my thirst quenched by His waters.”

Some participants wrestled in prayer as they faced various issues. One said, “I have been facing a very big decision and had no emotional space or time to really pray into it. The retreat was just what I needed. Time away from my busy schedule with space to just sit with Jesus and this decision. While I didn’t totally come to a final decision, I was able to remove the large rocks from the field, so to speak, so I could better face and pray about the issue.”

## Thankful

“Thank you so much for the opportunity during the retreat to come before Jesus. It was a good time for me, and I am very thankful for all your help and guidance during the retreat.” Another said, “I’m thankful to have had the opportunity to attend this retreat and I want to say a big thank you to Janet and Peter Dallman for the gentle and caring way in which they led and guided us. I would highly recommend this retreat.”



If you’ve never taken a spiritual retreat, or wondered what is involved, I hope this article has given you the desire and confidence to take time out with God. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact me. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

*Janet Dallman (UK), with her husband Peter, came to Japan in 1998. She’s been involved in church planting, student work, new missionaries, and serving as OMF’s Candidate Coordinator. She’s currently OMF Japan’s Member Care Advisor. Contact her at [jp.mca@omfmail.com](mailto:jp.mca@omfmail.com).*

# How an acorn grew into an oak

*The Holy Spirit leads us to divine appointments for friendship and faith-sharing*

By Kari Miyano

During a recent trip to Tokyo, I prayed for divine appointments. God certainly came through and surprised me. It seemed as if a curtain had been lifted so that I could look back through time and see how God worked to strengthen a new believer through the cords of human kindness. Small acts of friendship, the word of God, and prayers mixed with the faith of believers had blossomed into great fruit and friendship.

I invite you to travel with me and see how God used a simple invitation to create one connection that would lead to other key relationships which helped a new believer to grow.

## Seeds were planted

This story began when Ping was 14 years old. She attended a summer English camp in China. There, she asked one American teacher what would happen on doomsday, sensing they were Christians and would tell her more. The teacher met her afterwards to answer her question. These brothers

and sisters strategically used their gifting as teachers to plant seeds in the hearts of young students.

## The seeds fell on good ground

Ping nurtured and cherished the seeds of faith planted in her heart. She made her way to Japan and was baptized at a church in Kyoto in 2006. Ping prayed for her faith to grow and others did the same.

## Seeds continued to grow

Ping enrolled at a university in Kyoto, and there a friendship started. Erika, a loving, courageous, and almost blind student from Honduras, invited Ping to International Night. This was a monthly home gathering, hosted by Paul and his wife Rickie, missionaries from the US. Thanks to the hard work of another missionary family, connected with Osaka Bible Seminary, this house was built around 1951. Could they have ever imagined that someone would come after

them and transform their plain, concrete basement into a beautiful Japanese living room still used 70 years later as a place of outreach?

International Nights started with games so people could have fun and get to know each other. Then Rickie, like Betty Crocker, would “bake everyone happy” with homemade sweets such as cookies or brownies, and people would mingle. Lastly, Paul led a time of worship followed by a gospel message.

It was at International Night that I met Ping, just a few times. Ping also met Kim, a teacher. This sparked the discovery that Kim and Ping had both participated in English camps in China, the same summer, the same program, but at different locations. This common bond was a real encouragement to both women.

International Night provided a warm family atmosphere with people of all ages and backgrounds. There were children, singles, and married people from different nationalities. Everyone’s faith was nurtured through these times of fun, fellowship, and hearing God’s Word.

## On to a new city

Ping moved to Tokyo for a job in 2017. She remembered Melanie from International Night. By divine providence, Melanie had gotten married and moved from Osaka to Tokyo as well. She was there when Ping needed a friend. Naturally, Ping was led to join the church Melanie attended. She enjoyed the fellowship for several years at the church and with several International Night friends who had also moved to Tokyo.

## Dry times

After experiencing a long season of spiritual dryness, Ping wished to join a prayer group where she could get refreshed. After much prayer, she bravely transferred to a new church. However, everything was online due to the pandemic. Ping looked forward to the online prayer group but still questioned God. Why had she been led to step out in faith when there were few in-person gatherings?

## Streams in the desert

Around the same time, I too decided to keep walking by faith and not by sight. I was led to resume my annual fellowship trip to Kanto, after being on pandemic pause for two years. Nurturing my soul through friendship became a priority again.

I pressed on to meet my friend Lisa at her church. While planning, we decided to be open to inviting others for our lunch at a restaurant after church, in case God put anyone on our hearts. At church, I was prompted to welcome the woman sitting a few feet behind me. A few minutes later this woman came and asked if about ten years ago I happened to be a friend of Kim in Osaka. I replied, “Yes, but

why?” She said she remembered me from International Night! I wondered, *Could this be Ping? Ping from long ago?* Yes, indeed it was her! Hallelujah! Our souls rejoiced greatly in this amazing rendezvous led by the Holy Spirit. As both Ping and I took new steps, God had given us the desire of our heart—fellowship which led to spiritual refreshment.

## Joy and strength through fellowship

A few minutes later Lisa arrived. I was all excited to tell her about an acquaintance from Osaka who had wondrously shown up at this church. This was about 300 miles from where Ping and I originally met. As I started to introduce her, Lisa burst into laughter and said that Ping was in her Zoom prayer group. This connection was also a great answer to prayer for both sisters as they longed to meet in person somehow. Immediately Lisa and I realized that this was the person we were to invite to lunch.

So the three of us and another sister had lunch together. Like a detective with a magnifying glass, I listened intently as

Ping revealed the divine connections of the past 14 years, since we last met. We broke out laughing from time to time as we heard amazing details of how God faithfully led her. The waitress had to ask us to quiet down, but it was all we could do to contain ourselves.

## Fulfillment after many years

Ping went on to tell us that God granted her a full-time position at a university where she has opportunity to impact staff as well as her students. Granted permanent residency, she has decided to make Japan her home.

The little seed planted a couple of decades ago has grown into an oak of righteousness. As 1 Corinthians 3:6 says, some water and some plant, but it is God who makes it grow. Joy was bursting from my heart, and it was multiplied as I shared this story with Erika, Kim, Melanie, Paul, Rickie, and others. Our joy was made complete, knowing how Ping was walking in the light.

Usually, we are not able to see what happens to random seeds we have a part in cultivating, but in this case, I was granted the privilege of seeing how they came to fruition. Many of you readers are missionaries and English teachers, and everyone is planting seeds. I hope that this story will empower you to keep planting and nurturing the seeds God has given you. If we keep doing the right thing long enough there will be results. All glory goes to our Lord Jesus Christ! **JH**



*Kari Miyano enjoys traveling, in-person fellowship, connecting people, and writing as ways to build up the body of Christ and give recognition to pioneers of faith in Japan.*



# Life support for missionaries

*Reasons why a missionary might find a life coach useful*

Throughout my years as a missionary in Japan, I have struggled with a variety of issues and challenges. I have also observed numerous missionaries enduring hard times and heartbreaking situations. The missionary life can be full of stress and struggles. It is no easy task to navigate through various life stages while living in a foreign culture—without the support from family and friends that would be available in our home country—never mind learning a foreign language and culture.

To help missionaries navigate the challenges of serving in Japan, a variety of support services are available for encouragement and growth: life coaches, counselors, spiritual directors, and mentors. Each of these roles offer a distinct service to support missionaries.

## Support services

A **life coach** is a person who meets with someone regularly to support, listen, ask questions, and encourage.

A **counselor** helps someone sort through their past and find healing and restoration from traumas, bad experiences, and deep wounds inflicted by others. A professionally trained counselor can help the missionary move forward through a variety of therapies that can result in emotional healing and wholeness.

A **spiritual director** can help a missionary to grow in faith and help them hear God's voice more clearly. Spiritual directors can introduce spiritual practices for renewal and enlightenment, helping to draw the missionary closer to God. If a person is feeling spiritually dry or feels like they have reached a plateau in their walk with God, a spiritual director can help that person to break through to new levels of spiritual maturity.

A **mentor** is someone who has expertise in a certain area and can help the missionary grow in that area. A mentor teaches and guides the missionary through experiences and wisdom from on-the-job training. Often a mentor is someone older who has gone through similar experiences and life lessons who can offer advice and feedback to help the missionary grow and mature.

Missionaries can benefit from using these four supportive services. Many support services are now available online and are accessible to people around the world with a stable internet connection. More than any other time in history, these kinds of support services are accessible from the mission field.

Our needs change as we mature through various life stages. We could use a spiritual director in one season, a counselor at a different time, and a life coach at yet another stage of life. All are useful and beneficial. Understanding the differences can help us to discern which

service would be most helpful to use according to our particular needs.

## Areas where life coaches can help

I serve as a life coach to missionaries, and I see missionaries finding a life coach useful in the following areas.

**Transitions:** Missionaries live through a variety of transitions as they move across an ocean, deal with cultural differences, and adjust to new communication styles and languages. A life coach can help the missionary to adjust to these dramatic shifts and changes. Transition times are a good time to seek support from a life coach.

**Family matters:** A variety of family issues can arise on the mission field. The support of a life coach can help with marriage issues, children's education, financial strains (including support raising), singleness, health, and aging parents.

**Encouragement:** Missionaries often struggle with discouragement and failures. Often a life coach can encourage the missionary to not just "survive" but to "thrive" in ministry.

**Developing a new ministry:** Missionaries often want to develop new ministries and plant new churches. A life coach can help fine-tune the vision and move forward with plans and goals.

**Discern calling:** When God wants to affirm or redirect a calling, a life coach can help to discern the direction the Lord may be taking the missionary. Someone who can listen and ask clarifying questions may help the missionary solidify their calling.

These four distinct support services are useful to missionaries at various stages in their life and ministry. How can you discern the best fit for your needs? Exploring various support services and leaning on the Holy Spirit to guide you can lead you to the best person to help. You may find some crossover between these services based on the person's gifting, training, and experience. For example, a life coach could also be qualified and gifted to be a mentor or spiritual director. Ask God to match you with the right person to benefit your personal need and growth.

God may use any of these services to help you minister in Japan. Do not hesitate to utilize these support services to help improve your ministry and life and to move forward into the calling God has placed in your heart. **JH**

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

# Practical ministry in honour–shame cultures

*Introducing a helpful book about ministry outside of Western cultures*

The book that has most shaped my perception of Japanese culture as an honour–shame culture is *Ministering in Honor–Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* by Georges and Baker.<sup>1</sup> Previously, I have mentioned the biblical theology of shame and honour they provide in the first half of the book.<sup>2</sup> Here, I look at their thoughts on what ministering in honour–shame cultures looks like practically.

According to Georges and Baker, the first need of those seeking to minister in honour–shame cultures is to live out a spirituality deeply infused by the honour we have received from God: “Before proclaiming the gospel of God’s honor, we as Christians must receive and embody it ourselves . . . A key element of Christian spirituality is living with a biblical view of honor and shame. Only then can we minister God’s honor to other people.”<sup>3</sup> Through the gospel, “God not only removes our shame but also transforms our shame into glory.”<sup>4</sup>

## Culture should transform every aspect of ministry

But it doesn’t stop with us—an honour–shame culture transforms every aspect of ministry, including how we relate to others, how we approach evangelism, how we view conversion and ethics, and how we do community. The book has a chapter devoted to each of these five aspects.

The chapter on relationships offers three suggestions for resolving conflict honourably and five for developing and deepening relationships. These eight suggestions include expressing requests indirectly, giving gifts, reconciling symbolically, and acting as a patron or a client in a patronage. Since “honor and shame function as the grammar of most cultures, this is how we ‘speak their language’ relationally,”<sup>5</sup> and “honoring relationships are at the heart of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup>

## Evangelism

When presenting the gospel, it is important to couch it in terms that resonate with people who live and breathe honour and shame. The authors are quick to point out that this doesn’t go against the gospel presented in guilt–innocence terms, but rather it involves emphasising different aspects of the biblical gospel. They then draw out two such aspects: a reversal of status from one of shame to one of honour and a welcome into a new community.

Western cultures tend to view conversion as an individual act, whereas in collectivist cultures, it tends to involve the community much more: “Group-oriented people view conversion as transferring loyalty and identity to a new group, so they must experience the group before choosing to join it.”<sup>7</sup> One way this works out in practice is that it can be a good idea to invite families into conversations about faith rather than just focusing on individuals.

Not surprisingly, ethics in honour–shame cultures tend to be much more concerned about issues of honour and dishonour rather than conformity to a legal code, and people will generally only change their behaviour if their code of honour is rewritten. The authors show that New Testament writers often use this approach when exhorting readers.

Finally, developing church communities that liberate people from shame and bestow honour on them is vital in honour–shame cultures. Georges and Baker state, “The church is God’s chosen instrument for bearing his glory and reflecting his honor.”<sup>8</sup>

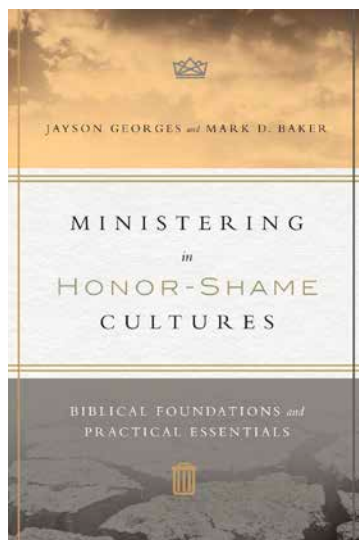
## A radically different lens

One thing I appreciate about the book are the many examples it provides from real life to illustrate concepts. While many of them don’t immediately apply to Japan (giving chocolate to a town hall official might not help much in Japan), they do drive home the radically different lens through which people in an honour–shame culture view things and how it influences every part of life and ministry. This is a book to read carefully and ponder how it applies in a Japanese context. **JH**

1. Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor–Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (IVP Academic, 2016).
2. Simon Pleasants, “Viewing the Bible through Honour and Shame,” *Japan Harvest*, Summer 2021, 33.
3. Georges and Baker, page 30 in Scribd version.
4. *Ibid*, p. 164.
5. *Ibid*, p. 173.
6. *Ibid*, p. 174.
7. *Ibid*, p. 245.
8. *Ibid*, p. 328.

Book cover image from Amazon page

*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.*



# QR codes for ministry

*An introduction to QR Codes as a ministry tool*

## What is a QR Code?

“QR” stands for “quick response,” as they immediately connect the user to its encoded data when scanned with a phone or reader. They are a type of two-dimensional barcode. Interestingly, QR codes<sup>1</sup> were invented in 1994 in Japan to track vehicles and parts through the manufacturing process at a Toyota-related manufacturer.<sup>2</sup> You have likely seen them in many different places; indeed, *Japan Harvest* used one on page 27 of their last issue.

QR codes are a strategic communication tool. They can contain many types of data—most commonly website URLs, but also map locations, contact information, Wi-Fi passwords, and much more. The three big squares in a code anchor the image direction, and the pattern of smaller squares or dots in the rest of it defines the data. The complexity (number of dots/squares) varies with the length of the URL or other data in the code.

## How to read them

Your phone’s camera app can probably already read QR codes, but if not, there are a multitude of free barcode reader apps available in your phone’s app store. Many apps for communication or social media also use QR codes to transfer app-specific data between devices.

For wise security, take a moment to look at the text (in the case of a web URL, your camera app will probably display it when it reads the code) before you open it in a browser, to make sure it’s what you expect.

## Uses for ministry

QR codes can function like a modern business card. Through these codes you can share your contact info such as email, websites, social media, and map locations to help ensure interested parties are able to contact you. First-time guests can be directed to a contact card on a church website via a QR code to share their information with you.

This tool is great for quick interactions or simplifying information exchange in ministry activities. Codes printed on flyers, tracts, and posters allow for easy scanning to point people to event announcements or other opportunities for further engagement. People doing outreach can save a QR code image on their phone to share evangelistic tools like gospel videos, Scripture, apps, or online resources with people they meet.

## How to make one

Tools to create QR codes are widely available online and in app stores. Karen likes to use online tools that can be used anonymously without an account—her favorites

are *qrcode-monkey.com* and *the-qrcode-generator.com* (note the “the”). Daniel likes to use the Mac app *iQR Codes* from the MacOS store. When making a code, many times all you need to do is select the type of information you wish to encode, then insert that information in the fields provided by the QR-creating app/website. In many QR code creation tools, you can also customize the colors and visual appearance to make it more distinctive, and/or even upload a logo to show in the center of the code (like the *Japan Harvest* code on this page, which was made with QRCode Monkey); doing this will help your code stand out and provide more information about what it connects to. However, the more you complicate the design of a code, the harder it is to scan, so make sure the foreground and background colors have enough contrast and that the code is not too small for cameras to read it in real-world lighting conditions. It’s a good policy to always prioritize readability over design.

Caution: Many tools promote the use of “dynamic” QR codes (or sometimes called “editable” or “trackable”), and sometimes premium design features are offered if you choose that option. A dynamic code is often described as a separate type of QR code, but in truth it’s just a normal QR code that goes to a middleman site before redirecting to yours. That allows the middleman to track your traffic—one of the most valuable commodities these days is data about where people go on the internet, so naturally all the makers of these tools want a foothold in that. There are also other security and privacy risks. Karen strongly recommends simply making a “static” code directly to your desired destination. There are ways to dynamically redirect within websites without external services. And if you want statistics about when your QR code is used, you can add something simple to the URL to distinguish it in your website’s own analytics.

Consider how you can utilize QR codes to make your ministry’s resources and information more accessible to the people you want to reach. **JH**

1. The term “QR Code” is a registered trademark of DENSO WAVE Incorporated.
2. This short video includes more of the backstory: <https://youtu.be/k09ip9Z6Tck>

*Cowritten by:*

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

**Karen Ellrick** and her husband Dan have been in Japan since 1996, currently in Osaka. Karen does tech-related support ministry, including serving as Art Director for Japan Harvest.



## No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions

*Matt Rhodes (Crossway, 2022). 270 pp.*

Rhodes, a missionary to North Africa, has written a provocative book that should be read and discussed widely. He reminds us that taking the gospel to those who have never heard is work that is long and hard. He wants us to approach ministry with devotion to excellence, which includes investing in theological education and mastering the language and culture where we serve. He also wants missionaries to avoid shortcuts by giving adequate time and energy to the task (p. 35). Years of careful preparation are needed to plant churches.

Rhodes looks at some of the shortcuts in missions and gives specific criticisms of church planting movements and disciple making movements, examining these methods in the light of scripture. He contends that foundations cannot be built in a hurry (p. 75). Undue emphasis on speed compromises the goal of planting churches that last. In the second part of the book, Rhodes shows how we can correct our course. He emphasizes learning the local language well so we can share the gospel clearly and boldly. He gives wise

counsel on equipping and sending missionaries who will endure until mature churches are established. We all long to see churches multiply rapidly, but Rhodes reminds us that to see lasting fruit come from our labor, we need to persevere and avoid shortcuts. **JH**

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

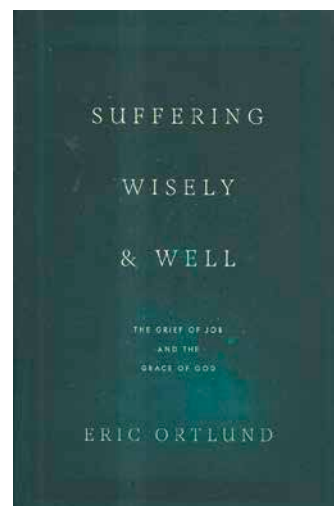
## Suffering Wisely and Well: The Grief of Job and the Grace of God

*Eric Ortlund (Crossway, 2022). 191 pp.*

Ortlund, lecturer in Old Testament at Oak Hill College in London, writes “to help Christians suffer well by being wise about suffering” (p. 175). After an introductory chapter on the varieties of suffering in the Bible and our response, Ortlund carefully works through the book of Job. “What distinguishes a Job-like ordeal from other kinds of suffering is the intensity of the pain and its inexplicableness” (p. 33). Each of the chapters on Job ends with a summary and application, such as “The one loss that pains Job most deeply out of all his losses is the loss

of intimacy with God” (p. 98). Ortlund’s treatment of God’s speeches is particularly enlightening. This book helps us understand better the modern-day Jobs we meet and to recognize that suffering is part of the life of discipleship. **JH**

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

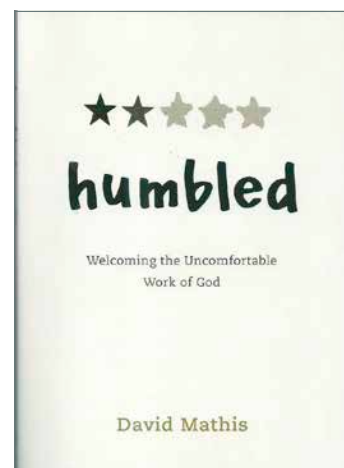


## Humbled: Welcoming the Uncomfortable Work of God

*David Mathis (B&H Publishing, 2021). 116 pp.*

Mathis, executive editor of *desiringGod.org* and pastor at Cities Church in Minnesota, has gifted us with a helpful study on how to pursue humility. How do we respond to the humbling circumstances that God permits in our lives? Mathis reminds us that we are never treated unfairly by God. What do we do when we meet God’s frowning providence? “Will I humble myself before God, or resist in pride? Will I welcome his severe awakening, or kick against this kindness?” (p. 29). Humility begins with hearing the Word of God. We learn to walk the path of humility on our knees in prayer. The humility of Christ in Philippians 2 shows us that true humility is “God’s image shining in its fulness” (p. 105). God’s humbling hand is not painless, but God is always gracious. This is a book that helps us learn how to welcome God’s uncomfortable work. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★



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

# Concrete language

*Using concepts that can be examined with our senses makes our writing easier to understand*

“Language is often abstract, but life is not abstract . . . abstraction makes it harder to understand an idea and to remember it.”<sup>1</sup>

Concrete language helps people understand new concepts, so it’s used often by teachers. For example, consider these two scenarios:

A seven-year-old is given ten books and told he has to give three to classmates. Then he’s asked how many books he’s got left. Another seven-year-old is shown, for the first time,  $10 - 3 = \underline{\quad}$ .

Which of these will the students find easier? The first one, of course, which is making the mathematical concept of subtraction concrete.

So what does this have to do with writing? Concrete ideas are easier to grasp. One day, I had to describe a child’s difficult behaviour to a colleague. I chose to do it by describing what had actually happened in a certain instance rather than abstractly describing the child’s behaviour in a general fashion. My colleague understood the situation far better after that short story than if I’d used abstract or generalised language.

Another example would be how we present statistics. We can say Japan has less than 1%

people who are Christians, or we can show someone a jar containing 99 one-yen coins and a single five-yen coin. For most people, the jar illustration would be easier to understand, as well as be more memorable.

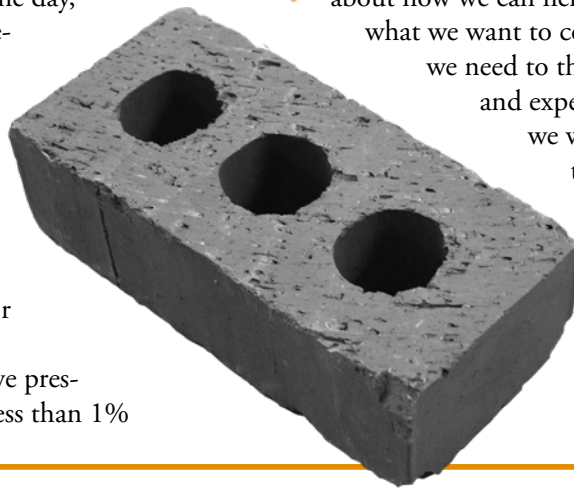
Here’s an example that shows how you can do this in writing:

Japanese people have a tendency to consider the group before they consider themselves. You can see that clearly with the trains: people line up and enter trains in an ordered fashion. Once on the train, they generally refrain from talking on their phones or speaking loudly to their travelling companions.

It isn’t hard to use concrete ideas to illustrate the abstract, but it does require us to take time to think about how we can help our readers see, feel, or experience what we want to communicate. When we’re writing, we need to think about what our readers know and experience, and try to translate what we want to communicate into something concrete that connects with their experience. **JH**

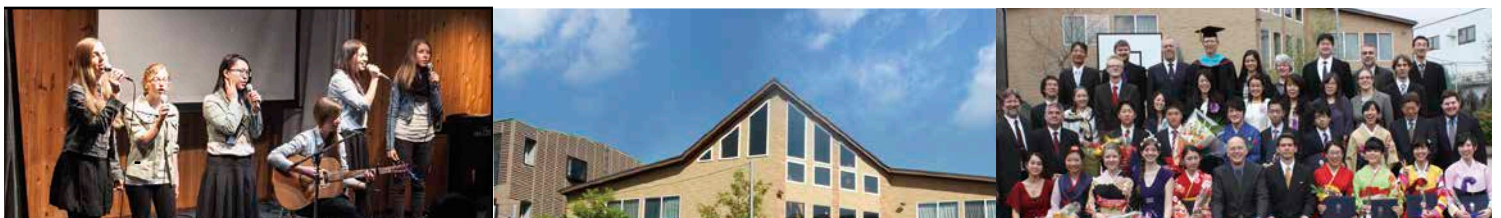
1. Chip and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick*, (London: Arrow Books, 2007), 99–100.

*Wendy Marshall* is the managing editor of Japan Harvest.



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# Your wish is my command

*"If your day is hemmed in with prayer, it is less likely to come unraveled." — Cynthia Lewis<sup>1</sup>*

Then Balak's anger burned against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have persisted in blessing them these three times! So flee to your place now. I said I would honor you greatly, but behold, the LORD has held you back from honor" (Num. 10–11 NASB).

King Balak asked a fortune-teller named Balaam to curse the Israelites. However, Balaam refused, saying, "I cannot do anything other than what God says"<sup>2</sup> and blessed Israel as God had told him to.

Balak was persistent, saying, "Isn't there any way for God to change his mind?" But of course God did not change his mind; no matter how many times Balak asked, Balaam obeyed God and blessed the Israelites. That made Balak angry, and he said, "I had intended to treat you well, but now I won't." Balak's attitude was: if things go my way, I'll worship God, but I don't need a God who does not do things my way.

Actually, isn't this the attitude of many people nowadays, especially here in Japan? Many people think: If God grants my wish, I'll give him money and buy an amulet at the shrine, but I don't know about a God who doesn't grant my wishes. I do not need such a God. In the first place, is such a God really God? It's as if their relationship with God is a transactional one. If they go to a shrine known for "romance" and are disappointed in love or if they go to a shrine to pray for good grades and fail in an examination, they will never go to that shrine again.

This is not just about Balak and people going to shrines in Japan. There are a lot of people with a transactional view of their relationship with God in the Bible, for instance Naaman (2 Kings 5:11). People want God to do their bidding. Balak wanted somehow to get God to do what he wanted. And when it didn't turn out, he got angry and said, "I don't need that kind of God!"

However, if God did what we wanted, speaking in the extreme, "prayer" would be giving God orders. This would make us greater than God: "God, here's a request. And after that, you can do this." And if we don't get the answer we want, we might say, "Why didn't you do it? I told you what to do!" And finally, we could end up saying, "Well, I guess there is no God." Even if one does not go that far, we can approach God as if we're making a business deal, saying, "Grant me my wish, and I'll offer such-and-such to you." That does not show faith in God and is not a posture of praise.

All of us, Christians and non-Christians, have this tendency. But it is a big problem when Christians, who should know God, think like that. Christians, even myself, can get angry and say, "Why did you not hear my prayer?" when our wish is not realized. And if my wish comes true, I applaud God and cry, "Hallelujah!" However, if we really know God, even if we do not have our prayers realized, we should always applaud God and cry, "Hallelujah!"

Even though I know this in my head, it is not easy to put it into practice. Looking at Balak's attitude, it almost seems like I'm looking at myself in the mirror. But a mirror is for seeing what I look like so I can fix things. And since there is a mirror here, I need to accept what I see and take steps to move forward, even though it might be one step at a time. Once again, I plan to pray to God because He is my Lord. **JH**

1. First Reformed Church of Portage, "A Day Hemmed in Prayer," January 12, 2020, <https://frcportage.org/a-day-hemmed-in-prayer> (accessed May 31, 2022).
2. The Bible quotes from here on are the author's paraphrase of the NASB.

Image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Omamori.jpg>

*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.*



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