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Japan Harvest
Winter 2023



Arts and Ministry

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May 16–19, 2023
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Prayer Summit for Western Japan

May 22–25, 2023
Nosegawa Bible Camp, Hyogo



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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Japan Harvest Staff

Executive Editor: Simon Pleasants
Managing Editor: Wendy Marshall (wmarshall@jema.org)
Associate Editor: Rachel Hughes
Editorial Assistants: Elena Kua, Jackie Peveto, Ariane Peveto, Jenn Bello
News Editors: Peter Swan, Ken Reddington
Art Director: Karen Ellrick
Advertising Director: Ai Nightingale
Fact Checkers: Sara Wolsey, Jocelyn Williams
Proofreader: Ken Reddington

Printer: Printpac

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Ministries Facilitator: Chad Huddleston
Communications Facilitator: Simon Pleasants
Membership Facilitator: Paul Ewing
Members-at-Large: Hazel Yokota, Brett Rayl

JEMA Administrative Assistants (part-time):

Atsuko Tateishi, Mayumi Penner, Michiru Pleasants, Ai Nightingale

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

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JEMA
2-1 Kanda Surugadai
Chiyoda Ku, Tokyo 101-0062

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

Email: jema-info@jema.org

Website: jema.org

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Art is a bigger part of our faith than we often realise



Artists have often felt sidelined by the mainstream Protestant church. As I think back to the conservative Presbyterian church I grew up in, it seemed there were only outlets for musicians, flower arrangers, and those adept in the culinary arts, with some occasional needs for acting and puppetry. Other forms of art didn't seem to be part of our worship or celebrated in our life of faith.

As an adult serving in Japan with people from many different Christian backgrounds, I've seen the arts embraced more broadly. For example, at the JEMA Women in Ministry events held three times a year in Kanto, I've come to appreciate the efforts organisers have put into our surroundings, transforming our meeting areas into places that remind us in nonverbal ways of the God we serve.

One of our missionaries in OMF is gifted at interior design. She regularly created special spaces for our missionaries to gather together, and she was also involved in several building projects within our mission that have lasted long after she left the field for ministry in her home country. You saw some of her work on the cover of our Summer 2022 issue: artwork in the OMF Hokkaido Centre. What a blessing her art has been.

I've also seen the arts used in a variety of ways to reach out to others in Japan, not just as a hook to get people in, but as a vehicle itself. For example, many years ago, we heard Tomihiro Hoshino speak at a church service. In 1970, he injured his neck while working as a gymnastic coach, rendering him paralysed. After his accident, he became a Christian and has spent his life creating art and writing and testifying about his Creator.

I don't think of myself as particularly artistic, but this issue has made me reconsider. One of my joys is baking, but I also enjoy planning and cooking evening meals for my family. I love being part of the team that creates this magazine. And, though I write nonfiction, I know that writing is an art too. I also love to enjoy God's creation. My husband and I take a great deal of pleasure in camping, and simply being outdoors in nature refreshes our souls.

Whether or not you think of yourself as artistic, there is something for you in this magazine.

One of our authors in this issue, Ariane Peveto (who happens to also be part of our editing team) has posed the questions: Who is an artist? Is art only for personal fulfillment? Am I only an artist if others appreciate what I've created? If you don't think you are an artist, you might be surprised. Check out her article on p. 6.

This issue includes articles by people who use various forms of art as outreach in Japan, and we also hear from people who use creativity in worship. We have an article by someone who's been thinking deeply about this topic for many years and has written about the biblical perspective on creativity. One of our writers is passionate about connecting people to God and each other through art but often feels misunderstood by others. She's written about how we can love the artists in our communities.

When we first decided on the theme of this issue, I was keen to reflect the theme in the magazine as a whole. I know my limitations, however, so, before we'd even called for proposals from the JEMA community, I took extra time to consult with three members of the magazine team (Ariane Peveto, Jackie Peveto, and Karen Ellrick). It's been a wonderful collaborative experience. As a result, we not only have a beautiful magazine but also a very special cover, created by Jackie and Ariane just for us.

May this issue encourage, inspire, and equip you for serving Japanese people.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Spring 2023: Ministry in an Aging Society

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

Autumn 2023: Singleness (proposals due by May 31)

Winter 2024: Discipleship (proposals due by July 31)

Who is an artist?

Expanding our definition benefits the body of Christ

By Ariane Develo

When I was a mousy girl with a sketchbook full of pencil-smudged drawings, my best friend was an artist. She was a few years older and just as much a sister to me as my twin. The three of us spent hours drawing together, and it was a regular part of our lives to share our pictures of made-up worlds and characters. My friend proudly showed off picture after picture—some she had inked with pen and even signed! I thought, *a real artist.*

We continued to draw together, later falling in love with manga and Japanese-inspired art styles. In high school, we entered a phase where it became impossible for my friend to go anywhere without a sketchbook. While other kids rebelled against their parents or pushed the envelope with new freedoms, there we were late one sticky summer night, scribbling away between turns at the bowling alley. To my teenage self, you didn't get any more artistic than this. But I was soon set straight by my friend.

"If you draw every day for three more years," she told me, "you might get as good as I am now."

My heart sank. I wasn't an artist yet. *Who is an artist?*

When I was a shy high school and college student with an ever-present story notebook in my backpack, my friends were artists, most of them writers. One crafted horror screenplays with characters based on our circle (sadly, the twins in his stories never made it out of the haunted house). Another friend posted stories on social media based on her favorite TV shows that garnered thousands of readers. Though I kept drawing, my first love had always been writing stories. Between classes, I'd dive into my notebook to add a few more lines to the

latest spy adventure, poem, or fantasy epic (at the time, fifty pages was an epic to me). But if you had asked me then, I would have said I enjoyed writing, but unlike my friend's work, my words didn't garner attention and I didn't have an audience. I thought, *I'm still not an artist. Still not good enough.*

Even while I worked on my master's thesis, a young adult novel in the blended science-fiction/fantasy realm like Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, I didn't consider myself an artist. I was just an apprentice learning a trade. I wove my Christian faith into a story that anyone could read, a story about literal and figurative light in a very dark place. And with it, I also had the conviction I should pursue traditional publication, seeing the world of pop culture as a mission field with few Christian workers.

At the time, I did not know that rejection and failure were the marks of my newly chosen field.

Years passed, and as I slowly amassed a dreary mound of rejection letters, I struggled to understand. Had I misunderstood my calling? Why did my desire to represent Christ in this field only flame brighter whenever someone politely, but firmly, shut a door with a copy/pasted rejection letter? But even as that desire pushed me on to send one more letter, to try one more time, I felt that old disappointment sink in with a new bite—perhaps I'd never be an artist.

Who is an artist?

Over these past years, I have spent time deep in the words of writers like Makoto Fujimura, Leo Tolstoy, Timothy Keller, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Madeleine L'Engle considering this question. I talked with others who also wondered about how to use their

gifts in the church, if their talents were really necessary to God's work, if art, in any form, was simply for personal fulfillment. I felt lost in the woods on a moonless night, unsure if I was still on the right path, or if it was even a path at all. But that is when the questions you ask yourself are the sharpest, as well as the most important, like *Who am I? Where does my worth come from?*

As I pored over Bible studies and nonfiction treatises on work, vocation, and creativity, I found an answer. Surprisingly, it was the answer I had started with: *You are a being created in the image of God.* But something had changed in my own understanding. It wasn't a sudden change at all, only one so gradual that I didn't recognize it until one day it seemed to drop into my thoughts like a letter through a slot.

We are created in the image of God, which gives every person we encounter an inherent and unshakable worth and dignity. Erwin McManus puts this beautifully when he says, "In the full meaning of the word, you were born a masterpiece, a work of art, an expression of the divine imagination."¹

But what else does that mean? God is the almighty Creator, and as people created in his image, we are also creators. That means that we cannot help but create, and when we create, we reflect God's nature, even if it's miniature and shabby compared to the divine masterpiece. On a more practical level, that also means there is a false dichotomy of makers and non-makers.

Who is an artist?

While you've been reading this essay, I'm sure that you've been thinking, perhaps with a bit of an eye roll, that *of course* the person who wrote this article is an artist. I haven't even told you about how I've baked and deco-

rated wedding cakes, illustrated picture books, or taught myself *tsumami zaiku* to craft *kanzashi*.² But what I offer for your consideration is that you, too, are an artist. While we may agree that the word “artist” might be helpfully used to refer to those who make a living with their creativity, we should recognize that we are all creative.

This naturally brings about a need to expand our definition of the arts to include not only the high and fine arts, but also the practical and the everyday. In his book *Adorning the Dark*, Andrew Peterson discusses his passion for this kind of understanding of art that encourages “people to look for the glimmer of the gospel in all corners of life, that they would see their God-given creativity in both their artistic works and their front gardens, in their home repair and the making of their morning coffee, and that they would call out that glorious creativity in everyone they meet.”³ When we look to the example of the creation we live in, it’s clear that art is not strictly lofty and special, to be admired from a respectful distance or left to the experts. Our Lord has created a world of daily wonder that includes not only majestic mountain views, but also the flowers growing from cracks in the pavement. And that’s not to mention what lies beyond what we

can see, like spices to taste, a pet’s soft fur to stroke, and birdsong to hear. It is all art, and none of it lives behind glass.

The arts often struggle for a place in the work of ministry and Christian living. It’s easy to think that the arts belong to a special class of Christians with rare gifts or perspective, or that the exercise of those gifts belongs in a different realm from the daily walk of faith. But if you consider the capacity and desire to create as a God-given characteristic we all share, then not only does our understanding of God deepen, but also our understanding of ourselves and the work ahead of us. In *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning states, “Because we are made in God’s image and likeness, you and I are yet another promise that he has made to the universe that he will continue to love it and care for it.”⁴

When we expand our definition of art beyond fine art or performance, awards or audience recognition, we will find nearly infinite ways to reflect God’s love and serve as extensions of his provision. No special tools are required;

we can create beauty wherever we go with what we already carry with us. Practicing hospitality, raising children, making a home, running a business, teaching, tending a garden, cooking meals—all of these can be art, and we should never forget that beauty can reach people in a way nothing else can. And with beauty, goodness and truth will follow.

Who is an artist?

All of us. **JH**

1. Erwin McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 188.
2. *Tsumami zaiku* (“pinching craft”) is a traditional Japanese craft using square pieces of cloth that is folded to craft *kanzashi* (ornamental hairpins), typically in the shape of flowers.
3. Andrew Peterson, *Adorning the Dark: Thoughts on Community, Calling, and the Mystery of Making* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2019), 168–169.
4. Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust: A Ragamuffin’s Path to God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 140.

Ariane Peveto is a writer who has called the US, England, and Japan home for a time. She’s a freelance editor, including copyediting for Japan Harvest, she’s taught college English and was a communications coordinator for Torchbearers Japan.



Why bother with art?

Looking closely at the way God created the world compels me to embrace a wider and deeper vision for the arts

By Dave Skipper

I'm sure we all have Japanese friends who engage in various kinds of creative activity and expression, whether professionally or as a hobby. If they are Christians, how can we encourage them to use their art for God's glory? If they are not Christians, how can we point them to the Creator of all good things? As a "musicianary" here in Japan, these questions are important for me in thinking about my own ministry too.

One possible approach is to look at the way God created the world. Doing this prompts me to embrace a vision for art in ministry that stretches beyond the vital but specific areas of evangelism and church. It seems to me that art is actually integral to our collective work and witness in the world.

In looking at the pattern of God's creative work in Genesis 1, there are a number of actions that get repeated (with variations) throughout the first six days. Each of these actions directly correspond to elements of human art-making.

1. Initiative

God initiates something new: "And God said". The starting point is God's purpose and plan, set in motion by the power of his word. This tells us of God's sovereignty and transcendence, his power and design.

As God's images and representatives, we are called to bring new things into being: ideas and possibilities, form and function. Artists are to think and operate with design, purpose, intent, and at least some measure of ability or skill.

2. Response

The materials respond to their Creator's commands: "And there was . . . and it was so." Of course in God's case his materials do more than simply respond—they obey his command instantly and do what he desires without fail. It doesn't always work out quite as neatly as that for us human artists! Often it seems to be the reverse; recalcitrant stone, notes not quite in tune, writer's block, mistaken splashes of paint, lines that just won't sit right. But our mistakes can open up unanticipated possibilities and twists. It's OK to learn, to try, to fail so long as we retain a posture of thankfulness, humility, love, service, and worship.

As God's image and representatives, we are called to do the work of bringing forth art, learning to understand and work with (or sometimes against) the grain of our chosen materials.

3. Differentiation

God differentiates his materials and sets up boundaries: "God separated" light and darkness, day and night. Waters above and waters below. Land and sea. Times and seasons. Plants and animals, distinct in their kinds. Male and female. Without boundaries we are left with formlessness and confusion.

God delights in the diversity of what he's made. He deems it necessary to set up complementing contrasts. In doing this he creates countless possibilities for combinations, development, and newness. We're invited to discover and meditate upon how his glory is revealed in all the myriad details.

As God's image and representatives, we are called to rearrange and develop the potential hidden in everything he has made. The artist's toolkit includes contrast, shades, dynamics, structure, parameters, layers, guidelines, the grain of materials, and surprises. Overturning expectations and providing a new way of seeing the world are among the functions of art.

4. Evaluation

God evaluates what he has done: "God saw . . . and it was good." Good: beautiful, pure, functioning as designed, fitting to his nature as a good, holy, and loving God. He doesn't just leave his work and wander off—he's engaged with his creation, committed to it, caring for it, sovereign over it. God has made all things not just for his glory, but also for our benefit and delight. He is the ultimate measure of goodness.

As God's image and representatives, we are called to evaluate our work. Traditionally the standards for art have been expressed as beauty, goodness, and truth—though these categories are highly nuanced and often very subjective. How can we evaluate art according to God's perspective? It's a big question. How about considering such categories as fit for purpose, blessing others, the artist's motivation, delighting in God's gifts, revealing the way things are, or pointing to something new or beyond?

I think it's important to state that every individual work of art needn't express hope or joy or a happy ending—truth must include pain, despair, and

brokenness, and sometimes it is right to pause in those places. That's why limiting our evaluation to just "beauty" is too simplistic.

5. Continuation

God sets things up to continue into the future: "And there was evening, and there was morning". God's faithfulness and his providential control of history echo in each new dawning day and also in the fruitfulness and generativity of plants, animals, and humans. It was fitting for God to make such a world, since from all eternity Father, Son, and Spirit ceaselessly overflow with abundant love for each other.

As God's image and representatives, we are called to pray and think and act for a flourishing future. The art that I make—whether or not in the church—plays a role in contributing to the glory of God and to the growth of his kingdom on earth by impacting personal relationships and building a spiritual legacy.

As for the new creation, our individual and collective art-making, creativity in worship, exploration, and service to God our King will surely be unleashed in ways we can't even begin to imagine now. Never forget that we are destined for new bodies—hands, eyes, ears, and all—with which we will serve our King without sin or frustration.

Gospel

This fivefold pattern describes not only God's creative works, but it also dovetails with a basic presentation of the gospel:

1. **Initiative:** God's sovereignty in and transcendence over his creation.
2. **Response:** man created in God's image and tasked to have dominion over the world for his glory and for the blessing of mankind.
3. **Differentiation:** our holy God's righteous law setting out bound-

aries of good and evil; man's rebellion as transgression of God's law.

4. **Evaluation:** our sin laid on the perfect Son of God; Christ's righteousness given to us.
5. **Continuity:** the promise and guarantee of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

We can even apply this pattern to the death and resurrection:

1. **Initiative:** the Father sends the Son.
2. **Response:** the Son obeys.
3. **Differentiation:** Jesus' body broken for sin.
4. **Evaluation:** the Father accepts his Son's sacrifice.
5. **Continuity:** Jesus raised back to life.

This same pattern can be observed all around us. So the very nature of the artistic process can itself bear testimony not only to what God did in creation but also what he has done in Christ for our salvation.

Application to ministry in Japan

Let's encourage Japanese Christian artists to think biblically about their art-making and to pursue their gifts. Let's listen to artists without assumptions, to understand their motivation, their struggles and their questions.

Let's spend time pondering why it is that God created such richness in Japanese nature and culture. Why has he put the creative urge in his creatures, including our Japanese friends? How can the artistic parallels of our salvation revitalise our calling to serve in Japan? Let's meditate on the fact that he will restore all things in the new creation.

Let's think about how the many incredible forms of Japanese artistry are divine gifts ripe for redemption and dedication to serving the King of Kings. How can we point others to our great artistic Creator who accomplished our wonderful salva-

tion through the most surprising and extraordinary means?

Let's be faithful in the small things when we make art of any kind. Let's pray that our art will honour God and provide a refreshing stream, a wind of change, a word in season, or a window of opportunity for God's Spirit to work in the hearts of those who don't yet know him (or even those who do).

Conclusion

We can see that God is the original and ultimate artist, and our art can display God's glory. It can reveal the truth of his goodness. It can intrigue and confound, confront and delight. It can show us the complexity of the human condition. It can be a mystery, a parable, a balm, a sword. It can help us to imagine and even enter into a different future. If art can be all these things and more, then is not the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the greatest artwork of all?

Art encapsulates and demonstrates the works of God in both creation and salvation. Art flows out of the nature of God, reflects his works, builds up his people, and demonstrates his kingdom. **✠**

Further reading: These are some of the books on Christianity/theology and the arts that I have found helpful:

- Art, Life, Faith: A Theology of Making*, by Makoto Fujimura
Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming, by Steven R. Guthrie
Art Needs No Justification, by Hans Rookmaaker
Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts, by Steve Turner

* Note: by "the arts" I mean to include the widest spectrum of creative activity and expression, encompassing all forms of "high art" and "low art," whether made by amateur dabblers or professional elites.

Dave Skipper (UK) has been involved in underground music subcultures in Japan since 2010. He has released an instrumental noise album based on Elijah and is working on a book on a biblical theology of sound. See links to his work here: <https://daveskipper.bandcamp.com/album/elijah>

The stuff of earth

By Jonas Davison



What is art, and what does it do anyway?

Seventeenth-century scientists theorized about a fire-like element that caused things to burn. This element, *phlogiston*, was thought to be contained in all burnable materials (e.g., wood, wax, and witches). The theory held that combustible materials released their phlogiston when burned. Plants collected it back out of the air, thus making plants combustible and keeping the air from exploding! For nearly a hundred years, various scientists continued to search for phlogiston. Yet today phlogiston theory is an amusing footnote in scientific history, because it turned out that phlogiston didn't exist. We now know that combustion is a chemical reaction that chiefly involves oxygen, one of earth's most abundant elements. In other words, the only thing that combustible materials really have in common is that, under the right circumstances, they burn.

Clarifying art

Today we have a growing abundance of visionary arts-in-ministry approach-

es, experiments, and ideas—praise God! Yet I believe we are encountering our own phlogiston-style problem. “The arts” is a kind of philosophical junk drawer term, connecting various forms and products, but the underlying theory that connects these arts remains elusive and hazy. Open an art textbook and you'll find we can't agree even on the basic definition of “art.” We see the effects of these various items—from haiku to brutalist architecture, funk music to pointillist painting—but we haven't identified the art-like element which connects them.

Correctly understanding combustion led us from campfires to space rockets. Likewise, the unintelligibility of art and how it functions holds us back in our artistic and ministry endeavors. As most artists experience, at a certain point, theory and practice *must* come together to unlock greater things. As Proverbs puts it, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18 KJV).

This haze surrounding art theory impacts what and how we make, those

to whom we hope to minister, and those who partner with us in ministry. Some may reject or become indifferent to the arts or their application to ministry. This isn't necessarily a rejection of beauty or aesthetics per se, but rather a rejection of the unintelligible nature of the work or ministry in question. On the other hand, embracing the unintelligibility of art creates an almost-gnostic atmosphere. Artists appear to have access to a mysterious power that other Christians lack, making the artist into a kind of cultural guru.

Both of these dynamics can breed mistrust among our brothers and sisters in Christ. For instance, supporters may mistrust missionaries who speak about doing art as ministry, or a church may misplace trust in charismatic artists whose technical ability outstrips their character. So we need to answer the questions: What is art? and What does it do? If we can do that, then we will better understand, evaluate, and communicate the value of art generally and art in ministry, for Christ's sake.

Understanding our materials

Phlogiston theorists began looking inside materials trying to find the mysterious element central to their theories. Many have approached art the same way, looking in art products for a defining element such as beauty, illusiveness, or nearly anything else. But it was the chemical reaction—the burning itself, not the materials—that grouped combustible things together. The stuff inside the materials was simply the normal stuff of earth, so combustion was simply *stuff of earth undergoing a chemical reaction*. The truth of art runs parallel: the stuff inside art is simply the “stuff of earth” and *art is stuff of earth undergoing an aesthetic reaction*.

Therefore, for an artist-Christian hoping to catalyze a reaction, rightly understanding our materials is key. Even before we put fingers to instruments we are standing on holy ground, working from prepared soil. Psalm 19 tells us that the materials of earth arrive in our hands already singing of their Creator: “Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world” (Ps. 19:2–4, NLT). The base ingredients that we make into pigments and paints, alloys and inks, lights and ligatures—these very things are already pouring forth an unquenchable fountain of praise to our creator God.

Furthermore, fallen creation recognizes its state of decay and is groaning and yearning for the new creation to be realized (Rom. 8:19–23). Jesus’s blood reconciles every part of fallen creation to his lordship: “All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross” (Col. 1:20, MSG). Already, before we have even begun the dance, the dawn rays of new creation burst forth beneath our feet.

Art is an act of interpretation

Yet, “the creation of God is unfinished,”¹ its materials and meanings buried in the stuff of God’s world, “waiting there to be unleashed in a new chorus of praise for the Lord.”² With our base material already speaking (as Psalm 19 tells us), we could then say that art-making is a work of translation. Transforming, fusing, remixing, and catalyzing stuff of earth into bits of something new is a way of interpreting the speech of creation. In other words, just as a physicist scientifically interprets God’s world, so the artist aesthetically interprets God’s world. Of course, the artist-Christian must do so in light of God’s revelation in Scripture, so we go one step further to say that our work mirrors God’s own: reimagining and remaking old creation into new creations, of which we are the firstfruits (Col. 1:20, Eph. 2:10, James 1:18). The artist-Christian aesthetically interprets God’s world after God.

Our responsibility as artists

We as artist-Christians bear aesthetic responsibility to creation itself and to the ongoing work of God in it. We must not “perjure the plants,” as Calvin Seerveld says, for “we may in no way ruin the testimony built into the Creator’s workmanship.”³ Making things that deny the reality of God’s speaking world results in artworks we often label *kitsch* (poor taste or quality). Of course, our artwork will be of varying quality and quantity, made by beginners or hobbyists or professionals, and may give misguided or even wrong interpretations at times. But we wholly reject “the Gnostic view of creation as inherently evil on the one hand and the romantic view of nature as an unfallen perfection on the other.”⁴ Instead we hold in creative (even redemptive) tension the now-but-not-yet, playground-and-battlefield, brokenness-and-beauty of this real world.

Nicholas Wolterstorff described art as an act of world projection.⁵ The artist creates a world of meaning that viewers, listeners, and observers inhabit for a time. (This imaginative inhabit-

ing is why advertising works: we watch a commercial and imagine ourselves in that happy on-screen world, complete with that one particular brand of dishwasher detergent). C. S. Lewis said that one such world “baptized” his imagination and set him on the path to believing in Christ. That experience eventually became Lewis’s motivation to write *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This is the kind of aesthetic reaction an artist-Christian aims to catalyze.

If we look at God’s own handiwork, we can see that even now creation itself is in the midst of undergoing a world-projecting reaction. On the first pages of the Bible, we see the world that God imagined come into being. Of course the world God imagines actually becomes reality! And on the final pages of Scripture, we behold an artist’s rendering of God’s new creation, the heaven-come-to-earth world that God has imagined and is making real.

We artist-Christians, then, have the strongest possible footing for our work! We are apprenticed to the Master Craftsman, creating in his workshop and with his tools, made by him and redeemed with his own blood, to the praise of his might and mercy. Our materials already speak of their Maker, and as believers we work under the illumination of Scripture that reveals for us the true state of the world and what God is doing to bring it about. We work in harmony with our Creator; that is, the artist-Christian aesthetically interprets the world after God. Our artwork projects worlds of meaning that our audiences inhabit, where—if we are transparent enough—they may even be captured by a glimpse of the beauty and truth of Jesus. **JH**

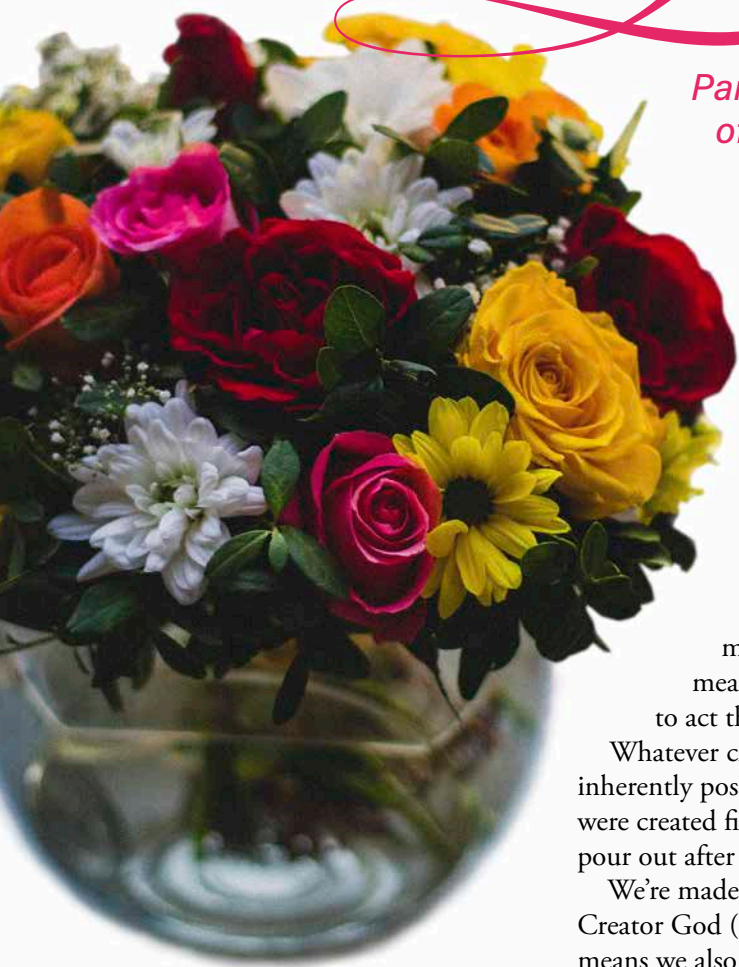
1. Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Tasks* (Toronto: Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980), 25.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 14, 23.
4. Benjamin P. Myers, *A Poetics of Orthodoxy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 54.
5. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980).

Jonas Davison (*Mission to the World*) is a flutist and audio producer, using his gifts to support church planting. He holds degrees in music and theology and previously served with the U.S. Army Band. He lives in Tokyo with his wife, Christina, and their four children.

Creativity: from God, towards God

By Don Ekstrand

Part one of a two-part series about how the origin of our creativity is in God and how creativity can resume its rightful place in the church



Scripture and tied inextricably to the nature of God.

Why is creativity important?

Harold Best, former professor of music at Wheaton College, writes, “Being made in the image of God means that we were created to act the way God acts. . . .

Whatever character or attribute God inherently possesses and pours out, we were created finitely to show and to pour out after his manner.”¹

We’re made in the image of the Creator God (Gen. 1:1, 27); that means we also are able to create. We cannot do it as God can, but we have an innate desire, a compelling drive to be creative. God is Creator—big *C*, and we are creators—small *c*. The difference between us is that God creates from nothing and his creative actions can occur irrespective of scientific laws. We create within the bounds of what God has supplied, and we’re limited by the laws of nature. This fundamental truth underlies this entire discussion of creativity. God is the one source of all creativity.

God commanded creativity

In Scripture we see God commanding creative actions. Man’s first creative activity was naming the animals—“Whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2:19 NIV). It was an entirely abstract creative activity. Adam had no familiar list to base names on. He could use his

imagination. When the Israelites built a tabernacle they would carry in the desert (Ex. 25–31), specific instructions were given for the utensils and furnishings. Some instructions were practical while others cover aesthetic features of the tabernacle. However, the people still had significant latitude for creativity. God is equally concerned with the engineering and the aesthetics of the final product. He is the creator of beauty/aesthetics (Ex. 25:31–34, 26:36) and the originator of design/engineering (Ex. 26:15–28).

Humans created intuitively

We first see mankind being creative on his own initiative immediately after the fall. They “realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:7). While God gave serious consequences for their sinful actions, he didn’t criticize their feeble attempts to make body coverings. You can almost imagine God saying, “Nice try, but that’s not going to work. Let’s do this instead.” Then he clothed them from animal skins, something with more durability, a better fit, comfort, and maybe even a little style (perhaps leopard skin).

Similarities between God’s creativity and human creativity

We also see in Genesis that God is sovereign over his creation; it’s completely under his control and direction. In a similar way, humans have control over what they create. Consider this example: When Moses came down from the mountain after receiving the ten commandments, he confronted Aaron about the golden calf. Aaron

If a student at your church asked you, “Can I use my love for painting in church?” how would you respond? If a young student is involved in theater or dance, can those be incorporated into church life or do they remain apart from life in the body of Christ? If the answer is, “I’m sorry but we don’t do that in church,” it leaves the student to wonder, *Does God value my artistic interests? Does my creativity matter to God?*

If artistic learning and artistic works are to have more than a pragmatic value in church, a theological understanding of art is required. I began a journey of discovery in this area 15 years ago asking, “What does the Bible teach about the value of music?” What I found was a broad understanding of creativity rooted in the stories of

said, “Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” (Ex. 32:24). We could imagine Moses thinking, *That’s a world champion in the category of lame excuses.* Such a creation would have required significant preparation and craft.

When an accomplished jazz player improvises, he draws on years of practicing scales, of developing riffs (motifs), of listening to other jazz artists, and assembles these accumulated ideas into a solo that “tells a story.” When a moment of musical inspiration hits, he may play something different than what he’s done previously, but it comes from the foundation of his practice and study. Though there may be a moment of artistic inspiration that is new, it’s still under the control of the artist. He remains sovereign over it.

Creativity and discovery

In Genesis 1 God tells Adam to “fill the earth and subdue it” (v. 28). “Subdue” is a peculiar word in this context. This directive was given before the fall, so there was no need to battle the animal kingdom into submission. To me it seems that “subdue” likely means to understand, to study, to figure out how the rest of God’s world works. Man was to be master over the earth with his mind and his reasoning. It was a command to use creativity and engage in discovery. “Subdue the earth” was a command to discover creation’s secrets.

Over many millennia humankind has harnessed the use of fire, developed tools and medicines, created musical instruments, spun fibers into textiles, and studied the natural world to learn the order for math and astronomy. These developments have not all been functional ones—esthetic characteristics have been added to increase the value, whether it’s pottery, metalwork, textiles, or woodcraft.

Aesthetics matter to God

In modern cultures that place high value on efficiency and economy, aesthetics—whether public artwork or architectural features in a new sanctuary—are often seen as frivolous, a waste of money. Consider how God created—“The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his

hands” (Ps. 19:1). Creation itself testifies to God’s work, to both the design and aesthetics in his creation. A great example is flowers. If God had desired, he could have created every flower the same, making each one the same shape, size, color, fragrance, and with the same function. Instead he created with incredible variety and added esthetic beauty to each one, beauty that Jesus praised when he said, “Not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these” (Matt. 6:29). Look at the forest and mountains the next time you visit. Are they just functional lumps of rock and organic matter? They are beautiful creations, aesthetically pleasing, as much as a human face or the evening sunset.

Evaluation is integral to creativity

We often overlook the significance of God evaluating his creation. Six times in Genesis 1 God says what he’s done is good. Finally, he says it’s “very good.” Was he evaluating the quality, appropriateness, function, or aesthetics? Probably all of those. However, it implies that evaluating creative work is a natural thing. God’s declaration of “very good” signals completeness and satisfaction with his creative efforts.

Evaluation is not just a summative act, it is part of the entire creative process. From the first thought of *What am I going to make?* the creator begins evaluating. *Will it be the right size, shape, color, texture?* And the scrutiny continues throughout the process—*do I add more of this spice? Should I take the photo in this light? What will happen if I write the computer code like this? Can I use this word in this context?* Reassessment continues hundreds, perhaps thousands of times during the creative process.

Evaluation gives things value, both to the creator and to others. Without it there is no joy, disappointment, discussion, disagreement, praise, and certainly no satisfaction. In other words, there is no point. Art is meant to be viewed; music is meant to be heard; books and poetry are meant to be read; a house is to be lived in; the pie is to be eaten; the handmade dress to be worn. The creator creates and the consumer appreciates the work.

Beauty and truth

Is art for the Christian exclusively about expressing beauty? Would we say that every piece of significant art is beautiful? Every thought-provoking play? Every enlightening piece of literature? Obviously that’s not the case, so what about those great works makes them so significant?

Great art is not only about beauty but also about truth. To focus solely on beauty and exclude truth would be akin to focusing only on God’s creative activity and ignoring the fall. Art that appears grotesque can still express truth, as some truths are repulsive or shocking in nature. As Christians we might want to turn away from things that are ugly or even controversial, but we are often called to face them. Art can show the emotional truth behind a factual truth. Consider the stories in Scripture that describe an ugly event but point to a truth we need to ponder. Scripture doesn’t shy away from the grotesque.

Creativity is the gospel

In today’s church, artistic creativity is often viewed as a pathway to an end, that is, using artistic pieces or activities to draw people toward Christians and conversations about spiritual matters. We must not lose sight of the fact that artistic creativity is valuable as it stands. It’s more than just a vehicle for sharing the gospel; it has much more value than a pragmatic intermediary. Instead we should think of artistic creativity as integral to the gospel, reflecting the glory and variety in God’s creation. It expresses the truths of the fall and redemption in a non-lingual way. Church members wondering about the value of their creative talents need to be affirmed in their giftedness. God-given creativity is worship. By being creative we are doing what God has intended us to do. How would that idea enrich both personal and community life in your church? **JH**

1. Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 23.

Don Ekstrand (US) has been the band director at the Christian Academy in Japan for 25 of the last 35 years. His love of music is only equalled by his love of the outdoors.

UNconnecting: engaging Japanese culture UNusually

By Peter Bakelaar

Multiplying gospel encounters through the arts

My wife, Diane, and I first started ministry in Japan in 1990. Over the past thirty-two years we have been involved in many aspects of church planting through traditional means of English classes, cooking classes, craft classes, special events, outreaches, discipleship, Bible studies, speaking, and teaching. We have seen fruit and enjoyed each of these avenues in serving God and others.

In general, our experiences have shown us that Japan is in a hurry. People are busy and lead highly scheduled lives. Personal, family, and company schedules are stressful and hard to keep up with. Japanese people also take themselves very seriously. There is little tolerance for imperfection.

A zero-defect policy is great for making cars, but it doesn't apply well to making healthy lives or relating to others on a daily basis. Fear of failure, fear of showing weakness, and fear of being ostracized strongly motivate people to perform well and not to laugh about themselves.

Missions methodology is based on biblical principles that can help guide and lead in church planting. We have benefited immensely from the experiences and input of other missionaries, authors, pastors, and scholars. Reading missions biographies, experiencing team ministry, attending the Church Planting Institute conferences and involvement with City-to-City Japan continue to be very formative for us. Some of the guiding principles that have helped us the most are being gospel centered, movement oriented, pursuing incarnational ministry, and putting Japanese in touch with God's Word and God's people.

Our lives continue to be a wonderful adventure and journey toward the heart of God. In these latter years of ministry, we are deepening our understanding of God's character and how he has made us, gifted us, and led us to where we are now. Three areas in particular have become very relevant to us at this point in our lives as we seek to engage with Japanese people: time, encounters, and laughter.

UNhurried time

Unhurried time means having an attitude and being in a setting where I can relax my heart and my mind and be filled with faith expectancy. Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry. I have intentionally prayed to have peace about what I might or might not get accomplished and to see what God has for this time. When others in the community want to interact with us, having time free to accept their invitations has brought new ideas, thoughts, and

plans to share further time together. It does take sacrifice. To keep my time free for people, I find myself having to take care of routine responsibilities early in the morning or late at night.

But my joy is the freedom of the day where I can be present in the moment and see who God brings my way or with whom I can visit. As I engage with others in conversation at the gallery and in the community, sometimes my iWatch will indicate a text or message. I have learned not to look at my watch, because as soon as I do, the person apologizes and says, "Well, I must be going. I am sorry for taking up so much of your time." It shows me how conscious the culture is about time and not being a "bother." To be able to give full attention and unhurried time has provided relaxed opportunities for others to share what is on their heart and mind. I am not always able to keep a free schedule like this, and I acknowledge that there are factors that are

Conversations in front of Gallery nani. All other photos, unless indicated, are inside the gallery.



outside of our control. But my desire is to create as much unhurried time as I can.

UNscheduled encounters

Unscheduled encounters happen where there are natural opportunities for people to interact and meet one another. People came to Jesus and met him where he was. For me, this has been our gallery and studio. When I am working at the studio, if I want to meet people, I just open the sliding doors that open out onto the street. I thank God for the exact placement of our studio on the first floor. People are able to easily see what I'm doing or creating, and their curiosity is piqued. Surprisingly, once people enter our studio workspace, if they seem interested, I am able to give them a tour of our whole facility. Our studio is an old two-story apartment that we have prepared for artists to use and for future artist residencies. I have had total strangers enter the living room, kitchen, storage room, and washroom, and the conversations have helped build and deepen relationships.

Art also invites questions. So the UNusual space we have at the gallery and studio are filled with objects, paintings, and sculptures that invite questions. Beauty is one of the love languages of Japan. Having facilities on the first floor that open naturally to foot traffic is a blessing. However, wherever God has placed us, we can think creatively about potential opportunities for meeting people in unscheduled ways as we become familiar with the natural rhythms and flow of those in our area.

As I meet people, sometimes they will spontaneously say, "Let's get a cup of coffee" or "Let's have lunch together." Those opportunities have been some of the most personal times of talking about faith and life. In one conversation

at a coffee shop, we were talking about heaven and hell and I forgot the exact word for the Buddhist hell that was being discussed. A person sitting in the booth next to us politely shared the word! The conversation was going much farther than our table. These conversations would never happen if I didn't have the opportunity to accept the unscheduled invitations and encounters.

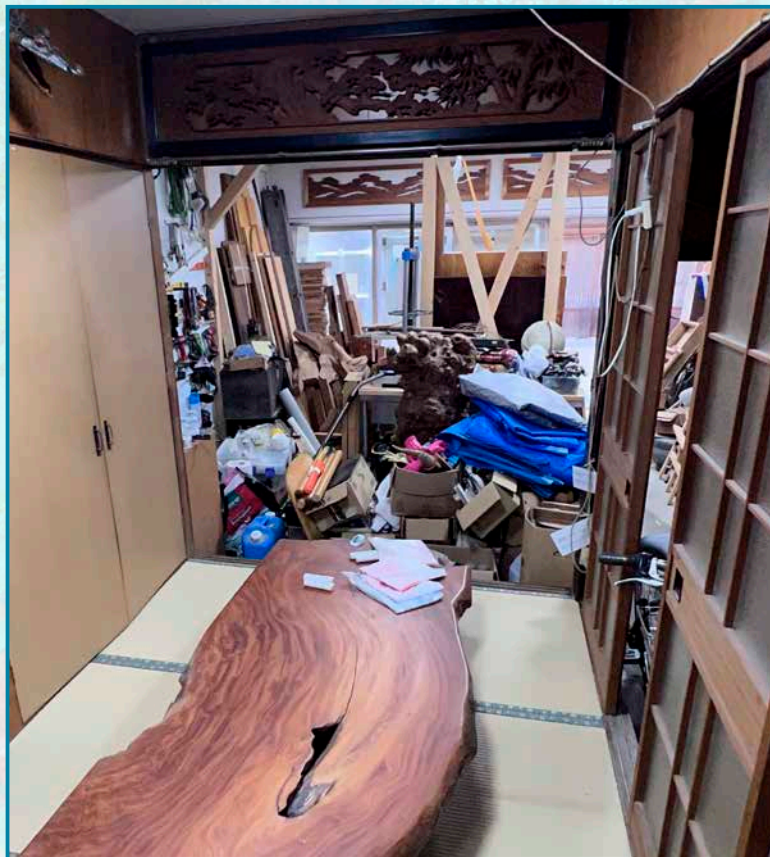
We are located in Seto City, a city in decline that is seeking renewal. It is predominantly a homogenous area built around the arts of pottery and ceramics. The population is older. There are many younger people starting new business ventures in the community because of the predominance of empty and abandoned buildings. When we moved here, we wanted to be where people naturally walk by. It is also a commuter city. People commute into downtown Nagoya from the nearby train station. I am grateful to God for the unscheduled times with people in our community, encountering others



naturally where they live as they are walking to work and as they are traveling to Nagoya to enter a very scheduled regimen. We are doing life together.

UNserious laughter

It's hard for me to imagine Jesus not sharing times of laughter with his disciples and others he knew. For me, laughter has been a pathway to deeper sharing in conversations. Laughter opens the heart. A couple who were skilled in drama spoke at a number of gatherings I attended through the years. They had a keen sense of humor, making us laugh at both our common experiences and ourselves. Sometimes these dramas focused on "elephant in the room" topics that no one wanted to admit or talk about but we all knew were a reality. Laughter helped us admit the challenges and be vulnerable because we were in a safe space. Then, with open hearts, we were able to receive the truths more openly. Shared laughter brought us to a point of connection and understanding. It engaged our emotions and our hearts as well as our experiences and intellect.



Part of Studio Tsunagaru



Videos about naniJapan's ministry (Nagoya Arts Network International):

"God's Story"—a community art exhibition held in a church. A joint venture with Christians and non-Christians looking at Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (4:39):

<https://youtu.be/3gPsBoWYDiK>



"Unfolding"—an exhibition of 100 old Japanese umbrellas provides a safe place to discuss the need for vulnerability and openness, and build community (10:26):

<https://youtu.be/LVrgl1i-uPk>

Video presentation about the author's background and his ministry using art to impact societies around the world and in Japan—for the Global Consultation on Arts and Music in Missions (GCAMM 2021) conference (46:41):

https://youtu.be/XHFoe8UUi_c



In a recent conversation with a fellow missionary, he mentioned that it was the court jester with his humor and creativity who had the freedom to tell the king anything without being executed! Of course, it is a different historical cultural context and situation, but I thought the role of creativity and humor and the disarming nature of laughter was interesting when permitted and appropriate.

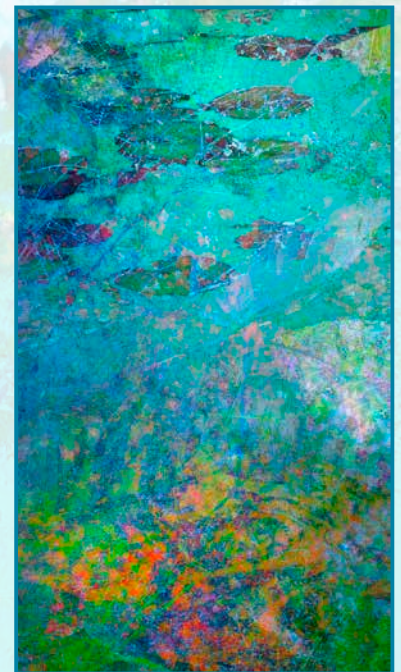
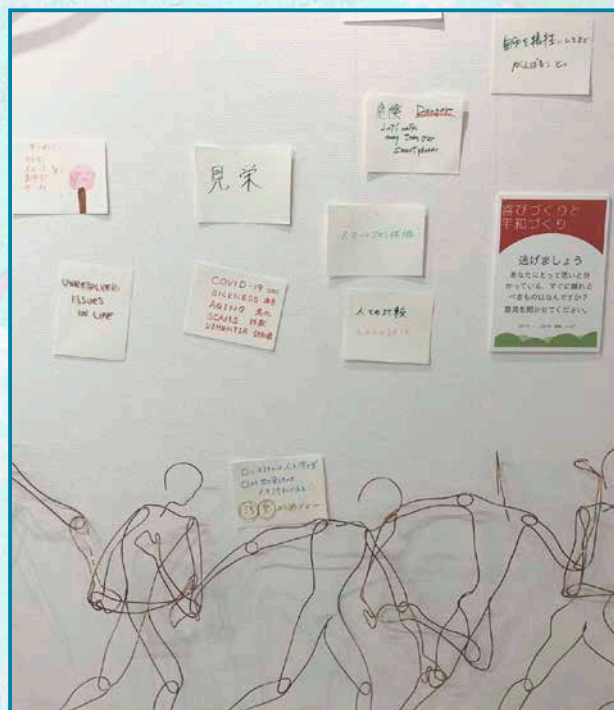
We occasionally watch Japanese dramas and comedy shows that seem to acknowledge the seriousness of their culture. These shows allow a collective laugh over what Japanese people experience. The laughter provides a gracious attitude that helps present challenges in an open way that allows discussion and sharing more deeply.

During one of our exhibitions, guests were asked to write a note about something they wanted to run away from and to post that note on the wall (shown to the right). One visitor posted, "I want to run away from my cell phone." As the exhibition progressed, several visitors posted the same comment on the gallery wall! When we pointed out these comments to other visitors, this

common theme made us laugh. This experience also gave us opportunity to talk together more seriously about the root causes behind the comments, how our lives are affected, and what we are hoping for.

These are things that we are finding work for us right now. We are finding a lot of joy in the process. Living our lives with a trajectory toward God, enjoying these moments of UNhurried time, UNScheduled encounters, and UNserious laughter means others are joining us in this direction toward

God. We are eager to see what God has planned for continued engaging, networking, training, and equipping. Our present experiences and practices are helping us see ways to make it easier for others to enter into what God is doing. **JH**



Photos (and artwork above, also used for page background texture) submitted by author

Peter Bakelaar and his wife Diane serve in Japan with Mission to the World. In 2019 they founded the Nagoya Arts Network International (Gallery nani and Studio Tsunagaru) in Seto City. nanijapan.org

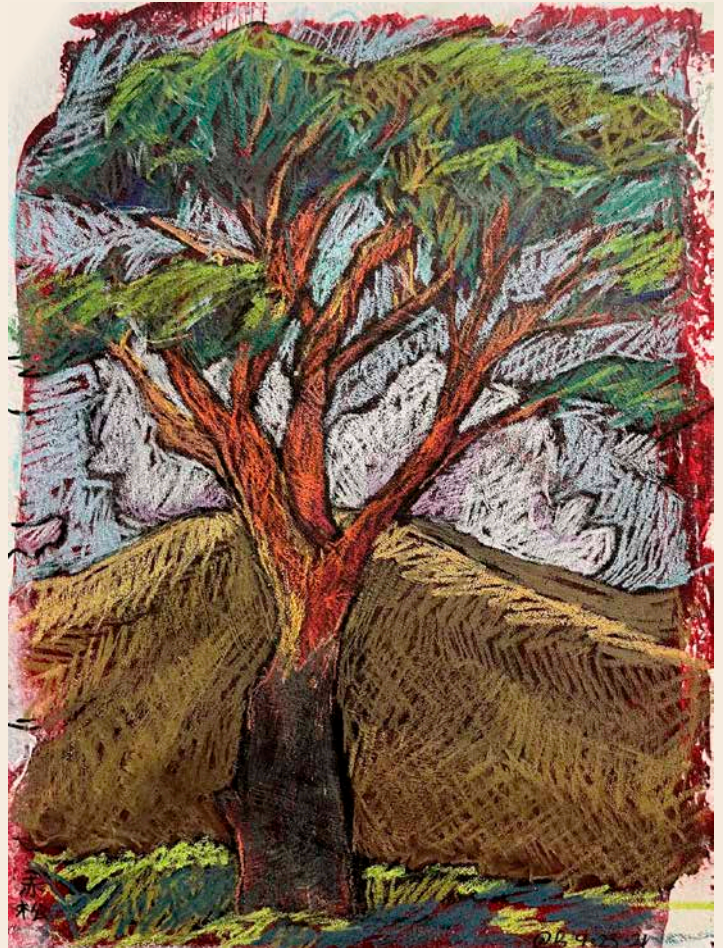
Remembering Christ's sacrifice in all things

By Claire Bishop

Both of these art pieces have a red acrylic base and are then layered with a pumice stone paint. Once that's dry, the initial drawing was done with an Indian ink pen. Color was then added over the top with colored pencil. I chose a red base, not only for its contrast with other colors, but also as a reminder of the importance of Christ's sacrifice in all things. As it says in Acts, God "himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. . . . For in him we live and move and have our being" (17:25, 28 NIV). **JH**

#1: Japanese Red Pine found in Aso-Kuju National Park

I created this piece as a way to process the grief and loss I experienced from losing my youngest brother to suicide. Over the years I have found that, on the day of his passing, being in nature and creating art has been a good way to process the day with God. In that place I can simultaneously remember my brother and his love for nature, as well as marvel at God our Creator. When I came across this tree while remembering my brother, I was struck by the beauty of the red bark growing from the gnarled trunk. If you were to only look at the trunk, the tree might seem barely alive, yet when you shift your eyes upward, you're amazed by the beautiful growth above. Life can often resemble this tree, with a past marred by sin and grief, but by being rooted in Christ, we can experience new growth and healing.



#2: Zinnia (百日草)

This piece was done as a way to relax. I was struck by the form and vibrant colors. God is so creative!

Artwork submitted by author

Claire Bishop grew up as a missionary kid in Africa but since college has called Manhattan, Kansas home. She works in Fukuoka as a Pioneers missionary, with her husband and two children.

Sing and tell

By Christina
DeCiantis
Davison

The vital role of singing in healthy Christian community

As Christians, we know that we are called to tell others about our God. And Scripture frequently pairs the command to “tell” with the command to “sing” (1 Chron. 16:9, Ps. 9:11, Ps. 96:1, Col. 3:16).

Why is it important for us to sing to one another about our great God and all his mighty works? How does he want us to use singing as we walk through life together? And how has he worked the singing of his people into his plan of redemption for Japan? Scripture and science both reveal that singing has a special ability to plant the word of God deeply into the hearts of both singers and hearers, and to deepen the bonds of Christian fellowship.

Remember and tell

First Chronicles records how the musically gifted King David, after he’d experienced God-given victory, began making Jerusalem into the glorious capital of Israel. He placed the ark of the covenant into one of the special tents erected for worship. The first “worship team” was tasked with three jobs: “to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel” (1 Chron. 16:4 ESV). Asaph and his fellow musicians played instruments, led in singing, and wrote songs of praise.

The chapter goes on to record “David’s Song of Thanks,” (vv. 8–36). The king directed this new worship team to sing it “to the Lord.” The song does not directly address God, but rather the “offspring of Israel his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!” (v. 13). Several times, the song exhorts the listeners, to both sing their praises and tell about God’s wonderful works. It reminds the people about the covenant God made with Abraham and how he

continually proved faithful to them. The temple worshipers gave thanks to the Lord by reminding each other of his might and mercy, telling stories of his greatness in song.

Several psalms contain verses that pair singing to the Lord and telling about his deeds (e.g., Ps. 9, 96, 105). These psalms contain imperative commands like “Give thanks to the LORD . . . make known his deeds among the peoples,” “Seek the LORD . . . seek his presence continually,” and “remember the wondrous works that he has done” (Ps. 105: 1, 4, 5). As the people sang these words, they exhorted one another: Remember the Lord! Remember all he has done for you. Remember to keep seeking him.

The Old Testament records how, over and over, God’s people stopped seeking him and forgot his law and promises. They needed to remind one another of these things, and to teach them to their children (Deut. 6:7), but they failed to do so, with dire consequences. We see this same need communicated to Christians in Colossians, whom Paul exhorts, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16). So, why is it not enough to teach and admonish? Why are we also commanded to sing?

Open and connected hearts

When God made us in his image, he gave us the gift of song. When we sing, we are imaging forth our Creator, who exults over us with loud singing (Zeph. 3:17). Because he sings, he made us able to sing. Because he exists in eternal joyous communion as a triune being,

he made us able to commune with one another in song.

In a recent article for *Christianity Today*, W. David O. Taylor wrote about how the study of the human brain reveals part of God’s good design for his singing people.¹ Neuroscientists have seen that people who make music together find their physical bodies syncing to the rhythm of the music and their brains synchronizing to one another as they share common neural activity. This activity is focused in “key emotion areas” of the brain and results in the lowering of barriers between people and a deepened sense of community and connection.

Congregational singing, then, is designed by our Creator to open up our hearts to the teaching of the Word, helping it to sink deeper



than it would if we only listened to spoken teaching. It helps us to love one another and enriches our fellowship.

This good gift is one that will endure in heaven, as God revealed to John in his visions. John saw that the congregation in heaven will worship in song and in spoken word (Rev. 5) and described those who were victorious over evil as singing part of the song of Moses (Rev. 15:3–5). Leon Morris, in his commentary on this passage, encourages us to “notice that, though it is sung by the victors, there is no word in it about themselves or the way they overcame. Those who triumph in Christ fix all their attention on him.”²

In our songs of praise we can continually point one another to Christ in every circumstance.

Singing Christ in every circumstance

Christians all over the world sing the beloved hymn “In Christ Alone” by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend.



The final verse includes the line “From life’s first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.”

My husband and I have a clear, powerful memory of breaking down in tears

“Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Tell of his salvation from day to day”
(1 Chronicles 16:9, 23)

as we sang those beautiful words during our oldest child’s first worship service. Our daughter was born on a Tuesday night, and that Sunday we attended our local church with her in our arms. In all our new parent exhaustion and overwhelming emotions, we poured out our hearts to the Lord in song. I’m sure it didn’t sound pretty, but as we choked out the words through our tears, the rest of the congregation sang us through all our fears and into the light of eternal hope in Christ. And we felt as though their arms and the arms of Jesus were wrapped around us in song. We will fail and make mistakes, but we belong to Christ from the first cry of life (which we had just heard for the first time), until the last breath he has pre-ordained for us. Where else could we find such matchless hope?

Recently, I sang that song again—at a memorial service—with another newborn baby in my arms, sleeping peacefully through his first time at church. Through my tears I once again affirmed my belief that “Jesus commands my destiny” and the destiny of each of his children—the one I held close and the one my church family had had to release into the arms of Jesus. In all my new parent exhaustion, grief, and sadness, I poured out my heart to the Lord in song. And the congregation, holding one another up, sang each other through all our fears and into the light of the bright-burning hope of resurrection that we hold in Christ, our risen Savior.

Transcending barriers in Japan

The fellowship of believers in Japan has a tremendous need for this beautiful gift of singing together. In a culture that has so many social barriers between people, singing can help facilitate deep connections and open hearts to learning about the gospel.

English speakers have an embarrassment of riches available to us in our heart language, including more sacred music than we could learn in a lifetime. The church in Japan has adopted some of these resources, and it is beautiful to hear globally

loved hymns such as “In Christ Alone” sung in Japanese. There is also great beauty and value in encouraging the writing of new songs to the Lord in the heart-language of this people. Skillful translation of English hymnody into the Japanese language is a valuable contribution to the life of the church, and it can help Japanese Christians to feel connected to Christ’s global church.

One day, all nations will gather before the throne of the Lamb and pour out their hearts in worship. Each people group will bring its own beautiful contributions of praise. Knowing this, we ought to encourage Japanese Christians to praise the Lord with new songs, created by their transformed hearts and minds. I pray that the Lord will continue to raise up Japanese-speaking Christians to write poetry and music for the Japanese church, so that we can enjoy this gift of singing together more and more. After all, we are practicing for an eternity of being united in songs of praise to our Creator. **JH**

1. W. David O. Taylor, “Hymns and Neurons: How Worship Rewires Our Brains and Bonds Us Together,” *Christianity Today*, August 29, 2022.

2. Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 18.

Christina DeCiantis Davison (BM Violin Performance, MA Musicology) is an Mission to the World missionary from the US in Tokyo. She seeks to share the love of Christ through music and to equip hymnwriters and other artists to serve the Japanese church.

Creative ways

By John Edwards

to connect in Japan

Short-term interns demonstrate how the arts can connect people without spoken language

The arts are not the primary way my wife and I do ministry. My wife is good at crafts. I can play trumpet a little bit and guitar, but I rarely do (I don't practice). However, it was through our D House internship program that I began to see how effective the arts are for connecting to others. Most of our interns come to Japan with very limited Japanese language ability, and yet music, drawing, dressing up, and cooking naturally draw people together and break down some of the communication barriers.

Of course, we try to teach our interns some Japanese language during the 12 weeks they are in Japan, but how much can they learn and use in such a short time for effective ministry? Ah, but their art (or their sport, their games, their time, or their smiles) is often what the Japanese remember most about our interns. And that memory, along with the knowledge that those interns are Christians, create a wonderful testimony (even without language) as to the wonder of Jesus Christ. This is something we who are long-term missionaries can follow up on. The following accounts are of various interns who have served with us over the last eight years.

Music

Blake, our first D House intern, came to Japan in September 2014 with very little Japanese ability. However, he had memorized "Let It Go" in Japanese (from the Disney movie *Frozen*). One afternoon we were having a picnic in our tiny yard with Blake's Japanese language tutors, two university students. With a little persuasion, Blake began singing "Let It Go" with all the drama and volume of a stage actor. Within seconds, a crowd of neighborhood chil-

dren and their moms were at our gate looking for the source of the music.

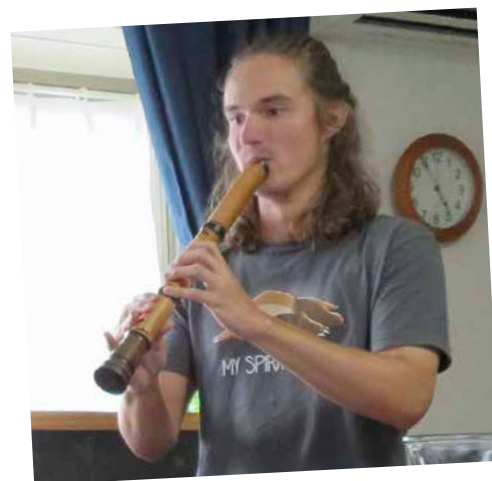
Our church was without a bass player one Sunday. One of our Canadian interns knew how to play and stepped in to serve on the worship team that Sunday morning.

Sam from Australia knew how to play the piano. At our church's Kids Club, one young girl sat next to him while he played. He showed her how to play a simple harmony, and they began playing a duet. The girl's mother was so pleased.

In the winter of 2017, my wife and I visited our local *jidōkan* (community center for children) for the first time with our three interns. The staff showed us around and explained the activities available for children there. Jalen spotted a guitar and asked if he could play it. He sat down on a child's chair and started playing and singing a worship song in English. Quickly, the staff sat on the floor all around him, clapping along and swaying to the music. Not long after that, we got permission to volunteer at that *jidōkan* every week.

In 2017, five young women came from Canada to learn about missionary work in Japan. An English conversation group put together a food-making party in downtown Sendai, and they asked the girls to sing. They sang a Canadian folk song and a worship song. They did a repeat performance at a farewell party put together by the local children and their mothers that was hosted at our house. The worship song ended up as a favorite of one of the Japanese girls even though she was not a Christian.

Eli came to Japan with training in Japanese martial arts. He also enjoyed traditional Japanese musical instru-



ments. He hoped to buy a *shakuhachi* (Japanese bamboo flute) while he was here. By asking around, we found a shop in Sendai. It just so happened that when we went to the shop, a shakuhachi teacher was upstairs giving a middle school boy a lesson. He invited us to observe. Afterward, he invited Eli to his studio for a free lesson. Eli practiced for the couple months remaining of his time in Japan. His last Sunday here, he performed a hymn with the shakuhachi, accompanied on the guitar by Raven, another intern.

Visual arts

Kacey had been majoring in art when she came to Japan as an intern in the fall of 2019. At that time we continued to volunteer weekly at a local *jidōkan*. Kacey would draw simple pictures and give them to the children. Soon the children were bringing her picture books and asking her to draw certain objects. Pokémon characters were a favorite. Each week a group of children would gather around Kacey to make their requests and watch her draw pictures for them.

Catherine loved manga-style art. She even had her own online shop. During her time with us in the summer of

2018, she learned that two of the middle school girls in our church-sponsored English class were members of the manga club at their school. After English class, they would all gather at the white board and begin drawing manga-style characters. We even had those girls over to our house one Saturday for food, English practice, and drawing.



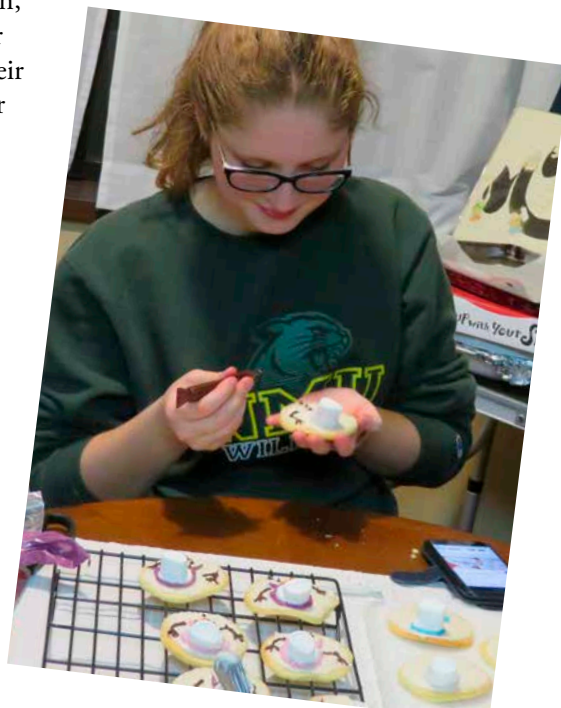
Tim's hobby was photography and videography. As a farewell, when he abruptly had to leave Japan because of the COVID outbreak in March 2020, he gave his many new Japanese friends a copy of his gorgeous photo of a starry night sky with a handwritten message on the back.

The five Canadian women garnered a lot of attention when they went out in public together. One of the members of the English conversation group who was not a Christian set up a time for them to be fitted in *yukata* in beautiful Matsushima. We walked around town and took photos in a Japanese garden. Many passersby took photos, too. This deepened our relationship with the woman who set up the day's experience.

Food and culinary arts

If cooking is an art, it's the one that we personally have used the most to connect with others, especially with our interns when they're staying with us. We have, on multiple occasions, invited people to our house, to our church, or to a different location to cook. A pizza party is great fun, but making the pizza together with each person choosing their toppings or even making their own pizza adds greatly to the fun, while getting to know each other.

Braeden loved coffee. He would use time off to visit coffee shops. He took notes about the taste of the coffee, how it was made, and the atmosphere of the café. We decided to have a party for our neighbors in a neighborhood we had just moved into. After dinner, Braeden



did a coffee-making demonstration as he prepared a cup of coffee for each of our guests.

The Japanese tea ceremony is well-known and beautiful (although painful for those of us who cannot sit *seiza* style). How wonderful it was to be able to ask Japanese people to demonstrate this ceremony for our interns on different occasions. Giving our Japanese friends a chance to show Japanese art not only helped us introduce the culture to our interns, but it also gave us a chance to deepen relationships, especially with those who are not Christians.

Reconsidering the arts for ministry

Flavors, colors, sounds, smells, textures—the arts touch on many, if not all of the senses. This past Sunday, I took a

curtain with me and lifted it up to show the congregation as I talked about curtains and their uses. I talked about the curtain in the temple that was torn in two and how the cross of Jesus removed the “curtain” between our holy God and sinful humanity. I was completely shocked at how holding up that curtain as an illustration made such an impression on many of the hearers. One woman even wrote that she remembered my message as she opened her curtains the following Monday morning.

I used to only consider performance or visual art as true art. Our D House interns showed me clearly that art is more diverse than that and it connects us in profound ways. Certainly, artists connect deeply with each other, but



even those of us who don't consider ourselves artists can deepen connection by thinking creatively beyond the use of words.

I thank God for those who are artistic and for how artists naturally connect with others. I desire to increase my creative thinking about how I can begin and deepen relationships through the arts. I also hope to develop how I can communicate better by thinking beyond words. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

John Edwards and his wife do evangelistic work in Obanazawa, Yamagata, and lead the D House internship program. They are with SEND International and have been in Japan since 1993.

Illustrating the sermon visually

*Chalk art helps preachers
creatively and clearly
illustrate biblical truth*

By Jonathan Prins

“Illustrations bring clarity to biblical truth and reveal how God’s Word works and has worked in the lives of others. They help us turn the ear into an eye so that our listeners see biblical truth more clearly. Illustrations make abstract truths concrete.”¹

Charles Spurgeon liked to refer to illustrations as windows—“The chief reason for construction of windows is . . . to let in light.” He said illustrations are used, “to brighten it [the subject one is talking about] with light.”²

Illustrations in the Bible

Jesus constantly used illustrations to reveal great truths. Mark’s Gospel says that “Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables, but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them” (Mark 4:33–34 NLT).

The Bible is, in many ways, a book of illustrative material. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes about the failures of the Old Testament Israelites: “Now these things which happened to our ancestors are illustrations of the way in which God works, and they were written down to be a warning to us who are living in the final days of the present order” (1 Cor. 10:11 Phillips 1972).

God made us to be creative. Genesis 1:27 tells us: “So God created hu-



man beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (NLT). Part of his image in us is the creativity displayed in Creation. That creativeness is displayed in so many ways, art being just one of them. In Paul’s benediction to the Ephesians he writes: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph. 3:20–21 NIV). While this verse focuses on God and all he can do through us, I believe that we are also challenged to imagine, to imagine what God could do through us for his glory.

Visual art can powerfully communicate the gospel

Enter chalk art, also called chalk talk, chalking, or chalk drawing. The old proverb “a picture is worth a thousand words” may not always be true,

but it certainly illustrates the power a visual can have. Chalk art, too, has the power to clearly communicate the gospel. Japan has always been a visually-oriented culture. Painting word pictures, as Jesus did, can “turn the ear into an eye,” so that the biblical truth the preacher is trying to communicate can be understood more clearly. Illustrating Bible truths visually can open a window into those truths in a new, dramatic, and more concrete way.

At the same time, one of the biggest challenges for preachers is illustrating the sermon in a way that reveals and enlightens the text rather than distracting the listener from the truth. The story may be a very good one, but if the listener only remembers the good story but can’t remember the point of the illustration, it was a bad illustration and turns the heart away from the truth rather than shedding light on that truth.

Chalk art: a memorable example

One of our churches runs a Summer Evangelistic English program. The final day features a sermon with a chalk drawing.

One memorable chalk drawing was a nature scene. Suddenly, a black-light picture appeared, superimposed on the chalk drawing. There was an audible gasp from the audience; they saw, illuminated in black light, the hand of God caring for the flowers of the field

and birds of the air. It drove home the sermon's point that God cares for us.

My wife still keeps a photo of that drawing. She uses it as an iPad screen-saver to remind herself of Jesus's words in Luke 12. To her, the art conveys Jesus saying, "How much more do I care for you? Don't worry, I'm in control." Another person posted the art on Instagram, commenting (in Japanese), "I couldn't help exclaiming 'Wow!' Listening to the music while this was being drawn made it even more amazing."

People tend to lose focus when listening to a speech or sermon. Chalk art draws people's attention.. It focuses their thoughts on the picture, yes, but more importantly on the biblical truth being communicated. Clearly, the drawings elicit a response, open the window, and shine light on the Word. That picture and the truth that it reveals sticks with people.

Chalk art: the tools

So, what does it take to do chalk art? First, an easel; ideally one that is designed for chalk drawing. My father used chalk art extensively in his church-planting ministry in Japan. When I returned as a church planter in 1985, it didn't take long for me to decide to give it a try. My father had built his own easel out of metal, and I used it for a number of years before acquiring a new one.

A lighting system is also important to allow the audience to see the drawing as it unfolds; regular white lights, colored lights, a spotlight, and a black light can enhance and dramatize the final drawing. The paper most chalk artists use is grey bogus paper. A few use large bed sheets. The chalk used is

"lecturer's chalk," a very soft and light chalk, different from sidewalk chalk. It can include both visible and invisible fluorescent, and regular colored and black chalk. I have also recently bought a variety of chalk pens to use for calligraphy as part of the drawings.

Chalk art: the possibilities

Drawings can range from simple to complex, but depending on how it's presented, the time should be limited to 10–20 minutes (shorter is better). The kinds of drawings are almost limitless, depending only on our imagination. They can range from a simple drawing of the cross or the empty grave, to a mystery drawing where the audience is kept guessing until the last lines are drawn.

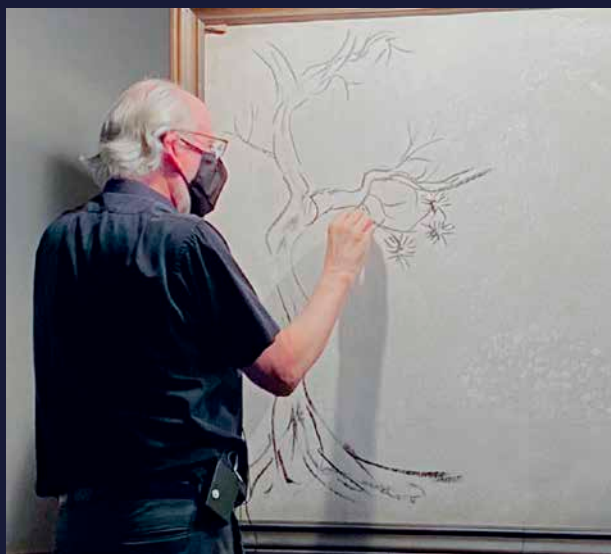
And then there are the invisible black light drawings which are revealed only when the chalk art is finished. These fluorescent drawings are done beforehand and can be more complex since there is no time constraint. Those drawings must be done on a 'visible' white chalk background, like a white bank of clouds, or a white waterfall, any spot that is covered by white chalk on the drawing, in order to be seen when the black light is turned on.

Christmas and Easter are great times to use chalk art. There are so many ways to portray Jesus' first coming, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. Some other illustrations I have done in chalk art include:

- Mt. Fuji during cherry blossom season, illustrating Psalm 8 and the majesty of God.
- Majestic mountains with a black light drawing of an eagle in flight, illustrating Isaiah 40:28–31.
- Giant redwoods whose roots are so shallow they need their fellows to lean on, illustrating the importance of church and community.

- Forest scene of a waterfall with the black light drawing of living water flowing from the cupped hands of Jesus
- Broken pots transformed (by black light) into new ones in the hands of the Master Potter
- Angry sea with a floundering ship becomes a safe harbor in the black light as one focuses on the cross rather than the stormy seas of life.

Recently I have also experimented with sumie-type drawings (monochrome) to illustrate biblical truths to Japanese audiences.



In the end, the point is not the drawing, but what it points to—the truth of the gospel. The purpose of chalk art, after all, is to expose people to drawings that help them meet Jesus in a new way and to shine a bright light on the truth of God's Word. If the chalk drawing fails to do that, it simply becomes a fun illustration with no lasting impact. But if used rightly, it can have a lasting impact on a person's life. **JH**

1. Danny Akin, "12 Reasons to Use Illustrations in Your Sermons," *Lifeway Research*, <https://research.lifeway.com/2014/02/13/12-reasons-for-using-sermon-illustrations/> (February 13, 2014).
2. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Illustrations in Preaching", *The Victorian Web*, <https://victorianweb.org/religion/sermons/chs1.html> (accessed November 3, 2022).

Images submitted by author



Jonathan Prins serves with EFCC Serve Beyond, working with Tokyo Multicultural Church. He grew up in Japan as an MK. His first wife Lyn died of cancer and he is now serving with his second wife Laura.

Embracing Soul diversity

Casting off a one-size-fits-all spirituality



The Parable of the Swimming Snake

My friends saw her before I did: a large green snake, resting in a contented coil on an island in one of the ponds at Shinsenuma Marsh in Niseko, Hokkaido.

We admired her together, but my friends, Karen and Christina, expressed relief that she was on the island, where water separated her from us. *But she got there somehow, and she could just as easily come back*, I thought to myself with a smirk.

I got out my telephoto lens and photographed the snake. She looked gentle, framed by last summer's dry grass. My friends continued along the boardwalk while I switched my lenses. I looked back at the pond, and saw that the snake was now swimming. I had never seen a swimming snake before. Ripples spread out in an elegant *s* as she approached the shore. She was at least two meters long.

I caught up with my friends. "The snake can swim," I enthused. "I saw her!"

They were not impressed. "So . . . the snake isn't on the island anymore?" "Ah . . . no."

As we passed the pond on our return journey, I spotted the snake resting in the grass beside the boardwalk. Her

intelligent eyes gazed up at us. I turned around and saw my friends huddled together, frightened. I explained that the snake was a harmless *aodaisho* (Japanese rat snake) and not poisonous, trying to coax them to walk by.

Meanwhile, as my friends warily eyed the snake, other hikers came along.

"Look, there's a snake!" I said, pointing, looking for someone to share my delight. An older couple, seasoned hikers, glanced at the snake with bored expressions and kept going. Two young women shrieked and ran back down the boardwalk. Then a middle-aged man approached with a large camera. I could see the excitement in his eyes as he found a good angle and started snapping one photo after another.

Finally, to continue our walk, I stood on the snake side of the boardwalk and convinced my friends to squeeze past on the other side. As we left the boardwalk and turned into the forest, we could still hear the two young women screaming all the way at the other end of the marsh.

Later, at the trailhead café, we enjoyed coffee floats and discussed our snake encounter.

"Am I the only person who thinks snakes are cute?" I asked.

"Yes," said Karen.

"That's a lot of wildlife in one animal," said Christina, shuddering.

I'm . . . different.

I've pondered this experience for over a year now. Not only was it a special bonding experience with two

colleagues, but I began to think of it as a parable of my life as an artist.¹ I am different. Everyone is different, but I seem to be *more* different. I often see and respond to the world in unusual ways. This extends to the way I connect with God and the way I worship him.²

Years of experience in church ministry have given me a front row seat to others' spiritual lives. Gradually I have grown in my appreciation for the ways God has gifted his people in vast, beautiful diversity. I realized that I connect with God through the Gospels and Psalms, nature and art. Our pastor, on the other hand, prefers Paul and private study; his wife likes to share the Psalms (and sourdough bread) with everyone around her; and my husband doesn't care what language or part of the Bible as long as he can open it and talk it over with others, Christian or not. This is my team; I love the gifts and insights each member brings.

Diversity of gifting and spiritual experiences brings challenges as well as joys. Ministry might be easier if we were all the same, but not nearly as rich, interesting, or beautiful. Since, as I mentioned, artists can be extra-specially different, I will share some hints to help you connect with and empower the artists in your church community.

How to love the artists in your community

Be intentional about the aesthetics of your worship space. While we can and should be able to worship any-

where, the space—the way it is built, arranged, and decorated—is in itself an act of devotion and a means of drawing people into deeper communion with God and each other. Ugly spaces, by contrast, can be distracting.

Likewise, pay attention to the aesthetics of your worship service. Communal worship is a reflection of the worshiping community, so I do not suggest aspiring to an impossible level of quality. Rather, plan your service so that its parts make sense and form a beautiful flow while also empowering those in the community to serve and honoring the traditions and symbols of the community. This balance is difficult to achieve. But since communal worship is vitally important to our life as Christians, it is important to give time and effort to overcoming this challenge.³

Do not wish that your artists would give up their art and do something “useful” or do the useful things first (I’ve been there, and I burned out). Likewise, don’t treat art as “wasteful.” Work with your artists to find creative solutions where resources are scarce.

Many professional artists work on weekends. If there is a consistent schedule conflict with Sunday worship, look for alternatives. Although there may be unhealthy situations from which a Christian artist may need to extract him/herself, do not immediately assume that this is the case. For many, our art is deeply connected with our spiritual life; giving it up would be like losing a limb.

Give your community’s artists ideas to inspire their work. What themes will be coming up in your preaching? What is the church’s yearly or seasonal theme? How can you invite the artists in your community to express these same themes in their art?

Encourage your artists to have fellowship with other Christian artists, even those from other churches and denominations. Art, like the spiritual life, thrives in community.

Artists, especially performers, are highly visible. For this reason, we are often accused of pride. Some artists do struggle with pride, but often that results from working in a competitive field and constantly being compared

with others. Dig deeper and encourage artists in your community to find their self-worth as God’s beloved children and image-bearers.

Some artists dislike being used to draw people to church events where their art is unrelated to the rest of the program. This can feel dishonest to us, both as artists and evangelists. I feel ill at ease unless my art is in harmony with the program of an event because I see art itself as part of the message, not only a vehicle to carry a message or a means of getting people through the church door. Including artists in the planning of an event can help solve this issue.

Remember that artists are humans, not resources. We can contribute greatly to our communities, but like all humans, we have limitations and we may need to say “no” to some opportunities. Although missionary artists usually receive a living allowance from their mission agency, Japanese Christian artists do not. Professional artists, who depend on art for their living, may not be able to volunteer their services for church-related projects. An honorarium or fee will help them continue to serve God through their art.

Speaking in parables

Artists may struggle with direct or verbal evangelism. I have come to realize that this is not lack of zeal but difference of gifting. We are more suited to a different “language”: symbols, stories, and parables. This style of evangelism draws in the listener by leaving the conversation open and making space for contemplation.

I went to seminary and learned to preach. When I burned out in 2017, that part of my self-expression dried up. Thankfully, I can still work with others who have preaching gifts to express the same concepts in a differ-

ent way, which may reach people who struggle to connect to sermons. While my husband preached through Mark’s parables, I chose similar themes and wrote my own parables using stories and symbols from everyday life in Japan. Several of these I read at the close of those sermons, allowing the church members to reflect on Mark’s parables from a different angle.

I’d like to close by showing you what this looks like: two parables about communion. When God draws my attention to a certain theme, I find that it is important to pay attention. The first parable I wrote in response to a conflict at a previous church, and the second touches on the issues of aesthetics in worship. I hope these bless you with space to ponder.

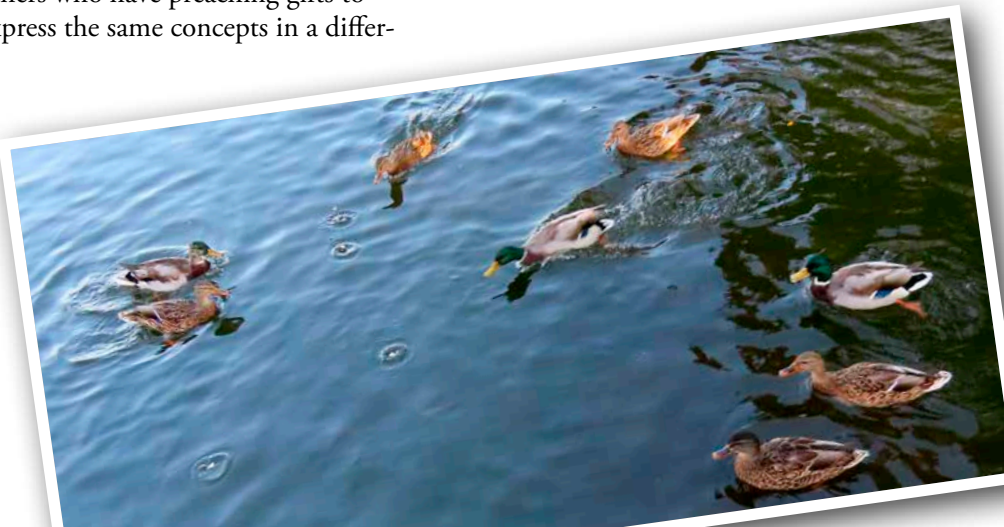
Cast Your Bread Upon the Water

When our church still had a pastor, he used to feed the ducks. But only on the first Sunday of each month.

On the morning in question, Fukui-san⁴ would cut up white *shokupan* bread into even, crustless squares. She always prepared more than we needed in case all the church members actually came and some guests from other churches too. But I can’t remember a time when everyone showed up, not even on Christmas; there were people who had quarreled with someone or who had grown distant. We always had leftovers.

During the service, the pastor gave thanks and lifted the bread, designating it for holy purpose. We ate and drank in silence, contemplating our sins and the grace of God.

Fukui-san put the leftover bread cubes into a plastic bag and tied it shut with a loose knot. She handed it to our



pastor with the bottle of grape juice. After all of Sunday's activities finished, he and his wife headed for Momijiyama Park, where there is a big pond fed by an ugly fountain made of just a pipe. But there are sakura trees there, and ducks.

Our pastor stood on the bridge and scattered bread into the pond. The ducks came and received it gratefully, jostling and gobbling. There were no leftovers. The ducks saw the bread for what it was: the grace of God in the form of shokupan cubes. Humans may turn up their noses at such a gift, but no duck was going to refuse.

And so it happens that in the pond of Momijiyama Park, you can find a flock of consecrated ducks.

eCommunion

The smell of bread wafts into the living room where I am working on PowerPoint slides for the upcoming OMF Hokkaido conference.

I made this bread using Hokkaido flour and eggs and our 15-year-old Canadian sourdough starter. I assembled the dough yesterday, and it rose slowly all night long. Early this morning, I shaped it into a loaf and let it rise in a basket, which gives it spiral impressions. Finally, I turned it onto a baking sheet, cut a cross with a bread

knife, and baked it for 30 minutes at 210 degrees Celsius. All this was for a photograph, in which I arranged the bread on a communion plate next to a matching ceramic wine goblet. This photograph, in turn, was for a PowerPoint slide. "Communion," says the slide.

I have heard that the cash-strapped sometimes bring plain rice balls to *yakiniku* (BBQ) restaurants, park themselves by the exhaust vent, and eat the rice while imagining that they are eating meat. We conference attendees, on the other hand, will look at my communion slide and imagine the taste and smell of fresh-baked bread while eating a tiny plastic-wrapped wafer individually packaged with preservative-laden grape juice that tastes like cough syrup.

We are not alone. Most churches these days seem to use these ingenious little packets. They are sanitized, safe from viruses and human tampering. They are also impersonal and cut off from the natural world.

I grieve that this symbol of Word-became-flesh, which preaches to us of the goodness of the created order, has been reduced to preservatives and plastic. Communion packets say, "It's just a ritual. Say these words and consume this spiritual medicine and you will be okay until the first Sunday of next month." There is no beauty, no flavor,

no "homemade," no "grown in Hokkaido." Who knows where this wafer and grape juice came from?

There's so much *shikata ga nai* (it can't be helped) in this pandemic—"If we're having communion, *shikata ga nai*, we have to use communion packets. It's safe that way." I've grown tired of this pragmatism, when meaning gets lost. Symbols only have power because they remind us of the meaning behind the symbol.

I eat our communion bread for breakfast, still warm, slathered in cream cheese and *ume* jam and accompanied by green tea.

"The gifts of God for the people of God," I say, lifting the bread. "Thanks be to God." My voice echoes through the empty dining room. If only I could have shared this bread, not just its picture, with my community. **JH**

1. In this article, "artist" refers to all people with artistic inclinations and gifts, not only professionals.
2. I have drawn many of the ideas in this section from *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Pathway to God* by Gary Thomas (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002).
3. This subject is an article in itself, so I apologize for my brevity here. Please contact me if you would like to talk further about the aesthetics of worship.
4. Name changed for privacy. But 福井さん—well of blessing—seemed appropriate.

Photos submitted by author

Celia Olson is from Seattle, USA, and has served in Hokkaido with OMF since 2009. A Japanese tea ceremony practitioner and professional cellist, her passion is to connect people to God and each other through art.



Hidden Beauty

By Roger W. Lowther

God reveals his glory through all things

In the fall of 2017, the Hidden Beauty 隠れた美 art festival took place in downtown Tokyo, where we experienced various Japanese traditional arts. We had sumie ink painting, where white space is as important as strokes on the paper, and ikebana flower arranging, where space between flowers and twigs communicates as powerfully as the objects themselves. We heard the music of the Japanese koto, where silence as well as sound

is gracefully played by the performer, and saw artwork by Japan's "Hidden" Christians, where references to Christ, Mary, the cross, and the apostles are hidden from the eye or concealed through symbolism.

Beauty in Japanese art is "hidden" in the space and silence between the placement of brush strokes, objects, and sound. And another beauty is hidden as well. This is the beauty of the Christian gospel. The idea that Christi-

anity is "outside" and foreign to Japan is strong. However, God was in Japan long before missionaries stepped off their boats in the 16th century, and his presence is revealed through everything that is made.

I find deep meaning in the Japanese verb *tsukuru* 造る (to make), which has two parts. The radical on the left (辵) means "path or proceed forward," and the part on the right (告) means "tell, inform, or announce." Together

SOUNDSCAPE
(PERFORMANCE TIME: 5 MINUTES)

ROGER W. LOWTHER

"Soundscape" is based on just two chords—E Major and G# Minor—and the only difference between these two chords is one note. Although the piece is only five minutes long, theoretically it could go on forever with an infinite number of repetitions.

"Soundscape" was written shortly after the great Tohoku earthquake of 2011 during a time when it felt like recovery was taking too long and nothing was ever going to change. During this global pandemic when we share similar feelings, this piece reminds us that God is always present and working, showing us an infinite number of ways to delight in him. You can listen to this piece on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/dMVK9Tc5Uic>) or purchase the sheet music on the Community Arts Tokyo website (<https://www.communityarts.jp/store/soundscape>).

they form the character 造, which I take to have the nuance of “information proceeding forth.” When I first learned this character, my eyes were drawn to the part of the character that looks like a square (口) and means “mouth,” learned by every first-year Japanese student. Many words related to communication contain that character for mouth: 言う (to say), 話す (to speak), 語る (to tell), 喋る (to talk), and others. All of creation—everything that has been made and will ever be made—communicates “information that proceeds forth” to the ends of the world.

Many pastors in Japan refer to the God of the Bible as the Creator Lord God (創造主である神様), maker (造) of heaven and earth, because this sets him apart from the eight million gods (八百万の神) of the Shinto religion. Only the Creator Lord God has the

power to send forth information and declare his glory through all things.

The heavens *declare* the glory of God; the skies *proclaim* the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth *speech*; night after night they *reveal* knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their *voice* goes out into all the earth, their *words* to the ends of the world (Ps. 19:1–4, NIV, author emphasis).

God’s voice declares, proclaims, speaks, reveals, and goes out to the ends of the world through creation into every nation, tribe, and people, including the nation of Japan. Psalm 19:4 in particular reminds me of Japan, long considered the end of the world because it is the eastern terminus of the historic Silk Road. Though we can-

not hear it with our ears, the message of God is hidden in all things that are made because we live in a universe saturated with the voice of God.

Information about God pours forth through all things. Day after day, night after night, they reveal knowledge of his glory. As we discover together the hidden beauty of the voice of God in all things, may we draw closer to him and be led to worship him. In so doing, we fulfill the very thing we were made (造) to do. **JH**

1. Community Arts Tokyo and Grace City Church Tokyo sponsored this event at Hamarikyu Asahi Hall in Tokyo on October 14, 2017.

Sheet music submitted by author

Roger W. Lowther is the director of faith and art at Community Arts Tokyo, Grace City Church Tokyo, and the MAKE Collective (international network of missionary artists). He has served with Mission to the World in Japan since 2005.

Unique arts in Japan

Watching the Master’s paintbrush dance in the lives of ordinary people

By Kari Miyano

Do you like chocolate? How many of you can remember a chocolate sampler where there would be various kinds all in one box? I always liked the chocolate crême ones and hoped I didn’t get one with orange filling. Sometimes you wouldn’t know what you got until you bit into it. Today I would like to give you a small taste of some arts used in Japan and let you know more about them. Through the arts in ministry, we can taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Gospel hula

In the past few years, gospel hula has become popular here. Several years ago, my friend Melanie from Hawaii was invited to dance hula at a church about an hour away from my home. My part in helping was to drive her to the little church. We got there early

and stayed late. As Japanese are naturally curious and want to talk to overseas guests, not only did I get the chance to interpret for her, but I was also able to make friends with the people over lunch and encourage them in their faith walks.

When I talked with her recently, Melanie explained there are many styles of hula, like traditional or contemporary Hawaiian hula, Tahitian hula, and gospel hula. Gospel hula focuses on worshiping God in an elegant, more sedate manner than, say, the hip-swinging Tahitian hula. Some types of gospel hula include a com-



bination of American Sign Language and traditional hula movements in telling a story through the hands. Melanie shared that many people have commented that their hearts were touched through the graceful and worshipful gospel hula dance.

Even this year during COVID-19, I received an invitation to a mini gospel hula “concert” that took place during a Sunday morning service. My friend Izumi from Yokkaichi, Mie Prefecture, was coming with her team, Shalom Gospel Hula. I arrived early and struck up a few conversations with people at the church. One lady told me it was her first time to come to church. We had a heartwarming conversation for about ten minutes.



Shalom Gospel Hula team, with 92-year-old dancer in front.



The author wearing a haori and conversing with friends.

When the team began dancing, it felt so good to see people not wearing masks and being themselves as dancers. They were wearing beautiful red dresses and white leis around their necks, and they conveyed the gentle and caring love of Jesus through their dance to the song “There Is None Like You.” The music flooded my heart and nourished me, as did their presence. One dancer especially got my attention because she was 92 years old! How glad I was to see her being a part of the group. I was touched and encouraged as I watched the dancers beautifully worshiping the Lord through song.

Wearing Japanese art

This may be a surprising way for women to use art. Over ten years ago, I started to wear a Japanese haori when I went to concerts and different events. A haori is a traditional jacket that is worn on top of a kimono. I wore a pair

of slacks, even jeans, with a T-shirt and then put a haori on top. Oh boy, did this ever open the door to conversations with people, especially elderly Japanese ladies! I was not fishing for compliments, but they would tell me how much they liked seeing me wear it.

As they approached me this way, it opened the door for conversations. I guess I was showing them that I valued their culture and something that was important to them—their traditional clothing, made from silk, in different colors and patterns. I started to buy more haori so that I could have different colors for different seasons. For all you bargain hunters out there, these are typically 300–500 yen at recycle shops, so it is very reasonable and easy to get one if you want to try wearing art and see what happens.

This is a great way to start conversations because the people will come to you and start talking. Then you know

who is open, and you can see how God leads from there. It brings me joy, and I still wear haori to this day.

Tying it all together with love

Usually after gospel concerts and gospel hula, there is a teatime where food is served and tables and chairs are set up for people to mingle and have fellowship. I make it a point to talk with the different people who come and ask God to use the conversations we have. I like to become friends with the artists as well as the guests, sometimes getting connected on Facebook or other media.

This May, there was an American gospel artist who was brave and courageous to come to Japan for music ministry. As I visited her Facebook page, I was extremely surprised to find a picture of my coworker, Momoko, with this singer. As I dug into the story behind the picture, I found out that Momoko had be-

come a believer through this ministry. It began by her attending a concert and then becoming friends with the singer as well as with people in the Japanese choir, all of whom were part of leading her to Christ over time.

All of this makes my heart sing and give praise to the Lord. He uses music to bless us, encourage us, and even to give us friends. The Lord our God is with us, and he is mighty to save. He takes great delight in us, and he quiets us with his love. He rejoices over us with singing, as we see in Zephaniah 3:17. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Kari Miyano (US) likes stepping out of the box and looking for what God is doing everywhere. She enjoys dancing and connecting people in the body of Christ. She and her husband live in Osaka.



恵 megumi (grace):
 十 (ten/cross) + 思 (think)

While 十 means “ten,” it has the appearance of a cross. Combining that cross with the kanji for “think” forms “grace.” In essence, when we think of how Christ gave his life for us on the cross, we see the grace of God. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Eph. 1:7 NIV).

命 inochi (life):
 人 (human) + 一 (one) + 叩 (knock)

This kanji presents a beautiful picture of the life we have in Christ. Our God is loving and personal. He desires a relationship with each of us. All we have to do is ask. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7 ESV).



福音 fukuin (gospel):
 福 (blessed) + 音 (sound)

The good news we have in Christ is indeed a blessed sound—the best news the world has ever heard! “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV).

1. “Flat lay” is a style of photography that involves carefully arranging objects on a flat surface (such as a bed or table) and shooting the photograph from directly above.

Artwork submitted by author

Jackie Peveto has edited Japan Harvest articles for four years. Though she lives in Colorado now, her thoughts travel to the places she called home for a while, including the Bible school at Torchbearers Yamanakako.



Japan Harvest News

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Isaiah 52:7

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

Mission Strategy Support Map

Identifying where a "church within walking distance" is needed

Christian Shimbun, July 17, 2022 Translated by Hiromi Terukina

Where are churches needed? An IT team from the Tokyo-based educational support organization, Kokusai Kyōiku Kaihatsu, has developed a Mission Strategy Support system and named it "Map David" (MD). Makoto Fukui, CEO and pastor of Tamagawa Christ Church, gave an overview:

"We thought of the slow-moving situation of evangelism in Japan as Goliath, and named the system after David who triumphed over him. MD brings the Church Database (by Word of Life Press) to a new level with the hope of bringing change to the current evangelistic situation in Japan.

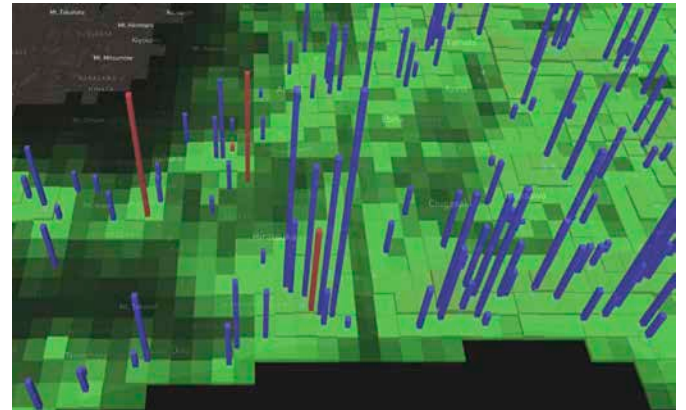
"When we considered evangelism in Japan, we concluded that more churches are needed, not necessarily bigger ones. Without the growth of each church member, a church cannot survive and thrive. Building more smaller-scale congregations of about 40 members within walking distance of the church would help pastors to effectively care for them. Japan needs churches to take root in each locality and bring forth Christians to bear fruit in that area. This will not be solved by just supplying more pastors to churches. We need to seriously consider revolutionizing the traditional way of evangelizing and pastoring.

"MD displays all sorts of information about Japanese churches worldwide onto a map, including the location, number of members and whether there is a pastor or not. MD also overlays the area's population density onto the map. This enables us to see how many people live within a church's target area. This is important to know."

"Switching to the satellite mode in the software reveals the geography of each area. For example, Hiratsuka, Kanagawa Prefecture has only a couple

of churches. But MD shows us that many people in that city aren't within walking distance of either church.

"Japan has long been battling to 'overcome the 1% Christianity rate.' But when we take a look at the population living within a square kilometer of a church, there are hardly any churches with members representing 1% of the region. Furthermore, only a small fraction of the church members come from within walking distance around the



Each blue bar represents a church and its size. Red bars represent churches without pastors. Selecting a green tile shows data such as population.

church and this is where we need to put more effort. We hope our MD system becomes an aid to all mission activity. In the future, we plan to update the database and add the ability to compare mission work before and after COVID-19." ■

Laughter as a gateway to salvation

Sharing the gospel through Japanese sit-down comedy *rakugo*

Christian Shimbun, April 22, 2022 Translated by Tomoko Kato

The Open Bible Kansai District churches held an event called, "Laughter as a Gateway to Salvation"¹ at Kobe Christ Glory Church, led by Pastor Sugawara.

The gospel was shared through *manzai* (standup comedy), *rakugo* (traditional storytelling), koto (harp), and traditional Japanese dancing.

Rakugo storytellers (pastors and other amateur performers) took part in sharing the gospel through comedy and entertainment. They made the audience laugh as they presented the attractiveness of the gospel.

Sugawara said they aimed to "share the gospel through Japanese culture. Sometimes the Bible can seem 'too Western.'"

When Sugawara became a Christian through a missionary, he felt that he had to "give up his identity as a

Japanese man." He believes that sharing the truth of the gospel using something that the Japanese are more accustomed to would make it easier for them to come to church. ■

1. In Japanese, there is a saying 「笑う門には福来たる」 (warau kado ni fuku kitaru), which means good luck comes to a laughing household. 「門」 means household or family, but also gateway.



Pastor Sugawara (in the center) with the comedians and performers



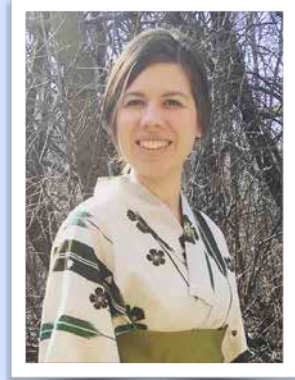
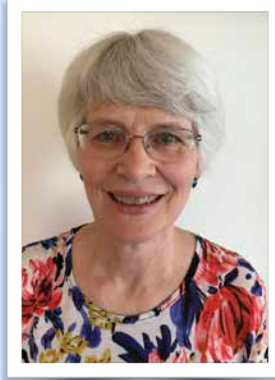
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Also see JEMA Women in
Ministry on Facebook



The good news is for missionaries, too

We have a heavenly Father who invites us to work alongside him

God is a missionary God, the Bible is a missions story, and the goal is the whole world. It always has been. One day, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14 ESV). There will be a tsunami of God’s grace, and his peace and justice will rule. There will be no more tears, mourning, crying, or pain. Marriages and parenting won’t be broken. The world will once again be right. We are now a part of establishing that kingdom of God here in Japan.

Someone once said that as we take the gospel to the unreached corners of the world, we have to also learn to carry the good news to the unreached places in our own hearts. That’s an interesting grid through which to think about Christian growth that we use during CPI’s Grace Week retreats (the next one will be early 2023).

The “now” and “not yet” of our salvation

There’s a *now* and a *not yet* to our salvation that’s summarized in 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, we are God’s children *now*, and what we will be has *not yet* appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him” (ESV, author’s emphasis). We are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone. That is finished—what glorious, good news! And we are not yet what we will be. That’s the tension we always live with.

When you became a Christian, your heart was like an unreached country. It was like the moment the first missionaries landed on the beach in Kagoshima. The gospel came to Japan, but that’s when the real work began! Are there corners of your heart today that are still captive to old idols and longing to hear the good news that Jesus has come?

As we learn to preach the gospel to the unreached parts of our own hearts, we also learn how to bring it to the Japanese. Our neighbors’ idols are more like ours than we want to admit. In fact, one way to see evangelism (and discipleship) is letting other people overhear us preaching the gospel to ourselves. It’s an invitation to “walk with me as I walk with Jesus.” It’s liberating to think that my job is not to model strength as a pastor. It’s not always having the answers or being full of faith. There is only one who is strong and faithful, and our job is to point to him. As John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). We aren’t speaking down to people but embracing

the fact that we’re beggars telling other beggars where we found the bread of life!

An invitation

I’ve been serving as either a pastor or missionary for nearly 25 years. Too often, I’ve preached and led as if the gospel were a dusty, old truth rather than a present-tense reality. Faith and repentance often become intellectual concepts or invitations for the lost instead of ongoing steps in the gospel dance. All too often, I lose the music and the present value of the cross. I’m swallowed up by the *not yet* and forget that I am God’s child now.

One of my strongest childhood memories is of going with my dad to cut wood in the wintertime. I knew that we would use the wood to keep the family warm, and I found meaning in helping with that job. But it was more than that. I also enjoyed special fellowship with my father when we worked together. I learned to drink coffee, laughed at jokes, and heard stories about when my father was young.

Now, God has called me to Japan, and I rarely get to work together with my dad—I miss that. Still, we have a heavenly Father who invites us to work beside him. He doesn’t do that because he needs us, and he doesn’t drive us like slaves. The work is meaningful, because it is family work. And working alongside our Heavenly Father creates special fellowship with him. Would you say your recent work as a missionary has been more like the experience of a son working alongside his loving father or a slave serving a strict master? Has it been more like that of a beloved daughter or a dutiful orphan?

The gospel is for us too

So, fellow missionaries, pastors, and church planters, called to this hard field, let this little article be a reminder and a call to sanity today. The good news isn’t just for those you’re called to serve—“It’s for you and for your children.” God isn’t far away; he’s near. You’re a child of the Father, a friend of the Son, and empowered by the Spirit. And right now, you’re a member of the family of God. Let’s lean into that today. **JH**

Jeremy Sink is a US missionary with Serge and a member of CPI’s Leadership Team. He and his wife, Gina, have three sons and have been serving in Nagoya since 2012.



Tadoku six years on

Why the tadoku reading strategy is so effective and some tips for using it

Six years ago I adopted a reading method called *tadoku* (多読) and wrote about my initial experience in *Japan Harvest*.¹ Since then, I've continued to use it and have found it extremely effective.

As its name implies, tadoku is a strategy that emphasizes reading a lot of material. It has three basic tenets:

1. Choose books you find easy to read.
2. Don't look up words in a dictionary; rather, skip over words and phrases you don't understand.
3. If you don't find a book interesting, start reading another one.

Why it works

Before I started using tadoku, I would spend a lot of time looking up words in a dictionary (roughly 1,000 words per book on average), and this slowed me down considerably. But now I'm generally able to read a novel in about a month. I think one of the biggest advantages of tadoku is that it maximises the time you spend reading.

Another advantage is that you spend your whole time in Japanese—there's no switching between languages. When you use a foreign-language dictionary, you're connecting Japanese words to English meanings (or another language). But with tadoku, you surmise meaning from the context, and so you're learning Japanese in Japanese. This mimics the way that children learn language.

Also, by reading interesting books that are not overly demanding, tadoku strikes the right balance between effort and reward. If a book is too hard, the brain quickly tires, whereas if a book is not engaging enough, you lose interest and tune out. With tadoku, reading becomes a more enjoyable, immersive experience. I think this principle extends to all educational experiences: you want to challenge yourself just enough, and you need some kind of intellectual stimulation as you learn.

Other benefits of tadoku include strengthening reading skills such as surmising meaning from context and evaluating which words and passages are critical for grasping the book's narrative and which ones you can safely skim over.

Some tips

As I've written previously, start reading manga as they are an excellent gateway to reading Japanese books.² The pictures aid comprehension, and text is brief and sometimes comes with *furigana* (kana that indicates pronunciation). When you're ready to graduate to books, I advise starting with short stories or articles by easy-to-read authors. I've found Seo Maiko, Murata Sayaka, Shōji Yukiya, Kondō Fumie, Higashino Keigo, and Murakami Haruki good in this respect.

One of the hardest things about tadoku is finding interesting books that are right for your level. The most interesting books always seem to be those that are hardest to read. But if you find an interesting book that's currently too hard for you to read, you can make a note and come back to it when your reading ability has improved. I find the website Bookmeter.com useful for recording Japanese books I want to read, am reading, or have read (it's similar to the English-language website Goodreads.com).

Another thing I struggle with is that I find it difficult to stop reading a book once I've started it. If it's not that interesting, I often keep reading in the hope that the ending will redeem the book. And if it's hard going and I'm already well into a book, I will plough through since I've already invested a lot of time on it. One solution to this problem is to use free ebook samples. They provide the first 5–10% of the book, so when you reach the end of a sample, you can evaluate whether you want to keep going or not. Alternatively, going to a bookshop or library, and engaging in *tachiyomi* (to read a book in a store without buying it) is a more traditional way to assess books before committing to them.

If you've never given tadoku a try, I would strongly recommend giving it a shot. It's the most effective reading strategy for foreign languages that I've come across. **JH**

1. Simon Pleasants, "Experimenting with Tadoku," *Japan Harvest*, <https://japan-harvest.org/experimenting-with-tadoku> (Summer 2016).

2. Simon Pleasants, "Get into Manga!" *Japan Harvest*, <https://japanharvest.org/get-into-manga/> (Autumn 2018).

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.



Art for relaxation and spiritual reflection

Spiritual reflection and relaxation are two ways that we can look after ourselves using art

Art is invaluable for self-care, for relaxation and refreshment, and as part of spiritual reflection and devotion.

Art for relaxation

As Japan's state of emergency drew near in 2020, I panicked about how I was going to cope with being cooped up, not meeting people, and not being able to explore.

A colleague suggested I try crochet. I rejected the idea initially. However, my friend encouraged me to try. With nothing to lose, I dashed to the 100 yen shop and grabbed a pretty ball of wool and a crochet hook. So began my somewhat tortuous journey, watching YouTube and doing crochet. Three years on, I've finished a number of projects.



Meanwhile, my husband, Peter, decided to teach himself modular origami—origami using more than one piece of paper. YouTube to the rescue again! I've lost count of the number of beautiful creations he's made. Many have found their way to friends and family, and a number decorate our apartment.



Beauty, and therefore art, is initiated and inspired by God. Consider these words, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31 NIV). God didn't make an "adequate" world; he made a beautiful world that was good to look at and to live in.

Moreover, creativity and artistic ability are God-given. I remember my amazement and pleasure when I read about the decoration of the Tabernacle: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts'" (Ex. 31:1–5). The text goes on to describe many beautiful items made by all sorts of people that were dedicated to God for use in the Tabernacle.

We are created in the image of God to appreciate beauty and art and to create it! Therefore, healthy self-care should include art of some kind, either appreciating someone else's or creating our own.

Neither my husband nor I would describe ourselves as artistic, but these arts have become enjoyable hobbies for us. I wonder what art you enjoy, or could learn to enjoy? Let me encourage you to fill your life with beauty and art for relaxation as part of your care for yourself.

Art for spiritual reflection

"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). Because beauty and art are God-inspired and God-given, they can also be used for spiritual reflection. Ann Voskamp writes, "All beauty is only reflection. And whether I am conscious of it or not, any created thing of which I am amazed, it is the glimpse of His face to which I bow down."¹

One method of visually-inspired spiritual reflection is *Visio Divina*, described as "holy seeing . . . a way to pray with the eyes . . . a way to behold created beauty and lead us to prayer."² *Visio Divina* can be practiced in beautiful surroundings or by using photographs or works of art. It can be done alone or with others.

Find a beautiful scene to look at (even a photograph of one will do), or a work of art, and use the following steps to practice *Visio Divina*:

1. Commit yourself to God in prayer, humbly ask him to reveal himself through his Holy Spirit.
2. Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Try to keep your eyes from wandering. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
3. Now, gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
4. What responses, emotions, or memories does this image evoke in you? Imagine you are in this scene. What do you see, hear, smell, touch?
5. What Scriptures come to mind? Respond to God about what you are seeing and sensing. Pray, and write down your thoughts and prayers if you wish.

May God bless each of us richly through the beauty he has made and the creativity he has given each of us to appreciate and to practice. **JH**

Resources

Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God by Sybil MacBeth
(See also: *Praying in color*, prayingincolor.com)

Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Christian Art and Prayer by Juliet Benner

Meeting God through Art: Visio Divina: A Guided Prayer Journal with Images from the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Therese Kay

1. Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*; quoted in Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, (IVP, 2015), 47.
2. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, (IVP, 2015), 47.

Images submitted by author

Janet Dallman (UK), with her husband Peter, came to Japan in 1998. She's been involved in church planting, student work, welcoming 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.

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.

オリエント・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.

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Tips for taking better photos

Part one of a two-part series about photography and handling of digital photos

Whether you are using a fancy camera and trying to get artistic scenes, or just capturing moments with a smart-phone, some basic principles of photography are universal. Understanding them can make your photos more effective for life and ministry.

Our eyes are like cameras but much more dynamic—they are constantly changing what they are looking at, adjusting the pupils to different light levels, and making the lenses focus at different distances. And our brains can do even more with those images. But a photo is a flat, rectangular recording of the light coming in at one moment, so not all of it will be at the right light level or focus. That's okay, but to get the best photo, it helps to know what's going on inside your camera. Each section of this article has both explanations and tips, so don't let the terms scare you off.

I first learned these concepts in a college photography course in the 1980s when I had to develop my own film. But digital photography is instant and free, so I encourage you to try out these concepts and learn by seeing what happens.

Light affects everything

Everything about both vision and photography is based on the light that hits each location on our retinas or each pixel on our camera's image sensor. Two things in a camera control how much light hits the sensor: the *aperture* (like the pupils in our eyes, making a bigger or smaller hole for the light to come in) and the *shutter speed* (the length of time the sensor records light). In addition, the sensor itself can adjust how it records the light it receives, which is commonly called *ISO*. In digital cameras (including cameras in phones), all these things are normally automated, but it's not magic—you can improve the odds of getting the shot you want with a little awareness.

When in bright sunlight, there is plenty of light to have a fast shutter speed to catch motion and a small aperture so that more is in focus (called "depth of field"—more on that later). But when you're indoors or in other dark conditions, do you prioritize shutter speed or aperture? Auto mode will try to strike a balance, but that might not be what you want. You'll care more about shutter speed if your subject is moving or the aperture if focus is critical. Higher ISO might seem like the way to get both, but the resulting image will have more grainy noise instead of smooth colors because the camera software has to guess

the color of each pixel using less information. Pro cameras have large sensors that can better capture light even at high ISO, but the sensors in phones are tiny, making this kind of noise a real problem. So get as much light on the subject as possible, by having a window behind you, turning on more lights, or whatever you can do. Flash should only be a last resort because the result won't look natural.



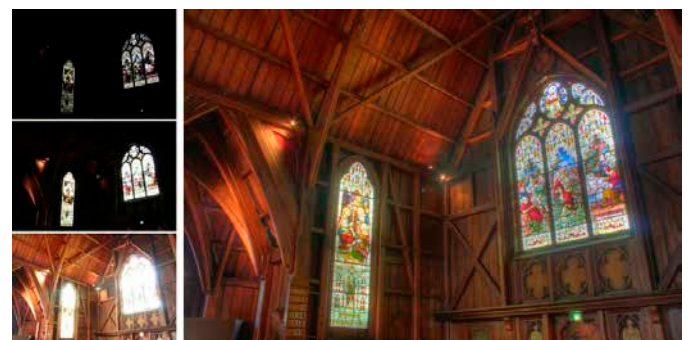
Example of grain at high ISO

Most cameras' default auto mode will typically adjust the exposure and color balance to make the average of the whole photo "middle gray." This means it might let you down if the subject you most care about is only a small part of the overall photo (e.g., a skier surrounded by snow or fireworks at night) or there is a predominant color you don't want neutralized (e.g., a sunset). Your camera should have an option to manually increase or decrease the exposure—it's usually shown as +/- numbers (you'd want plus numbers for the skier example and minus for fireworks). Manually choosing the white balance (daylight, fluorescent, etc.) might also be helpful. Learn where these adjustments are in your camera.

If you're trying to get clarity in both light and dark areas, a feature called HDR (high dynamic range) can help—it will take multiple photos very quickly and then combine them to use more exposure in dark areas and less in light areas, like the professional example below (HDR in amateur devices isn't this good, but it's better than nothing). Your phone might turn on HDR automatically when there is a lot of contrast in the scene. But HDR can't do miracles and should only be used if the subject isn't moving.



Wide and narrow apertures



Focus and depth of field

Our eyes can't keep all distances in focus at once—that's not how lenses work. Eyes quickly adjust their internal lens to stay in focus as we look at objects at different distances, and our brain puts it all together, but a camera has to choose just one focus for each photo. AI might look for faces, but otherwise the camera will focus on the center of the frame (if you see a box in your viewfinder, that's where it's trying to focus). If that's not what you want, you can specify the focus spot. On most phones, simply touch the spot on the screen you want to be in focus, wait for it to focus there, then touch the shutter button. On a camera with a physical shutter button, aim the center of the frame on the point of interest and press the shutter button half-way and hold, then point the camera where you want and press the shutter button all the way down.

The difference between the nearest and farthest distances that are in focus is called *depth of field*. The aperture has a dramatic effect on depth of field—a tiny aperture doesn't let in much light, but many more of the objects at different distances will be in focus.

Most of the time that's good, but it depends on what kind of photo you want. See these two photos of the same scene—one shows much more of all the trees, and the other blurs the background to draw the viewer to look at just one tree bud. If you are shooting a room full of people at a ministry event, you'd want the biggest depth of field possible, but a small aperture means you'd need a longer shutter speed for the same amount of light, so you have to make choices. The default shooting mode on your camera is probably full auto (even "AI auto" on a phone), but there should be other shooting modes you can use for more control:



- *Aperture priority*: You set the aperture, and the camera chooses the shutter speed. This is good if you want to control the depth of field higher or lower than auto is giving you.
- *Shutter priority*: You set the shutter speed, and the camera chooses the aperture. This is good if you have a fast-moving subject (e.g., sports) and you want to minimize blur.
- *Full manual*: You set everything! Not for the faint of heart.

"Scenes" and AI

Having said all this, cameras designed for non-professionals also offer a selection of what are often called scenes, like "sports" or "sunset," that will do some of this compensation for you. Every manufacturer will use different scene names, but now that you know the mechanics, you can probably guess what each scene will do, and then you can try them and see if they're useful. This article describes a

few examples: <https://www.picturecorrect.com/digital-camera-scene-modes>

Phones have gone even further with their AI. Some automatically apply a scene when it seems applicable, and apparently some will even alter reality to give you what they think you want!¹

Composing/ framing your photo

When aiming the camera or phone, a little thought can make the photo much more appealing, perhaps even artistic. The first point is really simple: think about whether the subject will look best in a vertical or horizontal photo, and hold your camera or phone accordingly. Curiously, it seems that most people tend to hold phones horizontally to take still photos but vertically to take video—I don't know why. Anyway, just stop and think before you shoot.

If you are using a camera with a zoom lens so you can change the focal length (wide vs. narrow view), use it to fill the frame with only what you want. If you don't have a zoom lens, use your feet—get closer if the situation allows. Note that "digital zoom" is not real zoom—it doesn't change the focal length, so you won't get any more detail of distant objects. It's the same as cropping a small piece of a photo and then inventing additional pixels that the camera didn't really see, which just makes the file bigger. I don't use digital zoom—if I don't have a zoom lens, I either move closer or crop the photo later to get rid of unnecessary background. Since phones are too small to have real zoom lenses, many have second/third cameras at different focal lengths that kick in when you "zoom," but often those extra cameras are lesser quality.

Here is a page with many more great composition tips and visual examples of each. It is focused (no pun intended) on art photography, but any photo can benefit: <https://photographypro.com/composition>

In part two, I'll share tips about handling digital photos after you have taken them. Stay tuned! **JH**

1. This video by Marques Brownlee was made in December 2021 but was already mind-blowing then: <https://youtu.be/MZ8giCWDcyE>

Images:

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

<https://photographylife.com/what-is-iso-in-photography> (used with permission)

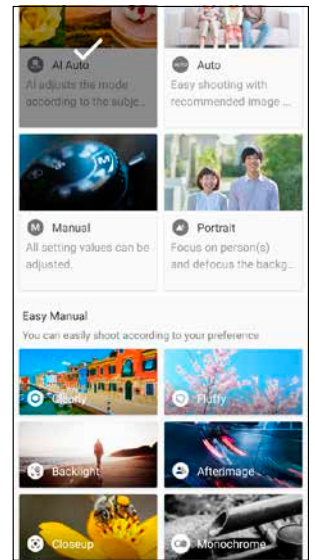
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depth_of_field

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HDRI-Example.jpg>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Old_saint_pauls_1.jpg

Screenshot submitted by author

Karen Elrick (US) and her husband, Dan, have been missionaries in Japan since 1996 and live in Osaka. Karen ministers through print design, web development, video/audio editing, etc. and is the designer for Japan Harvest. <https://L4JP.com>

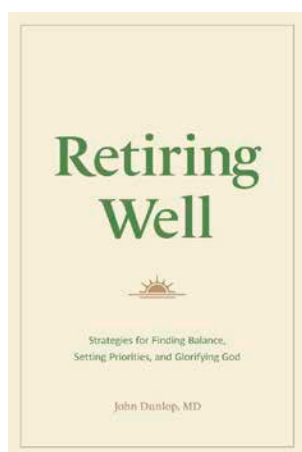


Some modes, scenes, and effects on the author's simple phone

Retiring Well: Strategies for Finding Balance, Setting Priorities, and Glorifying God

John Dunlop, MD (Crossway, 2022) 179 pp.

Dunlop specialized in the care of seniors for some 50 years and writes from his own retirement experience. He shares what he has learned from his study of the Bible (God’s values and priorities), from watching many of his patients retire, from his reading, and from his own failures. The book is practical, and each of the ten chapters is organized around a specific strategy to implement: Determine



your priorities, retire at the right time, retire in the right place, take care of yourself, love God, make good friends, enjoy and strengthen your family, avoid destructive pitfalls, get busy, and be flexible, adaptable, and resilient. Each chapter ends with questions to ponder and a prayer.

He includes recommended reading and other resources, including Christian financial advice for retirement. The three-page Scripture index

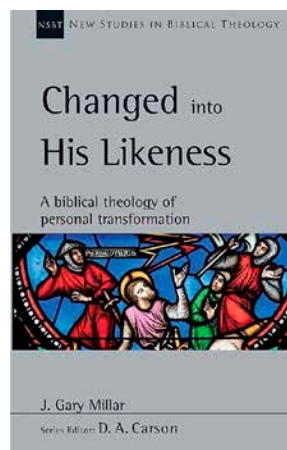
shows how the book is informed by biblical wisdom. In the chapter on loving God (the longest chapter), Dunlop encourages us to focus on spiritual disciplines to grow in our love for God as we retire. Retirement may have its surprises and challenges, but Dunlop reminds us that “the end of retirement for those who have retired well will be to stand in the presence of Jesus and experience his glory . . . Let us long for—and live for—that day. That’s the final strategy for a joyful, fulfilling retirement that brings glory to God” (p. 167). Highly recommended for all ages! **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Changed into His Likeness: A biblical theology of personal transformation

J. Gary Millar (InterVarsity Press, 2021) 271 pp.

Millar, principal of Queensland Theological College in Australia and Old Testament scholar, explores the nature of gospel-shaped change. He exposes the dangers of both promising too much (a suffering-free, resource-rich life) and expecting too little (minimizing what God can do through his Spirit in us). He has a fascinating chapter on the Old Testament and concludes that a careful reading of the OT “suggests that change or transformation is both necessary and deeply desirable, but remains elusive until the new covenant (i.e., the dramatic intervention of God promised in multiple places . . .) is set up by the coming



Messiah” (p. 122). His concluding chapter argues that transformation is a New Testament reality. God changes us through the gospel. Millar says that writing this book made him “gasp all over again at the extent of his love for us, the extravagance of his work in us and the relentlessness of his commitment to us” (p. x). This book calls us to embrace the challenges and delights of a lifetime “of being changed

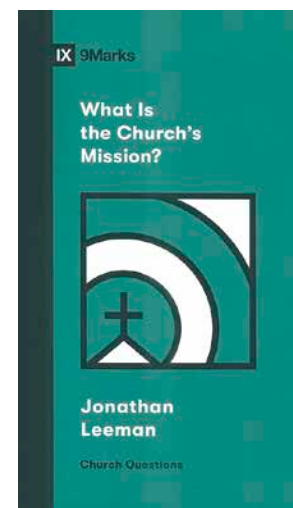
by God into the likeness of Christ. It is a call to be both realistic and optimistic. It is a reminder that yes, the Christian life is hard, but we have been changed, are being changed and will be changed into his likeness” (p. 243). **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

What Is the Church’s Mission?

Jonathan Leeman (Crossway, 2022) 64 pp.

This short booklet does not take long to read, but it is packed full of wisdom. What does Jesus call the church to do? Leeman, editorial director for 9Marks, argues that the mission of a local church is to (acting together) go and make disciples (the whole family job). And our mission as an individual church member is to be a disciple by observing everything Jesus commands (the individual family member job). Leeman says that “making disciples plays a central role in being a disciple” (p. 23). He helpfully distinguishes between “root problems” and “fruit problems” as he looks at a gospel solution to humanity’s biggest problem. God is the solution, and “directing people’s hearts and minds to God is the most important thing a church can do and the singular activity around which everything else revolves” (p. 47). This is clear, biblical teaching on the mission of the church. **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.

How can you write with integrity?

Credibility is such a foundational element in writing that we often neglect to think about it

Have you thought about whether your prayer letters project credibility? Credibility means the quality or power of inspiring belief.¹ If your prayer letters aren't credible, then people might stop reading them and won't be so interested in being part of your support team.

Credibility is easy to lose. Have you ever read a book or an article that seems a bit off? I once read a book where the main characters relocate to Tokyo from the US with young children. It's something I could relate to, but the author clearly had never done an international move with children or talked to anyone who had. Additionally, the author didn't describe Tokyo as I know it to be. The writing was unrealistic, almost fantasy, except that wasn't the genre! I didn't finish the book.

If people have a personal relationship with you, they are more likely to trust your prayer letter. However, if you are overseas and they've never met you, your prayer letter is the only way people have to judge if you have credibility.

Some ways to foster credibility in your prayer letters:

- Research your facts
- Follow through with anything you promise
- Share answers to prayer requests
- Share personal stories
- Use solid writing skills
- Use an active voice

A writer who clearly exaggerates facts, shares things that aren't correct, or doesn't follow up on things that they say they are going to do will struggle to build credibility with their readers. Share how God has answered people's prayers. Be real about struggles and even perceived failures by sharing personal stories.

A prayer letter that is badly put together (for example, with poor grammar or excessive rambling) is not going to encourage people to trust you. Try to take the time to edit and hone your writing. Use an active voice, not a passive one. Active voice: *I could write a whole article on this topic.* Passive voice: *A whole article could be written on this topic.* An active voice tells us what someone or something does. When you write using active voice, you engage your readers and often write more succinctly.

If you work on these six points, you'll build credibility with your readers and hopefully get them more engaged in what God's called you to do. **JH**



1. "credibility," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/credibility> (accessed Oct. 13, 2022).

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

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Source: <http://www.statisticbrain.com/average-cost-of-college-tuition/>

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Working for unity through prayer in Kōchi

“Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work.” — Oswald Chambers¹

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16 NIV).

I am grateful that in Christ, I have been made righteous. As such, my prayers, and yours, can be powerful and effective. Here’s an example.

The historical situation in Kōchi

When I was studying Japanese as an adult in Tokyo in early 1979, I would tell the pastors of the churches I went to that I was going to Kōchi City. They would invariably tell me that it was a place well-known for disunity among the churches. And it was true. When I first came to Kōchi as a teenager with my family in the fall of 1970, my dad and I went to an evangelistic meeting held by Kōji Honda (the “Billy Graham” of Japan). Including Dad and myself, there were only six people there—in a huge hall! Later, we heard from local pastors that the reason the attendance was so low was because of discord between pastors. What a sad commentary on the church in Kōchi.

Because of that history, when I started my first church in 1981, I purposely tried to work with other churches. Over the decades, this church and the one I started in 1982 have held a variety of events that included pastors and laypeople from many churches. But the most effective thing we have done is our monthly Fresh Encounter with God, where pastors from various backgrounds meet to seek God’s face and worship Him together.

A new approach

To facilitate unity among the churches in Kōchi, the small group of pastors that meets monthly to pray started holding Global Days of Prayer (GDOP) from 2008. GDOP was started in South Africa, eventually becoming an annual event with over three billion people participating worldwide. We held GDOP every year, but in 2012 we decided that we wanted something better suited to our situation. Thus began the Praise Worship Day in Kōchi.

Our desire is that the unity of the church in Kōchi (made up of all believers) will be made visible. The church is actually one, and we want to express that. On Praise Worship Day, we desire to praise and worship God with the result that God will make us one and that our unity will influence others, even outside the church, and through God working within us, Kōchi will be changed.

Praise Worship Day in Kōchi 2022

This year, we held the Praise Worship Day at the Kōchi Pentecostal Church. Because of COVID-19, we hadn’t met for two years, so we were excited to do so. We have learned from the past, and God gave us a really good time,



for which we praise Him. This year had an international flavor, with people from England, Australia, America, and Japan—a good foundation for the future. It was the first time we’d met at this church, and we had more pastors and more churches involved than ever before. We’re looking forward to seeing more believers and more churches involved next year. As we look at what God has done in the past, we’re grateful and look forward to what He will do in the future.

Though each church in Kōchi is small, when we come together with other Christians, we realize we are members of the “catholic church.” This year, we felt that strongly.

We, as pastors, will continue to meet for worship and prayer together. We have been led to hold not only Praise Worship Day but also other interdenominational events like World Food Day, our biannual citywide Christmas meeting (the next one is 2023), etc. As many Christians get involved, we are declaring that “Jesus is alive” in Kōchi.

God is “not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9 NASB). That includes the people of Kōchi. With that assurance, we will continue to share the gospel in this needy place. **JH**

1. Oswald Chambers, “Greater Works (October 17),” *My Utmost For His Highest*, <https://utmost.org/classic/greater-works-classic/>

Photo submitted by author

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 Kōchi Citywide Pastors Group..

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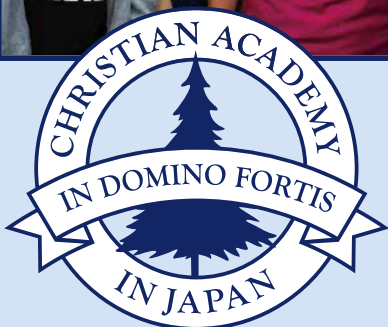


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