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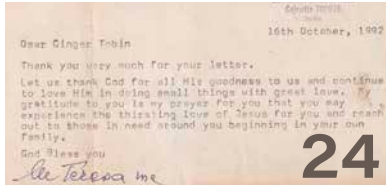
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Kansai WIM Autumn Day of Prayer

October 16, 2023

Crossroad Church, Nishinomiya

Tohoku WIM Fall Day of Prayer

October 23, 2023

Shiogama Bible Baptist Church, near Sendai



January

WIM Winter Day of Prayer

January 17, 2024

Ochanomizu Christian Center, Tokyo



February

JEMA Connect

February 19–21, 2024

Ochanomizu Christian Center

March

WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 4, 2024

Mustard Seed Christian Church, Osaka

WIM Annual Spring Retreat

March 6–8, 2024

Olive no Sato, Nikko



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

jema.org

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



Japan Harvest

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English background.

Doing life together

I got an early hint that this was going to be a significant magazine issue—long before we sent out a call for article proposals for it, several missionaries approached me about contributing. That is rare. So it's obviously past time to focus on this topic, and I hope that it will be helpful for everyone no matter what our marital status is.

Who am I to comment?

However, as a married woman with no experience as a single missionary, I'm very reluctant to write this editorial. As Sue Eenigenburg says in her book *Sacred Siblings: Valuing One Another for the Great Commission*, "I don't have a clue what [cross-cultural ministry] would be like as a single."¹

Two people also wrote to me recommending someone write a book review on the *Sacred Siblings* book mentioned above, but no one volunteered to write the review.

So I bought the book in the hope that it would give me something helpful to say in this editorial. The book did indeed reveal my ignorance and also showed how important it was that we in the wider missionary community talk more about this. For example, I had no idea that some single people feel their organization treats them as less valued team members, but then I can't remember ever having a conversation with any missionary on this topic or most of the other topics in this book.

Sacred Siblings is about doing life and ministry together as cross-cultural workers no matter what our marriage status is: "I think men and women all need good spiritual friendships to help us in this adventure called life. That's where our sacred siblings come in."² The book is based on a survey done with over 200 missionaries in more than a dozen organisations, though it is largely from a North American perspective (75% of those who responded to the survey).

This book is written by two women, one single and one married, and gives a balanced view along with plenty of stories and quotes from their survey to help illustrate the points. It raises many thought-provoking topics, and at the end of each chapter is a section called "Good ideas and helpful tools" as well as questions that could be used for a group discussion. I was interested to see that Faith De La Cour, former missionary to Japan and writer for *Japan Harvest*, wrote an endorsement that appeared in my Kindle version of the book. She stated, "I recommend that after reading it, opportunity is made for dialogue at team retreats and conferences."³

Supporting one another

More than one in five of the 201 of those who responded to a JEMA survey in 2021 were single. Our single readers may want to check out the organisation Shoulder to Shoulder, a ministry that "exists to empower, equip, and encourage single mission workers, their teams and their agencies as they serve in cross-cultural ministry."⁴ As articles have come across my desk, I've noted that various resources and groups have also been mentioned; if you're feeling alone and needing some support, please don't hesitate to follow up leads you find in this issue. I'm sure that many of our authors would also love to hear from you.

I challenge the JEMA community with one more quote from *Sacred Siblings*: "Our impact on lost communities is greatly enhanced or diminished by how we love, value, and treat one another."⁵



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Winter 2024: Discipleship

Spring 2024: Triumphs in Ministry (proposals due by October 30)

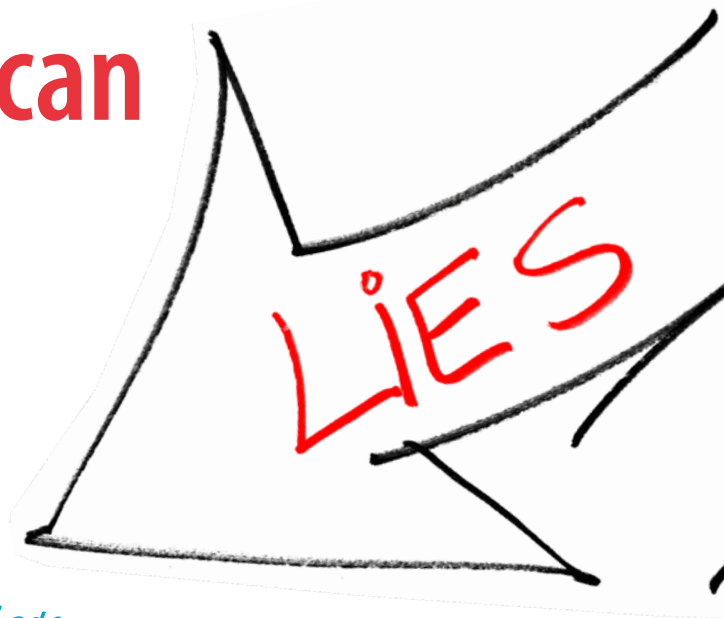
Summer 2024: Children and Youth Ministry (proposals due by January 31)

Autumn 2024: Japanese Christians (proposals due by April 30)

1. Sue Eenigenburg and Suzy Grumelot, *Sacred Siblings: Valuing One Another for the Great Commission* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2019), 32.
2. Ibid, 199.
3. Ibid, 3.
4. One Another Ministries International, <https://www.one-another.com/shouldertoshoulder> (accessed June 7, 2023).
5. Eenigenburg, 160.

False beliefs that can hinder the single person's faith

By Stephanie Schatz



What we say about singleness and marriage reveals what we think about God's care

“When will my life begin?” In the movie *Tangled*, Rapunzel receives the answer to her song when a handsome stranger prompts her to escape from her tower. Love is soon to follow. The message? You truly start living once you’ve found the love of your life. Until then, days filled with ordinary tasks simply don’t count.

I wonder how many young Christian women find themselves asking the same question. Many of my Japanese friends also grew up watching Disney princesses whose sole purpose in life was to find their happily-ever-after with Prince Charming. But when you are single at 30 or 40, you realize that putting a pause on your dreams because you were waiting for marriage may not have been the wisest course of action.

Over 15 years of ministering among Christian singles in Japan, I have heard many misconceptions about marriage and singleness. Some of these falsehoods seem to come from romantic movies. Sometimes, they are rooted in misinterpretations of the Bible. Left unchecked, these beliefs can undermine a single person’s spiritual walk, especially when they question why God hasn’t provided them with a Christian spouse.

Let’s take a look at eight ways of thinking about marriage and singleness. What do they reveal about our beliefs on singleness, marriage, and God’s will for our lives?

1) “Once I fix my character flaws or spiritual weakness, then I’ll get married.”

Implication: If your future spouse will only enter your life after God has finished preparing you for each other, then marriage becomes a reward for spiritual growth. By contrast, singleness becomes a sign of spiritual immaturity or lack of faith.

Reality: While many couples can attest to great spiritual work done in their lives prior to God introducing them to their spouse, it’s never a guarantee that God will do the same thing in another person’s life. Couples can encourage their single friends by sharing how marriage has been the beginning of a different season of spiritual growth, not the culmination of their spiritual journey.

2) “If I get married, all my problems, loneliness, and concerns about the future will disappear.”

Implication: A marriage partner will save me from my problems, not God. It elevates marriage from being a comfort in difficulty to what rescues me from difficulty.

Reality: Research shows that after a few years of marriage, people return to the same emotional state that they were in prior to marriage.¹ Marriage itself doesn’t remove life’s problems. As many of my married friends have attested, the addition of more people into their

family circle increased their worries and concerns. It’s also quite normal for some happily married people to feel lonely because no other person can fully satisfy our hearts.

3) “I’ll be whole when I find my soulmate.”

Implication: Another person is responsible for completing us.

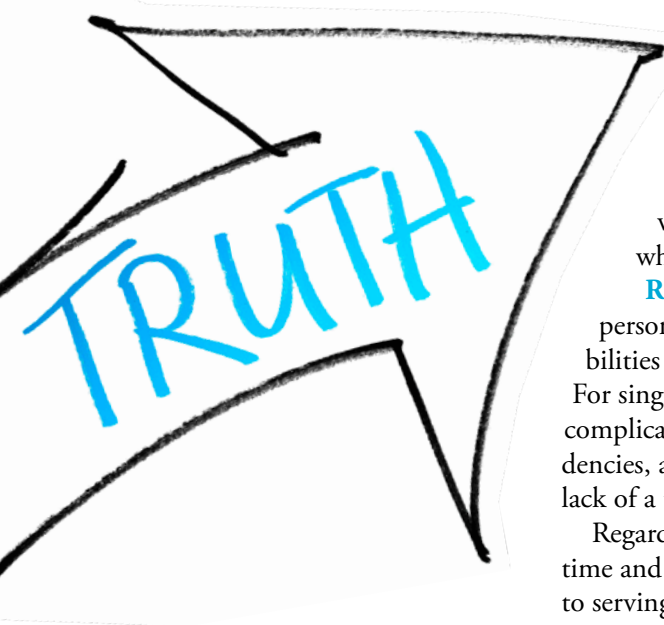
Reality: It may sound romantic, but there is a limit to the help, comfort, and understanding that another human can offer. When people are disappointed, they might conclude that they didn’t find the right partner rather than question their expectations.

More importantly, our identity is meant to be defined in relationship to God, not just in our relationships with other people. We are His children. Yet because of sin, we will always feel something is missing. Our relationship with God brings completion and restoration that will only be fully experienced in heaven.

4) “If I get married, I’ll have more stability in my life and a permanent friend always by my side.”

Implication: Marriage is seen as a way of holding onto a best friend permanently. For missionaries who face lots of transition, this is very appealing!

Reality: God has actually redefined family for the Christian through Christ. Whether we are married or



single, we have friendships—brothers and sisters in Christ—who can support and encourage us.

However, the half-truth does recognize that singles must put more effort into creating opportunities for fellowship since every interaction with another human requires them to go outside their home. Walking through life's difficulties with another person can be a comfort, but it doesn't stop life from being unpredictable. God is our only rock in the midst of life's storms.

5) "I'll be seen as more mature and responsible if I'm married, which will benefit my ministry."

Implication: One stereotype regarding singles is that they have shirked the responsibility of doing the hard work of marriage and raising children. To appear responsible, singles who buy into this may focus on finding a marriage partner over personal character development. There can also be pressure, particularly on young men, to be married in order to serve as ministers in the church.

Reality: Character, integrity, and spiritual maturity are important to effectively minister to others and glorify God whether you are single or married.

6) "Being single gives you the freedom to do what you want when you want to do it!"

Implication: A single person doesn't have to worry about other people when making life's decisions, unlike married people who have a spouse and kids who can't be ignored.

Reality: The Christian single person still has relational responsibilities to their family and church. For singles, decision-making can be complicated by people-pleasing tendencies, anxieties about the future, or lack of a trusted confidant to consult.

Regardless of our marital status, our time and energies are to be devoted to serving Christ (1 Cor. 7:29, 35). If we are Christian, none of us gets full autonomy to rule our lives; only Christ gets to be Lord.

7) "Singleness is a temporary stage before marriage and therefore doesn't need to be thought about very deeply."

Implication: Singleness is a problem that will be fixed by marriage. It's more important to prepare for marriage because that will likely last the majority of your life.

Reality: Unless you are engaged or already married, there are no guarantees about your future marital status. Even when married, we never know if we may find ourselves in another season of singleness as a widow/widower or divorced. We are called to be faithful to God in this present moment. We cannot neglect to ask "How does God wish to work in and through me right now?"

8) "God doesn't love me because He hasn't answered my prayers. He has withheld this good thing called marriage from me."

Implication: God doesn't really love me because He hasn't provided for my felt need of a marriage partner.

Reality: God has given us everything we need by giving us Himself. The Holy Spirit's presence with us is a seal of salvation and promise of our eternal union to Christ (Eph. 1:13–14). The end goal of life isn't marriage but a relationship with the Lord.

Acknowledging the limitations of marriage is not meant to disparage or discount its joys. Marriage is an untested blessing from God. At creation,

God instituted marriage as the norm (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:24). Furthermore, marriage is a blessing to be desired: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD" (Prov. 18:22, ESV). But marriage is not our greatest good. The best gift God could give is available to all believers—He has given us His very self. He is the one who knows us entirely, including every ugly blemish caused by sin, and He chose us "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). He is the one who sees every tear (Ps. 56:8) and promises to never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Death will not separate you from Him either (Rom. 8:38–39). His is the trustworthy love that you can have full assurance of.

Sometimes that may not seem like much when you want someone you can see and touch. It's normal to acknowledge the good God is doing in your life through singleness but still have moments you wish you were married. Maybe the dissatisfaction you feel about being single can point you to the "already and not yet" aspect of Christ's reign. He is the bridegroom who has already paid the price to set His Bride free, yet He still waits to welcome her home (Mark 2:19–20; Eph. 5:25–27). Singleness and waiting are part of Christ's story, and we already know it will have a glorious fulfillment at the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6–9).

Don't give in to the lie that God has forgotten you. As Paul once needed to remind the Colossians, "All these things are just a shadow of the reality" (Col. 2:17, my paraphrase). Let's lift our eyes to see the divine story that all earthly marriages point us toward. We are the Bride of Christ, and the future He has prepared for us is far better than anything we could ask or imagine. **JH**

1. Katherine Jacobs Bao and Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Making It Last: Combating Hedonic Adaptation in Romantic Relationships," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 8, no. 3 (March 2013): 196–206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.777765>.

Originally from Canada, **Stephanie Schatz** is the Pioneer Japan area leader, serving with them since 2008, and staff at Fukuoka Bible Church (JECA). Stephanie recently graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary with an MA in counseling.

Singleness in the church: *learning contentment and how to be a blessing*

By Christina Winrich

An interview with a single Japanese colleague about life and ministry

Recently I sat down for a cup of tea—via Zoom—with Koyuki Sami, executive director of the OMF Japan Homeside Team, to discuss various issues related to singleness in the church. The following are excerpts and paraphrases (for the sake of condensing) from our conversation. We focused on those who have never married, which is what we personally are familiar with. We understand that the issues will be slightly different for those who are divorced or widowed, especially for those with children.

Christina: What would you say are some typical challenges for singles in Japanese churches?

Koyuki: It really depends on the age and the person. For those in their twenties or thirties, they face a big decision of whether to marry or not and who they should marry. For Christian women, this is often a very difficult decision as there are so few single Christian men in the church. If the young person is the only Christian in their family, there may be intense pressure from parents to get married, regardless of whether the spouse is a believer or not.

For those in their forties and above, the biggest struggle may be a sense of loneliness and wondering where they belong. Singles in their forties are too old for the *seinenkai* (young adults' group) but also may not feel part of the *fujinkai* (women's group) as these members are typically married with children. The single woman may feel out of place as she cannot really relate to many of the topics discussed.

Once you get into your sixties, you realize that you have no one to journey

with you in your old age, and no one to take care of you as you encounter different health issues related to aging. As you discover new physical limits, including sickness and injury, you realize how fragile and alone you are. Many older single women may be busy taking care of their aging parents and, at the same time, wondering who will help them when they get to be their parents' age.

As for single Christian men, especially as they get older, they may feel even more lonely and have difficulty finding a place where they feel they really belong.

Christina: What are some blessings that you or those you know have experienced as singles?

Koyuki: There are some wonderful blessings that come with being single, most of which are related to the freedom we have to spend our time and money the way we feel led. We can choose to be a blessing to others, even in our loneliness. We can choose to be an auntie or uncle to younger people and young families. We may be freer to do things for others; as a single, your decisions are often just between you and the Lord. (This is also a big responsibility as you have to decide everything by yourself!) Because of this freedom, many singles are very devoted to the Lord. If you look at almost any overseas missions agency, for example, you will find many singles serving as missionaries.



Koyuki Sami

Christina: Looking at the Japanese church from the outside, it seems that there are many Christians (usually women) who marry non-Christians. Would you agree that this is a trend in Japan?

Koyuki: It does seem to be a trend. There are really two types of these marriages. Type A, where one partner—usually the wife—becomes a Christian after marriage, and Type B, where a Christian chooses to marry a non-Christian. It may be that there are so many Type As around that young people think that that model of marriage is not a problem, and so they choose to marry a nonbeliever. However, I believe many Christians struggle in such marriages. Often, though of course not always, the nonbelieving spouse becomes less open to the gospel after marriage than while they were dating. It can often lead to the Christian spouse feeling lonely and even opposed when they want to go to church, attend weekly prayer meetings, etc. It can become even more complicated and difficult if children are involved, as the non-Christian parent may oppose their child(ren) being exposed to the gospel.

Christina: I recently had a conversation with a university student who is dating a non-Christian guy. Her father is a pastor but approves of her dating and even marrying this young man, regardless of whether he becomes a Christian or not. I asked her why she was willing to marry a non-Christian, and she said that because there are so few Christian men around, she had no choice. I mentioned that singleness could be a choice, to which she replied, “But I want to get married.” How would you respond to this young woman?

Koyuki: I think the young lady is being optimistic that the young man will come to the Lord and that God will use their relationship to do it. Of course, this is always possible and we pray it may be so; however it is more likely that he may not become a believer. Many young people can't imagine the reality of living with someone they can't pray with, can't share the core part of themselves with, how hard that actually would be.

Christina: It also seems like there is an emphasis on marriage in the church or in society. What could the church do better in terms of teaching about singleness and marriage?

Koyuki: It is important for the church to be faithful to the teaching of the Bible, where we see that both the married state and the single state have blessings and challenges. It is true that in the beginning, it was not God's intention for people to remain single. Marriage was God's blessing to us. However, since the fall, singleness has become part of human life, but it is not a curse! It is a state of life out of which God can make beauty. God is blessing singles and using them to bless the church and advance the gospel. We also have some great role models in the Bible, most notably Jesus Himself, Who never married, and of course Paul, who wrote quite a bit about how his singleness helped him to serve the Lord. We can think of more modern role models, too, like John Stott, Mother Teresa, and Amy Carmichael.

Teaching on singleness is not so common in the church in Japan. It may be that because most pastors aren't single, they feel they don't have

much insight to offer. They may also feel responsibility to help singles find a partner.

Christina: What could the church do better to help singles flourish? And what can singles do to be a blessing to the church?

Koyuki: Offering balanced biblical teaching on singleness and marriage would be helpful. The church can welcome singles fully as adults, not as problems to be fixed by marriage. This includes realizing that each individual has different experiences with singleness. Some may want to be married while others are very content to remain as they are.

Christina: It would be good to have more openness in the church to talk about singleness. There are often talks on marriage and family (which is wonderful!), but not many on singleness. Singles and marrieds can learn from each other about their challenges and blessings. I think church members can be intentional about inviting singles over for a meal, games night, or movie night with their family, welcoming them as aunts and uncles.

Koyuki: Yes, though in Japan, it is not so common to invite people into the home. The church can have mixed small groups of all ages and stages, which is a reflection of the true church anyway! The basic need is to create spaces where people feel they belong and feel loved and cared for, and also where they can care for others.

Singles can also take initiative to invite couples and families into our homes or to do an activity. Practically speaking, though, it is easier for a family to add one person to their dinner table than for a single to add a family to their table, but it can still be done.

Christina: Or be proactive about offering to babysit for friends with younger children, to bless the parents with some time alone.

I think there is also a huge need for pastors to preach about contentment in the Lord versus focusing on whether someone is single or married.

Koyuki: That's very true. We can't assume that the single state means

discontentment while being married means contentment. Both have blessings and challenges.

I learned this for myself during a difficult time. I learned about how solitude and loneliness are different. Solitude includes contentment, being full of gladness to the Lord because He is with me. If you are always with someone, like Paul said, your attention may be more on how to please and serve them (i.e., your family). But as a single, your primary focus can be on how to please God. It would be good to have pastors share more about their own experiences of contentment in the Lord.

Christina: Is there anything else you'd like to say about this topic?

Koyuki: While Japanese politicians are really pushing for marriage and children, I think there is actually less family pressure to marry now than there was 30 years ago. In my childhood church, there were many wonderful single ladies, including the founders of the church, and the church had high respect for them. If we have good examples of contented singles who are happily serving the Lord, loving and caring for others, it may give people a different opinion about singleness.

For example, during my time as a missionary in the Philippines, I stayed with a family of seven for a while. Two of the children were in their early twenties and were desperate to find boyfriends. Their mother said, “Look at Koyuki! She is still single yet she's happy. You don't need to get married to be happy.” This was so encouraging to me; I felt that I had shown this family a good example. If people think that being single means not being happy or not being complete, then they need to see some examples of contented singles. While we do have some unique anxieties and challenges, especially as we face aging alone, we also have the opportunity to keep trusting God to meet all of our needs. **JH**

Photo submitted by author

After seven years in Japan with OMF, Christina Winrich (US) has recently returned home to help care for her aging parents. She plans to continue sharing Jesus with international friends and also hopes to finally learn Irish fiddling on the viola.

We need this in Japan!

By Judith Ricken

How a singles festival in Germany inspired a vision for a Christian singles network in Japan

In March 2020, a worldwide pandemic was declared, and it became more and more clear that COVID-19 wouldn't be over anytime soon. That was a difficult, challenging time for all of us, and many felt insecure. Additionally, I had my own crisis. A friendship that might have turned into a relationship didn't, which left me confused, disillusioned, sad, and lonely. As you can imagine, the COVID contact restrictions didn't help either. I met only my friend Megan once a week in person. Everyone else I met via the computer screen. I was able to continue working, but I did it more dutifully than joyfully. Clearly, I wasn't well. Each time I met my field leader, I said, "I'm functioning, but I am not well." We thought maybe a time-out would help, going somewhere to be able to heal. I heard that there was a place like that in Thailand, but, alas, due to travel restrictions, it was out of reach.

The solution

Then my field leader said, "You cannot go to Thailand, but you could go back to Germany early."

As I heard those words, my heart immediately lifted, and I said, "Yes! That's what I'd like to do." Of course, there were things to organize; my teammates from KGK, our boss in Germany, and my sending church had to be informed; replacements for my responsibilities had to be found; but in the end, it wasn't such a big deal. I left half a year early to go on furlough. Through God's provision, I found a place to live three weeks before leaving Japan.

Festival for singles

In Germany, there is a national interdenominational singles network

called Solo&Co. "Solo" means "alone" and/or "single," and "&co" means "and company." The vision of this network is to enable Christian singles to live their lives to the full. In autumn 2020, two weeks after my arrival, the three-day Solo&Co Festival would take place. The topic was "Love LIFE" (perhaps better translated "Love Living"). I decided to attend. It was a miracle that this was allowed to happen in the midst of COVID restrictions.

Although about 300 people were attending, we were put into groups of about six people. We shared accommodation and ate together and sat together in this group—no masks required; hugs allowed. With everyone else, we had to keep a 1.5 m distance and wear masks. The groups were color coded, and my group was sunshine yellow (*Sonnengelb*). What a great color to express "living the full life."

It was amazing! I connected immediately with the other people in my group, which included a divorcée, a widow, and four "classical singles" (someone who has never been married). We swapped life stories, went for walks together, wiped tears, gave hugs, and encouraged each other outside of the sessions.

As I was sitting in the sessions surrounded by about 300 other people who were all single, I was greatly encouraged. Here it was so normal to be single. And all these people were living normal lives. It wasn't some sort of self-help group but a gathering of singles. Suddenly the thought came into my head: *We need this in Japan!*

This was empowerment in its purest essence! Though it might be true worldwide, it seems that Japanese singles suffer from a minority complex. One is seen as abnormal; everyone

wishes, prays for, and hopes that we get married.

Solo&Co Singles Network

The Solo&Co movement in Germany started when Astrid Eichler, a single pastor, was asked to write a book on singleness. She called it *There Must Be Something Else*, feeling there must be some other message for singles than just "I hope you get married one day." Marriage cannot be the only hope for singles. In churches, there are many sermons on the topic of marriage, but I have never heard a message on singleness. On desiringgod.org, you can find an article that includes this sentence: "I do believe in purgatory. It's called Christian singleness."¹

The fact is Christian singles have needs that are unique to them. They also have fears, insecurities, challenges, and temptations. How do we address them? There must be another message than "I hope you get married one day," as if that will solve their problems.

Solo&Co in Germany experiments with different things. The challenge is how to find constant, reliable, and committed fellowship and relationships outside of marriage. Two singles might move closer to each other and meet once a week for breakfast. Another single is adopted by a family and joins them on their yearly vacation. They hold informal meetings in all different areas of Germany. If a single moves, he or she can contact Solo&Co and ask where the next group is.

This is not a dating service. On the contrary, the network wants to encourage singles to live their lives to the full—as singles.

In short, this network is great, and I wish we had something like this in Japan. I'm sure there are already people

who are involved with and minister to Christian singles. Could they get connected with each other?

I have a dream...

I'm dreaming of a national inter-denominational network of and for Christian singles in Japan. As soon as this thought entered my head, though, doubts arose as well: *Could it be done? There are fewer Christians in Japan than in Germany. There are far more denominations. Geographically, Japan is not as compact as Germany. Cultural adaptations would have to be made, but which ones?* I still have no idea even how and where to start.

This reminds me of a passage from the biography of a missionary to India named Evelyn Brand (1879–1974):

What about the most difficult of her tasks, to win this other mountain range for Christ? How? When? Without another help but Elizabeth and sometimes Ruth, Santoshi or another girl from the Kollies in order to tell the story of the saving Jesus-God, to sing the hymns, show biblical pictures, play Tamil records and pray for converts without

ceasing? Were they all just dreams? No! It was a matter of faith, God had promised her long ago, when she had felt weak and torn and had prayed for guidance. "Didn't I tell you, if you believe you'll see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).²

I believe with God's help, in his timing, it is possible. If you work with singles or have a heart for Christian singles and would like to support this vision, please contact me via email. At the JCE7 in September in Gifu, there will be a Salt and Light Group on this topic as well. It would be great if we could meet there. **JH**

1. Greg Morse, "Marriage Is Not the Mission," *desiringGod*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/marriage-is-not-the-mission> (April 17, 2017).
2. Dorothy C. Wilson, *Mutter Brand—Die Geschichte einer Frau, die für andere lebt* (Brockhaus Verlag Wuppertal: 1997), author's personal translation. Originally published as *Climb Every Mountain* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976).

Photos submitted by author. Sonnengelb is German for Sunshine Yellow.

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What about my needs and longings as a single?

By
Rae-Anna
Hedorin

Singleness has been a journey of knowing God in ways that I thought could only be found in a husband

Soon after coming to Japan, I came across an Instagram post from Debra Fileta, an author and counselor, that read, “If we really want to create healthy marriages, we need to back up and start by creating healthy singles.”¹ Somehow, until then, I didn’t know that singleness was an important topic to talk about. I thought that people just endured singleness internally and didn’t really discuss it, especially with married people.

In her post, she went on to ask:

“What if communities were to gather around their single friends, helping them and encouraging them in the season while they’re standing alone? What if we could impact singles while standing alone—imagine how that could change the future of our relationships?”

This began very interesting discussions in my community between marrieds and singles. It’s hard to stand with someone in their singleness if you don’t really understand singleness. How could a peer who has been married more years than they were single understand the life experiences of a single? As one family in Christ, we are not two separate groups, and we desire to grow in understanding of each other. Ever since then, this enriching conversation has been ongoing!

One of the most frequently wrestled-with questions among singles is, “What do I do with the unmet needs and longings I have as a single?” If a person

lives with perpetually unmet needs and desires, how can they be healthy? What is God’s way for this?

Longing for marriage, longing in the area of sexuality, any desires that are unmet for years or decades are too heavy a burden to carry. I don’t think God means for us to carry this. So I lay it down before him as a living sacrifice, sometimes daily if I have to. And I turn to him, and seek him in the midst of this.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12 NIV).

If there is no place for these desires to go, it can make the heart sick! But we do have a place where these longings are fulfilled. Jesus is able and more than willing to show you what this means. Ask him!

I believe that these longings are part of God’s design to propel mankind to seek the one who satisfies. I set my heart to discover this now as a single rather than after the honeymoon period in marriage. I seek him to discover how he is my provider in the midst of each longing, wanting to take this reliance on him into whatever may come—a life anchored in knowing how he *satisfies*.

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19 NIV).



My journey

After a canceled engagement, I made the decision to let God choose my future husband and the timing. I found myself single for longer than I would have imagined, and this has taken me on a journey of knowing Him in the areas I thought could only be found in a husband.

“But those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (Ps. 34:10b NIV).

“But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst” (John 4:14a NIV).

I decided to take these scriptural promises literally and believe that God has sufficiency for us singles in each of the areas where we perceive lack—provision of abundance from relationship with him. This is meant for all people regardless of relationship status and, I believe, is especially discovered in seasons where there is no one but him.

Somehow, many of us were taught through media that a husband/wife would fulfill and satisfy every longing we have. As a result, many singles live in a suspended state of longing for marriage, holding onto this fantasy and potentially idolatrous view of



marriage rather than seeking God in all these things. Through the conversations, I learned from my married friends that marriage does not fulfill these longings in the human heart! Marriage is a beautiful thing, but no person can fulfill our longings fully, completely, and always.

Dethroning all other sources

There was a process of dethroning that had to happen in my heart. There can only be one on the throne in our hearts—one in first place. And anyone or anything except Jesus on the throne is idolatry.

“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You” (Ps. 73:25 NKJV).

During my time of beginning to learn this, I’m thankful the people around me were listening to God. They told me to go directly to Jesus. Honestly, it was shocking and almost hurtful when I was first told to go directly to Jesus. By myself? I felt abandoned by humans—the connection I had depended on so much. *You want me to go, physically alone, to meet someone who is just Spirit? But I will*

still be physically alone! I was so stuck in that mindset.

But it was the best advice. I discovered Jesus from there. From the inside out, he met me. Being strengthened in my spirit, finding that I am fully loved in my spirit, and finding that he is always with me in my spirit affected me in the physical. I felt physically strengthened, loved, and not alone.

Where do I turn to for satisfaction?

I had settled into a routine of looking forward to certain benign things at the end of a work week. Then I felt led to do a 40-day fast from all the ways I usually sought rest, refreshment, joy, pleasure, and satisfaction apart from him. Early on, it became painfully clear how much I relied on these (not bad) things for satisfaction. But laying them down showed me how anything besides God can only temporarily and partially satisfy our longings, and the deepest longings of the human soul are only satiated by Him. I began to discover how he satisfies me and how to live as a fully satisfied woman!

Spiritual singleness

God began to show me what it means for me to live as his bride (which all his people are, as one body—see Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 19:7). He showed me how I had been living as “spiritually single” and what it now means to live as one who is completely and perfectly loved, completely and perfectly cared for.

I found myself longing to be cared for. The relationships I have provide a taste of this, but not in a complete, full, and constant way. I began to seek to know how he could fulfill this desire.

“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7 NKJV).

I found myself longing for full partnership in the ministry God has called me for. I have beautiful relationships in Japan with people who stand with me on these things, but I don’t have the full partnership that I long for. I began to seek to know how he is my partner.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.” (Ps. 32:8 NIV)

I found myself longing for more times of fun and enjoyment. I’m a person who loves work but equally loves and needs times of fun sprinkled throughout the week. As the friends who were always up for spontaneous hangouts got married and had children, this became a gap. These times are scheduled throughout the months, but not to the measure I desire. I began to seek to know enjoyment in my relationship with him.

“In your presence is fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11b NKJV).

Continuing the conversation

I want to hear more from married Christians of how Jesus is ultimately their source! This ongoing conversation will help to eradicate the myth that marriage/sex is the ultimate source of fulfillment and will allow us to exhort one another, singles and marrieds alike, to seek and find Christ as the true satisfaction for our souls.

In Japan, which feels at present like a smaller dating pool for Christians than in other places, many find themselves single. Oh how we need to know this truth: that we are lacking no good thing! Singles and marrieds, who is the one who satisfies you? The answer for both is the same person.

“Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (Ps. 90:14 NIV). **JH**

I share this full journey in detail in Part 5 of the 55-Day PureHeart Challenge. Learn more at: <https://onfire.jp/en/55daychallenge>

1. Debra Fileta (@debrafileta), “If we really want to create healthy marriages, we need to back up and start by creating healthy singles,” Instagram photo, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B3PzBlBHYGK/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==> (October 5, 2016).

Rae-Anna Hedorin is originally from Canada and was also raised in Nepal as an MK. She lives in Nishinomiya, Hyogo, serving with Onfire Japan. Her primary focus is in the area of purity—wholeness in relationships and sexuality.

I'm not actually single

As a bride of Christ, I am neither alone nor lonely

By Rijke Rombeek

Have you ever had problems filling out basic forms where you know what answer they expect you to give but it does not feel quite right? I often have that issue. I can put in my name well enough, as long as there is not a strict character limit that has Japanese names in mind rather than Western ones. Date of birth, check. Gender, check. I know there are people who are challenged by the gender question, but I am more than happy to put in the expected answer and move on. Married or single? Now, that is where I find the problem. In all legal senses, I am not married now, nor have I ever been. Yet I find myself uncomfortable with calling myself single.

How I became a bride of Christ

I am not single; I am a bride of Christ and Christ alone.

This is not a situation that came about by accident, nor am I the only one who has received a calling like this. It isn't because something or a series of somethings made me give up finding a husband. It isn't because I was not interested in having a husband.

How it came about was simple: he asked, and I said yes.

It was a night back when I was 18. I was not heartbroken, nor did I even have a specific crush, though I was definitely interested in and amused by boys. If asked, I would have said I was more focused on a boyfriend than a husband at the time, but I was definitely interested and hopeful that someone right would come along.

I was an insomniac. I do not say that for your pity but simply to explain

that I had a lot of quiet time. I spent most of that time listening to music, reading, writing stories, praying, and, in general, thinking about life and even boys. On one prayerful night, I felt God ask the question, and it both shocked me and yet resonated with every fibre of my being. Would I take all the energy I would normally put into finding a boyfriend, a husband, or such satisfaction and instead put it into my relationship with God? Would I be happy to make Jesus my one primary relationship? I had been a Christian for two years already, so this was not a question of salvation but a specific calling in my relationship with Christ. I said yes joyfully. So, joyfully, I got a bit too energetic and woke up my mother, who came to see what was going on.

There are moments that seem so significant that they form your life and influence all your memories. This was one of those moments for me. Saying yes that night felt immediately like a life-changing event. More than 30 years later, it is still one of the most powerful moments of my life and my walk with God.

In case you are wondering, I do wear a ring. Sadly, not my first one as I lost it during my first term in Japan. I did not inherit these rings; they were bought for this one purpose. I am honoured to wear a ring, and honestly, I would rather have people make the assumption that I am married rather than single.

Everyone has a different story

While I am aware that my story is not an everyday one, even among

singles, I have been surprised by the response of so many people who hear that I am a bride of Christ.

Becoming a missionary was a great help in the local church community, who now seem to accept me as some kind of nun. I am okay with that. Yet I was surprised by how many in the missionary community seem to struggle with accepting my singleness. There have been too many times where a missionary hears that I am a bride of Christ and feels they need to rush in and say that they are more than happy to pray that God might provide me with the right man. Of course, I already feel I have the right man. I mean, who can compare with him?

In my life, I have known people who were single even if they did not want to be and a few who were moderately content that this was their life. I have known people who married young and those who chose to wait. I have known marriages that have been happy and those that have been unhappy. I have known marriages that are good and strong. I have known marriages that have broken down into divorce. Sadly I have known a few where one spouse was widowed early. I have studied



premarital, marital, and postmarital counselling. I have learned that even with “Mr. Right,” marriage is not easy. Marriage does not provide all the answers. Simply put, it is not nearly as glorious as my 18-year-old naive self wanted to believe. Yet that does not mean marriage is a bad thing. I know people who are as ready to praise God for the partner God provided them with as I am.

No regrets

I have never once regretted this life. My life has certainly had its share of challenges. Yet being a bride of Christ has taught me how much I can rely on him.

I learned long ago that there are things that I am not gifted in. Quite a few things, actually. Many of them come up regularly enough in life, and I need to deal with them.

With my parents’ and many other marriages, a partner can often step up

to assist because they are, at least somewhat, more gifted in that area. Or, at the very least, the couple can stumble through things together. This, as I see it, is one of the beautiful things about a good marriage. A balance of companionship and practical assistance in life.

Adult life definitely contains things I am not gifted at, and I remember struggling in my twenties with a number of the practical requirements of life. At some point, it occurred to me that if I was married to Christ, I should be relying on him to fill in what I cannot do. Intentionally saying “This is not something I am good at, so it is Jesus’s job and I will help him as I am able” has been such a game changer. I do still stress out about things. Yet relying more on him has brought other people in my life who have been happy to support me in my areas of weakness. It means that I have become more capable or brave in some areas. It is a constant reminder that I am not alone and I am not meant to live this life as if I were alone.

One of the most poignant moments that reminded me of this was a few years ago. I was sick to the point of being bedridden, and doctors were unable to find any painkillers whose side effects did not add to the seriousness of the problem. Jesus did not come to my bedside with a promise of healing and take all my problems away. It felt more like he was sitting on the side of

my bed and weeping with me, weeping over the pain, the limits of medicine, how far away my friends and family seemed, and my own inability to be useful. He was the companion that I needed—the irreplaceable companion who did not leave when life got rough and was not afraid of my pain. He was right there, day and night, my strength and my rock.

Whether it is practical life issues, such as finances or studying Japanese, or the more serious issues of broken health, I would choose no other partner by my side. I am neither single nor lonely. I am not somehow deficient because I do not have a man in my life. I am blessed, blessed with the most wonderful partner God could provide. Blessed to be able to live this life by his side, relying on him, knowing that he will take care of me and love me through whatever life or death may bring.

So am I single? I would like to say “no.” Yet the fact remains that in the eyes of most people, I am single because I have never gotten married in any conventional sense. Either way, I am decidedly unavailable. Yet this is not true of all single missionaries. They may feel called to be married and appreciate your prayers for that. Have you ever asked your “single” friends or coworkers what their story is? It may not be what you think. **JH**

Rijke (rye-ka) Rombeek has worked with the poor and homeless since 2001, starting in her hometown of Ottawa, Canada. She has served with OMF Japan since 2009, specializing in ministries to the homeless and poor in Tokyo since 2011.

Courageously single

By Rebecca Evans
and Becky Keith

Two missionaries discuss the unique internal and external challenges of singleness

As two single women serving as overseas missionaries, we often grapple with our singleness. Our own emotions, the enemy, the world, common messages heard from the church, and sympathetic words from friends have challenged us again and again. We've wrestled with all of this, but rather than being sidelined or taken out of the faith or Kingdom work by, for example, loneliness or idolizing marriage, God's given grace upon grace to help us thrive more and more for his gospel and the Great Commission.

Rebecca

Sometimes misplaced "kindness" is applied in how singles approach themselves and in how others approach them. It originates out of feelings of sympathy or a desire to comfort the sadness and loneliness singles can feel. Of course, there are moments when that is needed; however, what is needed much more often, yet is profoundly lacking, is for singles to remind themselves and for others to remind their single brothers and sisters of the precious and high calling they have received.

For a long time, I often felt sorry for myself in my single life, and I struggled with longing for a relationship. I repeatedly heard lies from the enemy related to my singleness: "You're worthless! You have no life as a single! You're



missing out on real life!" I experienced emotional and spiritual exhaustion from these strong feelings and lies. I desperately wanted freedom.

One day while reading Colossians 3:1–4 (which tells us to set our hearts and minds on things above and describes our lives as being now hidden with Christ in God), Jesus spoke to me, saying that I could indeed experience freedom. In truth, it was simpler than I realized—if only I would deliberately and repeatedly set my heart and mind on things above. We aren't at the mercy of our longings; rather, we can make moment by moment choices. Jesus also reminded me that my life's value could not be measured by my status as

married or single or by any earthly thing. Whenever I struggled, if I meditated on my life being hidden with Christ in God, I deeply felt the untouchable value of my life.

I also read 1 Corinthians 7:33–35, which exhorts unmarried women to be concerned about the Lord's affairs rather than a husband's and to live with undivided devotion to the Lord. I repented and felt humbled by what a tremendous privilege it was to be single and to live with an undivided heart and devotion to the Lord and his Kingdom. I committed myself to set my heart and mind and to remember my high calling.

However, it's much easier said than done. My wayward heart often led me back to my old ways of thinking and feeling, and I received intense

testing in various circumstances. I spent the better part of a year facing my feebleness, repenting again and again for my divided heart and mind until God mercifully brought me into a more spacious place of freedom.

One starry night as I stood next to Lake Yamanaka in the freezing cold, tears flowed uncontrollably. Amazingly, the tears were not being shed from the sadness of loneliness or the desire for a partner. They were tears of joy shed from marveling at the sheer goodness and mercy of Jesus toward me on this journey. He gave me a new peace and firm convictions to help me in times of struggle or attack. He had freed me from my heaviness at being single!

We are meant to thrive in our singleness; however, we have a strong enemy, along with a variety of internal and external challenges, that often prevent us from thriving. We need to bravely speak to our own hearts, and we need others around us to also courageously speak to us of the truth and the incredibly beautiful calling of a life of singleness.

Becky

As a single, I have been told to wait—wait to find the husband God has prepared in advance. I was watching my friends be called to the battlefield one after another as mothers. All the while, I felt God calling me to the battlefield, and I was just “waiting.” As I tightly grasped my idol of marriage, I was missing the calling to the field.

One thing that I have learned in my life so far is that marriage is not

some level you achieve if you are good enough or even a higher-class Christian. In fact, Paul proclaims that it is better to stay single. As single Christians, we have a role to play in the body, a role that is mutually supporting and being supported by the body of Christ. The good news of the New Testament is that we are called into the family of Christ by the work of him who hung on the cross. In Genesis, God says it’s not good for man to be alone. Many people (including me) have confused the remedy for loneliness to be marriage, but Christ gives us the remedy in him and the body that he has adopted us into.

I’m tired of waiting for my husband to show up to start this amazing adventure with Christ. It’s time for us to stop hoping our loneliness will be remedied by a spouse and trust in the hope Christ gives that he won’t leave us alone and look to our family in him

for the mutual support that he calls us into. It’s time to join the battle. He has given us everything we need to face it. It’s time to leave the sidelines.

Our hope for this article is to encourage our fellow single Christians. We hope to remind ourselves that God has given us a great purpose. As we lean into the body for support, there will, of course, be hang-ups, but we can trudge on together. Christ is with us; he weeps with us, rejoices with us, and will provide everything we need to live a life glorifying him. **JH**

Photo by Rebecca Evans

Rebecca Evans and Becky Keith both serve with No Place Left Japan (NPL). Rebecca, from Texas, has served in Japan for nine years. Her co-laborer and good friend Becky is from Colorado and has served for six years. becky.keith@gmail.com

Loving our single siblings in Christ

What being a baby Christian as a young single in Japan taught me about loving like Christ

By Joel Diffenderfer

I was baptized at a beach in Kagoshima shortly after becoming a Christian at age 19. For the next year, the church in Japan was my family. I was far from my blood relatives and native culture and young in my faith, yet the love I received as a single adult drew me deeper into the family of God. Their love also shaped my view of the family of God.

Now, fourteen years into marriage, I think back on the Japanese church’s love for the 20-year-old single me. Here are three lessons I learned on how the church can love singles.

Serve Well

I was surprised that Japanese churches regularly share a meal on Sundays. Those meals felt like the big family

gatherings I attended as a kid. I missed those gatherings when I went off on my own to university.

Apart from Sunday fellowship, I shared many meals with church families, fellowshiping around their table. One family loaned me a car. Many gave me a place to sleep. It makes me think of the first picture of the church in Acts: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. . . . And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:44, 46, ESV).

The Japanese church taught me to default to a position of service. It’s tempting to look at the time, energy, and relative freedom of singles and

think, “How could they serve me and my ministry?” Our Lord came not to be served but to serve. Looking to serve singles, rather than the other way around, is one way the gospel turns family on its head.

Rather than seeing me solely as someone with no family responsibilities—and therefore free to serve—the church served me. In Japan, regular communal meals may not be unique to the church, but the heart with which they served me was.

Give Grace

I was immature even for a twenty-year-old. All those things I mentioned before were not given to me because I earned them. Even when I was at my most unlovable and selfish, my broth-

ers and sisters in Christ loved me. They were patient with my shortcomings. They gave me opportunities even after I had failed. They continued disciplining me even when I didn't see the value in it.

The Japanese church taught me to default to a position of grace. It's tempting to look at the blind spots, sins, and failures of singles and think, "Is it worth the effort to make them part of the family of God?" But the Father brings us into his family on the merits of Christ and not ours. The gospel calls us to treat others as blood relatives who we can't merely dismiss.

This isn't a slight against twenty-year-olds or singles. We must admit that every person has some things about them that are hard to love. Singles are no more sinful than the rest of us. But because they are not forced to work out their shortcomings with a spouse or kids, it can be harder for them to see their blind spots. I know it was for me.

Point to Christ

A few days before I moved back to the States, another single Christian asked me to come to the church. He said he had something to give me. I rushed to church, my mind racing with the wonderful possibilities. When I got there, I found him sitting, guitar in hand. He proceeded to play a song of praise that he had written himself. I thanked him, we talked for a few minutes, and then I left with deflated expectations. Yet years later, having forgotten many of my other experiences during that year in Japan, that is my most vivid memory. Two single men from vastly different bloodlines were truly brothers.

Remember how Paul considered his own blood heritage. He was "of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. . . . But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing

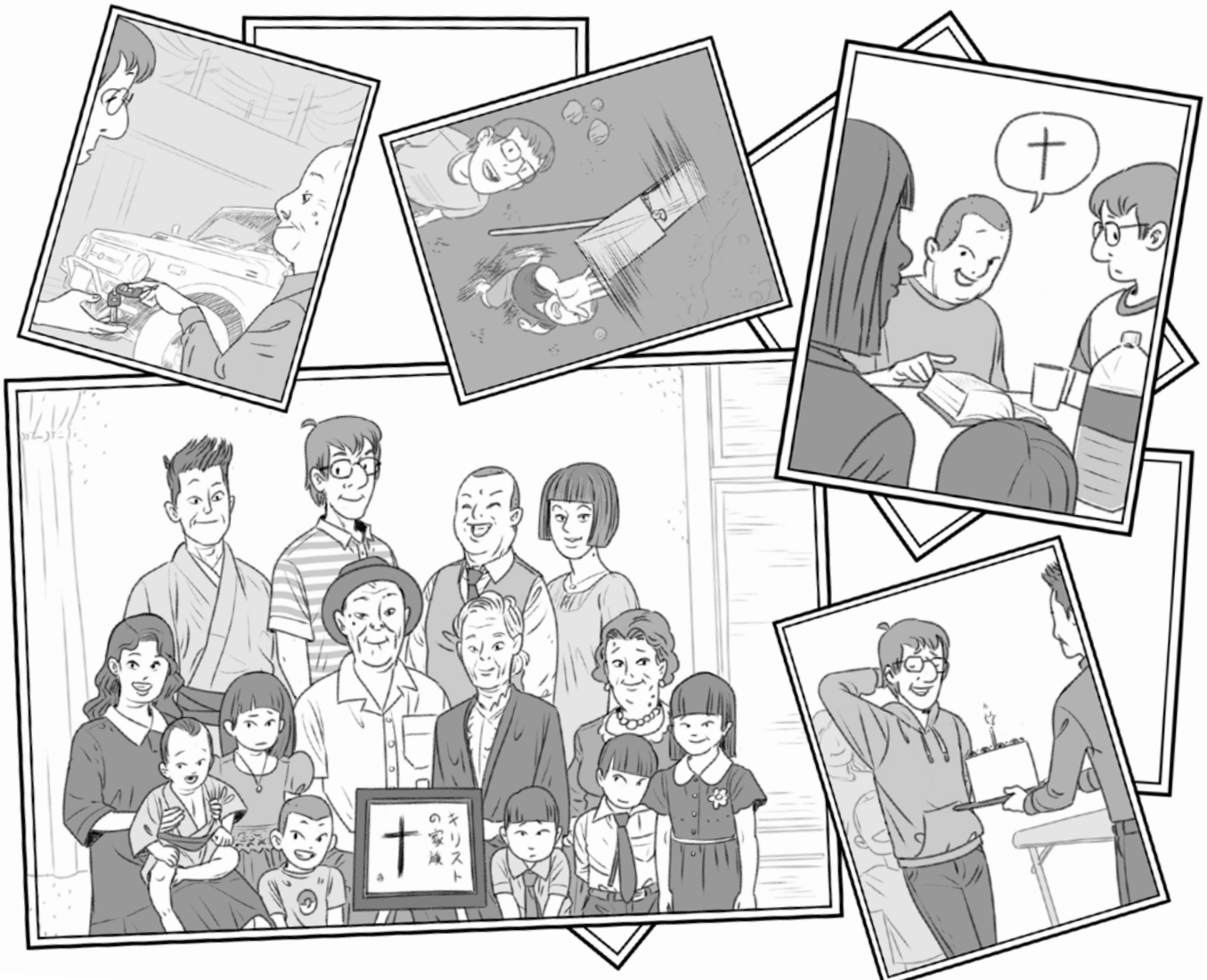
Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:5b, 7–8a, ESV).

The Japanese church taught me to default to Christ. It's tempting to look at singles and think, "They need a spouse, or a job, or an education, or a role in the church, or an opportunity to stretch their wings." If we could give them all those things but not point them to Christ, it would be worthless. We would not be serving them. We would not be loving them. We would be as unbelieving family to them—connected in name but not in perfect love.

When singles are in our church, we have a great opportunity. This isn't an opportunity for the church to be served by their time and energy but an opportunity to love them as Christ loves us. **JH**

Illustration below by the author

Joel Diffenderfer and his wife Misti are church planters in Japan. You can find out more about them, read a comic about church planting in Japan, and get in touch with them at www.diffnotes.com.



Ideas for supporting your single colleagues, from one of us

By Karena Kenmotsu

Married missionaries can do a lot to support their single brothers and sisters. But it's important to remember that one size doesn't fit all!

“Since I have you here, what are some ways that we can better support our single missionary coworkers?”

A conversation during a recent missionary retreat turned into an impromptu “singles panel” when single missionaries from our sending agency had lunch with a caring and curious married woman. Here are some thoughts from that great conversation.

Not all singles are the same

First, it's important to ask individual singles how they want to be supported. We aren't all the same, and the ways we feel encouraged will also differ. Some will want to talk about their singleness or be included in your family dinners, while others prefer more privacy and independence. Building friendships with your single teammates and church members will guide you in showing them care that they'll receive well.

“Singleness” includes more than just one life stage. I am

among the never-been-married-but-would-eventually-like-to singles. But there are also widows, divorcees, and those who are intending to remain single forever. This means single people have different experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Younger singles may tend to view themselves as “pre-married,” while older singles may be thinking about retirement in light of singleness.

Singleness can be permanent

There are some people who will never marry; for them, singleness is their final marital status. That is God's design for them, and it is a good plan. Whether they will be single for life or not, we must be careful not to make singles feel like life only truly begins once they're married.

There are many times I've been told, “God has someone for you! You just have to wait for the right person to come along!” But the person has no way of knowing whether it is true or not. It's been more helpful when I've had friends empathize about

having some unmet desires without trying to make promises about my future.

Practical support ideas

Again, singles won't necessarily feel encouraged by the same things. However, if you're a married person, consider some practical ways that your single friends might appreciate help. Can you explain their bills and financial statements that are in Japanese, take their car to the mechanic, or split large Costco orders with them?

Holidays like Christmas or Thanksgiving can be especially difficult for singles who are far from their families. Consider inviting singles to your family gatherings, but appreciate that it may still be a painful reminder of their singleness.

Some singles, especially those with the love language of physical touch, may feel “touch-starved” in a culture like Japan where hugs are uncommon. Considering your comfort level and relationship with the single person, work together to see whether there are physical affection needs you can be part of meeting.

Verbal support ideas

One question I've come to like is, “How's your relationship with your singleness lately?” Some of us are enjoying the freedom that comes with singleness, while others are mourning the absence of a romantic life partner. This question allows space for all of us to answer honestly.

Instead of using “we” to refer to you and your spouse, introduce them by name. This turns “We've lived in Tokyo for five years” into “My husband, Steve, and I have lived in Tokyo for five years.” It's a small change that's easy to



forget, but it honors your spouse by name while keeping the conversation about individuals.

Considerations for home assignment

Many missionaries have a love-hate relationship with home assignment, with visits to family and friends mixed in with updates to churches and supporters.

Singleness introduces an additional twist—you are the only one responsible for all of it. This is often quite overwhelming! As a quintessential homebody, I find solo travel on home

assignment to be extra daunting. The single missionary's supporters back home need to step up, but you can be a listening ear or sounding board on the field as they prepare for or transition back after home assignment.

Additionally, singles don't take any of our closest people with us when we travel. We leave our family and supporters to join the field, but we also leave the teammates we've been doing life with when we go on furlough. We might be blessed to have people in our passport country who understand what missionary life is like, but that's not guaranteed.

Final thoughts

Singleness is a unique set of life stages. It can be liberating, lonely, or both. If you are a married colleague of single missionaries, you have countless opportunities to support them well. The body of Christ functions best when each body part is thriving and supported by the others. **✠**

Karena Kenmotsu is a JEMS missionary serving with the Nozomi Project in Ishinomaki, Miyagi. She is a part-time tentmaker originally from California and likes tea, not coffee.

What are you waiting for?

Whether married or single, serve God wherever he has placed you

By Michael Karpf

“I don't ever want to go back there again as long as I live” were my words as my 777 took off from Tokyo Narita Airport on the way back to Dallas. It was Labor Day weekend 2000, and I had taken advantage of my flight benefits at American Airlines to visit a missionary friend in Chiba. We must have covered the whole city of Tokyo the day after my arrival as we took an early morning train in and returned late to Chiba. It had been hot and humid, and I thought the place was so big and crowded. And I knew that

they had earthquakes! All this made me never want to go back there again.

Five years later, I was living there and loving it. Obviously, God changed my heart and gave me a love for the Japanese people to see them come to know Christ.

A change of heart

But this is only the end of my story that started several years before that. I was born into a Jewish family, later becoming a pre-dental student with no intention of God (or anyone, for that matter!) running my life. However, I came to Christ at the age of 26, believ-

ing that Jesus was the promised Jewish Messiah. After one year of dental school, I matriculated at Dallas Theological Seminary to study for ministry.

It had been a very difficult year before starting seminary; I had dropped out of dental school and went through a very painful breakup. Like many others, I longed to meet someone and marry. I had friends tell me that being single was a gift and that I had more time to serve God. To me, it was anything but a gift. I wanted to get married and then serve God. That's what I was waiting for.

At DTS, I went to a get-together where students who had participated in summer missions projects shared their

experiences. I remember a woman sharing about her summer in Haiti who mentioned she was the only single missionary. I had wanted to spend a summer overseas, but I thought I wanted to wait until I got married before going.

No more waiting

Guess who shared his summer missionary experience a year later? A single missionary who had an opportunity to relieve a missionary family in Daegu, South Korea, with Overseas Christian Servicemen's Centers (OCSC, now Cadence International). The opportunity for me had opened, and God provided the necessary support. It was a life-changing summer as it was my first trip to Asia, and the fervency of the Korean Christians in their faith in prayer almost put me to shame. I didn't need to wait to get married to go.

I had another opportunity to serve with OCSC the summer after I graduated from seminary, this time in Darmstadt, Germany. Once again, I took it without a wife.

Missionary service

I worked at American Airlines for a time, traveling to many places, including Japan. I knew how very few Japanese are believers, and my heart nearly broke for them. God opened the door for me to take an early retirement from the airline and serve as a missionary in Japan with Grace International Ministries. A church in Soka needed a missionary to teach conversational English as well as to serve as a pastor. The church preferred a single missionary because they could not afford to pay a couple and they could only provide one Religious Activities Visa. Again, with a heart for Japan and a love for

the Japanese, I knew that I would have been a fool not to go, even without a wife. Again, nothing to wait for.

I loved my time in Japan, but the church's policy was only to keep a missionary for a few years. I moved to Thailand for a few reasons, including a relationship that I hoped would be long term. It wasn't, but I'm still living in Bangkok, where I preach and teach at both Thai- and English-speaking churches and online. Via Zoom, I also have taught expository preaching to Bible college students in Nepal and recently was asked to teach 60 Indian pastors.

Why am I telling you all this? Like many others, I had not planned on being single indefinitely. I am well aware of the struggles of being single: loneliness, fitting in in a couple's world, and am well versed in Paul's reminder that "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:9 KJV). Why hadn't God given me a wife when I so longed for one? I don't have the answer. I do believe in God's sovereignty and that he is able to provide a wife for me if he so chooses. I also knew that I had many opportunities to serve God that a married person with a family would not have. I also knew that I didn't have the same stresses and pressures a married person would. I was free to serve God, and he gave me many opportunities to do so. No need to wait to get married.

An encouragement to singles

It is not the purpose of this article to give a theology of singleness, but it is my desire to encourage those who are single. This is where God has you at this stage in your life. I like what my friend Ray Pritchard said as he preached from Jeremiah 29: "You are

where God has you. How do I know that? Because if he wanted you elsewhere, you'd be there. If God is God, that must be true."

I don't know all the reasons why you are still single if you do not want to be. Please don't get married because it is "the thing to do" or to avoid loneliness. Marry only if God brings someone into your life who loves him, who you love, and who loves you. If God leads you to a person like this, then you should marry because it is proof of having found your life's partner, as Chuck Swindoll once said. If you are single but not wanting to be, the only advice I can give you is to trust God. He knows all the reasons why you are single, and he does have a purpose for your life. He may have opportunities for you that you could not pursue if you were married. Take advantage of what God gives you and bloom where you are planted.

I don't know if I will ever marry or not. It would be nice to have someone to share life with. When I was in my mid to late thirties, being single was very difficult for me to accept. But a few years ago, a friend asked me how I felt about it, and I told her that it was the least of my worries. So I will serve God as long as I am able and trust him with me being single or married. I encourage you to trust God with whatever state you find yourself in and to serve him wholeheartedly. What are you waiting for? **JH**

Michael Karpf, former missionary at Soka Evangelical Free Church (Soka, Saitama, Japan), is a pastor-teacher in Bangkok, Thailand. He's also a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, with a Master of Theology (1993) and Doctor of Ministry (2019).

You're going to b

By Kellie Nicholas

What Jesus has revealed about our relationships in heaven gives great meaning and purpose to singleness

When I heard that *Japan Harvest* was doing an issue on singleness, I just knew that I needed to interview my friend Dani Treweek. Dani is single herself and has studied singleness as a pastoral and theological issue. Through her studies, she has rediscovered that the world to come, heaven, gives great meaning to the state of singleness. That's because of what Jesus says in Matthew 22:23–33, an incredible passage and one of the most specific revelations of what the new creation reality will be, according to Dani: “Jesus reveals this massive spoiler about eternity, which is that there won't be human marriage. We will be like the angels, that is, unmarried and celibate.” Singleness is a foretaste of what we will experience in relating to each other for all eternity, and “it is the single Christian's privilege to actually be able to live that out now.”

This helped address a concern Dani had as she thought about her own singleness and ministered to other single women. She felt that many churches focus on the undivided attention, or usefulness, that a single person's life allows in God's service. This seemed inadequate to Dani. But if there was something more to say to single men and women,

she wanted that to be firmly rooted in the Bible.

“How do I make sure my pastoral heart is being informed by theological truth?” she asked.

Why study singleness?

Dani herself is single and has never been married. She grew up in Sydney in a Christian home with the “boring” but wonderful testimony of always knowing Jesus and growing to maturity in him. It was in her late twenties that it began to dawn on her that maybe marriage was not going to be around the corner. “I needed to grapple with

this reality that it hasn't happened and may not happen and what does that mean for me,” Dani said. “Not just how do I survive, but what do I think about singleness, and is that aligned with what God thinks about my singleness?”

In an ethics class at theological college, she was excited to hear for the first time that there is a relationship between singleness and the new creation, and she was eager to pursue the prospect of “exploring how the future informs the present.” After several years of pastoral ministry, particularly as a women's worker at an Anglican church in Sydney, she was keen to write a book about the theology of singleness. She commented, “Within a month of thinking I was going to write a book on singleness, I had somehow signed up to do a PhD on singleness. . . . but I did a PhD to write the best book I could, something that would be useful.”

So what is the meaning of singleness?

Dani wanted to grapple with what God says “the purpose, the meaning, the definition, the significance of singleness, of not being married, is.” When teaching about



e single forever!

singleness, the church is very good at focusing on 1 Corinthians 7:29–35 and its emphasis on undivided devotion, that meaning is found in how you use your singleness. “What I wanted to ask was is there something intrinsically meaningful about singleness, regardless of how we experience it?” Dani said. “We do that with marriage . . . messy marriages don’t mean that marriage is ever less meaningful. But we say singleness can only ever be meaningful as it is unmessy.” She wanted to explore whether or not this was true.

She is very excited about how the Bible and especially Matthew 22 answers her question: “God has a good and right purpose for the unmarried Christian life, regardless of what the context and circumstance is. It gives us a little glimpse of the life we are waiting for as members of the church together in Christ. The more I think about it, the more it baffles me that we have so downplayed verse 30.”

Dani points out that what Jesus reveals about the world to come, where we will all be unmarried, shows that marriage is not essential to human flourishing or to be fully human. “Instead [we will be] rejoicing in our brother and sister relationship with each other,” Dani said. “This reality ought to inform our understanding of the meaning of not being married in this world.”

Dani says that sometimes we think that if we value marriage, we have to see singleness as the opposite and as not good. She is adamant that we need to uphold both and that marriage and singleness need each other. They are

not in competition but complementary. In different ways, both are reminders and a foretaste of the realities of the world to come.

What surprised you most from your study?

Dani had an idea that eschatology, a study of the end times, was key to understanding singleness but that she was possibly going to have to discover the connection. But if she was going to have to discover it, “then how true could it be?” To her amazement, what she found was not a new idea but consistent with over 1000 years of church history.

Many contemporary Christians are aware that the early and medieval church had a high view of the unmarried life, particularly focused on chastity, though they don’t have an awareness of the reasoning behind it. So much of early church thinking actually focused on eschatology, that “marriage is of this age, and we are living in light of the age to come,” Dani said.

What really surprised her was how consistent and “un-novel” that concept was until the Reformation. Now, she says, “we have forgotten that it even existed. The Reformation was so successful at rehabilitating marriage in some important ways that we have completely forgotten . . . the reason behind why singleness was seen as valuable and meaningful.”

Today’s church has the opportunity to remember this teaching, which contains a challenge, Dani says: “The unmarried life is deeply linked with the life to come. As Christians, we are

longing for the life to come. So why would we desperately hold onto things of this life rather than embrace the foretaste of the next?”

What would you like to say to the Japan Harvest readers?

“Christian theology is necessary for us to get our pastoral care right,” Dani said. That’s because if we only focus on practical solutions for ministering to single people, we may miss the purpose God has for all people, single or married. “The way we bring long-term change and relational beauty between marrieds and singles in the church is by aligning our vision for marriage and singleness with God’s vision for it,” she says. We should be committed to “seeing practical change happen but making sure it is informed by solid biblical understanding.”

One of the ways that Dani has done this is by starting Single Minded Ministry. Their website contains some great resources that can help us think through many of the issues involved and how we can serve one another, both married and single, as we seek to serve our great God together. **JH**

Photo of Dani submitted by author

Kellie Nicholas is a CMS Australia missionary who works with KGK (university student ministry) in the Kansai region and has been in Japan since 2008.

Danielle Treweek is the author of The Meaning of Singleness and the founding director of the Single Minded Ministry. She loves spending time with her nephew and niece, drinking a good cup of chai tea, and listening to the Les Miserables soundtrack on repeat. danielletreweek.com

Singleness—a God-given choice

“Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.”¹

By Ginger Tobin

When “some Pharisees came to him to test him,” Jesus managed to turn the occasion into a learning opportunity for his disciples (Matt. 19:1–12 NIV). Assured by Jesus that allowable exits from marriage are extremely limited (v. 9), his disciples wondered whether “it is better not to marry” (v. 10). He then offered three avenues by which singleness may enter a life: birth, others’ actions, or one’s own decision.

Not a mold for everyone

Many factors influence a person’s choice to stay single. A reason for some people may be having same-sex attraction. My research while studying and practicing counseling led me to conclude that homosexuality develops in the context of familial and socio-economic influences, not as an orientation one is born to. However, I observed a decades-long struggle of two friends to define and live out the bond between them. My gay friend finally gave up on heterosexuality after not finding any physical attraction to the opposite sex and being unwilling to deny what he believed to be his nature before his decision to receive Jesus as Savior. With respect to sexual orientation or other issues in their current life, some people simply do not seem to be cut out for marriage. In such situations, what could marriage be but a tormenting misfit? Therefore some people choose to stay single. Certainly, we have no right to try to pour anyone into a marital mold, as the relatives of several friends have tried to do. On the other hand, with the help of the Holy Spirit and counseling, some have succeeded in shifting to a heterosexual orientation, including marriage and family.

Jesus also spoke of those who “refuse to marry for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:12 TLB). A missionary friend who was born in a

war-torn country travels widely for his work, helping professionals minister to victims of war. Although he has loving friendships with others, he has chosen to forego marriage, thus feeling free to give himself to the ministry to which God has called him. Catholic brothers and sisters around the world have chosen celibacy, celebrating their freedom to serve God.

In the category of those “made that way by men,” we find Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was described as having this attitude: “the Christian must be ready for martyrdom and death.”² When his persecution, imprisonment, and execution on order from Adolf Hitler prevented him from marrying his fiancée, he demonstrated his readiness for martyrdom at age 39.³

Dreams...

The Grace Livingston Hill novels my mother passed on to me from her mother left me with double dreams. Reading about virtuous Christian girls saving alcoholic boyfriends and living happily ever after, I dreamed of accomplishing a heroic rescue but also of continuing as I was, single, until Jesus’ return. Since Jesus hadn’t returned by the time I’d reached dating age, I prayed for God’s choice of a life partner. Noting that my father’s unbelief seemed to have taken its toll on my parents’ marriage, I was happy to meet my former husband in church, where we served together in the choir.

However, 15 years later, as his drinking and my fear of abandonment cut into our marriage, he left. Announcing that he was divorcing me, he asked whether I planned to contest his action. In keeping with Jesus’ words in Matthew 19, I hate divorce. However, since my husband had stopped going to church and living a life in harmony with Scripture, per 1 Corinthians 7:15,

I released him. Having been elected an elder in my church, I had declined ordination due to our marital conflict, per 1 Timothy 3:1–5. However, elected again in 1989 after my husband had left, I accepted ordination, embracing the singleness to which I returned, trusting God for healing, and now living my dream of walking forward with Jesus.

Mother Teresa’s example

Mother Teresa has served as a welcome role model for my readjustment to singleness. I treasure her loving support in personal correspondence, which began in 1992. Encouraged by reading books written about her doings and teachings⁴, I wrote to her, suggesting that she herself publish meditation books. She replied with a letter of encouragement. To this day I cling to words like these, which she spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994:

Because I talk so much of giving with a smile, once a professor from the United States asked me: “Are you married?” And I said: “Yes, and I sometimes find it very difficult to smile at my spouse, Jesus, because He can be very demanding—sometimes.” This is really something true. And this is where love comes in—when it is demanding, and yet we can give it with joy.⁵

Having received a calling from God to speak and write, I have been greatly encouraged by Mother Teresa’s boldness in speaking out for scriptural values, as demonstrated in that same presidential breakfast speech. She pleaded:

Please don’t kill the child. I want the child. Please give me the child. I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child. From our children’s home in

Calcutta alone, we have saved over 3000 children from abortion. These children have brought such love and joy to their adopting parents and have grown up so full of love and joy.⁶

Reading this, I sent her a letter of gratitude, not expecting a reply, but was again blessed by a reply from this woman of whom it has been said that when talking to someone, it was as though they were the only other person in the world!

I have had two dreams about Mother Teresa that have greatly impacted my decisions, one of which I'll share here. In this dream that I had soon after our personal correspondence began, I saw her on the campus of University of Northwestern in St. Paul, Minnesota, where I had recently attended a Decision School of Christian Writing in 1986. She was with some of her Sisters of Charity and suddenly exclaimed, "Let's go on a medical mission to Africa!" "Yes, let's!" they replied eagerly with stethoscopes already around their necks. On awakening, I thought, I'm not a Catholic, and I'm not a medical professional. Why am I having this dream? Years later in 2017, I made my first trip to Africa, visiting a former

teammate in Zambia who was agonizing over her singleness. She arranged for my two single Japanese friends and me to visit an orphanage where we helped care for babies. A childcare worker had a bandage wrapped around her swollen foot. Inquiring as to her injury, I learned that four years before, she had slipped in water heated for the babies' baths and fallen down the stairs. Surgery had been performed poorly, and she had been working and caring for her own family all that time. I asked if we could lay hands on her ankle and pray for healing, to which she readily assented. God told me to raise funds for her surgery to be done properly, so we did, and it was!

Naturally, I wished to meet Mother Teresa in person, but when I hoped to stop off in India on a visit to the States, she was on a speaking tour in Canada. When she passed away, I received numerous newspaper clippings, condolences, and expressions of concern from friends and family for my emotional wellbeing. Since we serve the same Lord, I was okay!

Following God's call

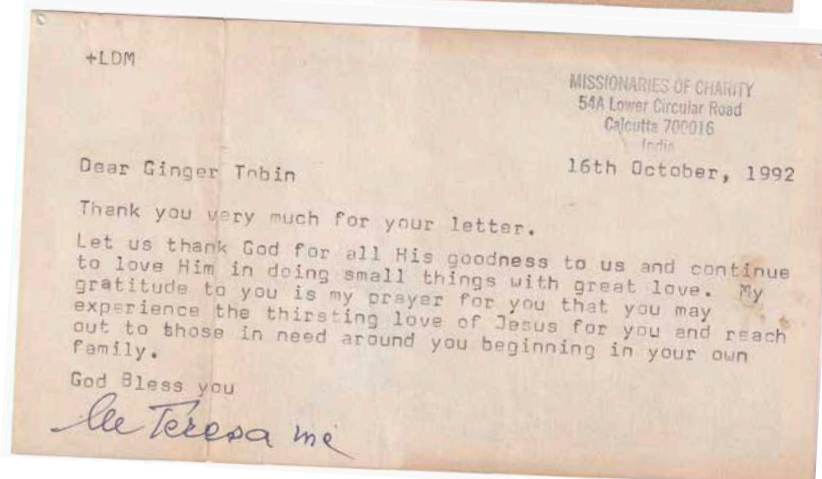
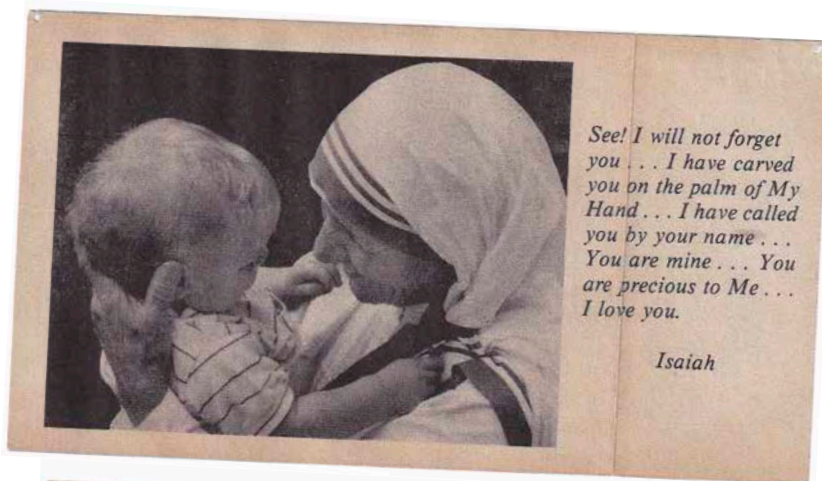
More recently, I have been helped by the HeartChange program (heart-

change.org), which began in Oregon shortly after my divorce. Attending HeartChange Workshop encouraged me to develop my relationship with God as all-sufficient Father. Its sequel, HeartDesign, was life-changing in further deepening my relationship with Jesus as Husband. HeartsOverflowing allowed me to more fully experience my relationship with God the Holy Spirit. HeartsTogether has been developed to enhance marital relationships. Since my partnership with Jesus led me to Japan in 1995, God has opened a door for me to help bring HeartChange here in Japanese. It was during my gay friend's second time through HeartChange that he finally gave his heart to Jesus.

In the seasons of our lives, we all face choices, some of which affect our marital status. As we prayerfully choose to answer God's call, our marital status may change, but our goal must always be the same—to please our commanding officer (2 Tim. 2:4). As Jesus suggested in Matthew 19, it is not necessary to have a physical spouse in order to please him. Above and beyond our marital status, he is glorified and we are fulfilled as we follow him. Through whichever channel singleness may have reached us, we are free to tune in to God's best for us each day. In heaven, there will be no more marrying or giving in marriage (Matt. 22:30). After our brief sojourn on this Earth, we will all be singles for eternity! **JH**

1. Matt. 19:11 (NIV).
2. G. Leibholz, "Memoir," chapter in the introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 2015), p. xxii.
3. Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. 532.
4. Angelo Devananda, ed., *Mother Teresa: Contemplative in the Heart of the World: Selections from Her Letters and Teaching* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1985), p. 59.
5. Mother Teresa, "Mother Teresa's National Prayer Breakfast Message," February 3, 1994, *Crossroads Initiative*, <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/mother-teresas-national-prayer-breakfast-message> (posted September 2, 2016).
6. Ibid.

Scan of photo and letter submitted by author



Ginger Tobin serves with Aijalon Ministries International, bringing HeartChange transformational retreats and personal HeartRecovery to Japan, and leading Bible studies in Japanese and English. Her hobbies include bicycling and swimming.

The Champions Program: True Love Goalkeepers

Teaching young people how to protect their bodies and hearts

By Kari Miyano

Through teaching at a junior high school, my eyes have been opened! Many of the students believe that love is what today's music, media, and culture conveys it as. There is a desperate need to help these young people who are sorely lacking a moral compass and don't know of God's ways. So it is important to reach the youth with God's truths—we must rise as loving adults and teach them ways to prepare for life.

Ephesians 6:13 gives a clarion call for all ages to do just that. *The Message* paraphrases it this way: “Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet.”

The Champions “True Love Goalkeeper” course

What can we do to help young people make good choices for life? There is an excellent program for youth that teaches wholesome morals and prepares hearts for the gospel that my friend Ruth introduced to me two summers ago. It is called the Champions Program. One of its main courses is called “True Love Goalkeeper” (the Japanese name is 愛を守る人 *Ai O Mamoru Hito*, “the person who protects/defends love”). Like the goalie protects the goal in soccer, true love goalkeepers learn what true love is and how to protect it.

Ruth told me how she started a group using this program to help educate her fifth grade daughter and her daughter's friends. Whether believers or not, many parents can easily agree with the values taught through the course.

In Ruth's words, here are some things she liked about it: “The program is good because it is easy for anybody to teach it as it has a set teaching that is blended with games, activities, and a workbook to fill in. The workbook also has a place where students can share their thoughts, which might be difficult to share otherwise, in the form of writing letters back and forth with the teacher. I like it also because it was made in Taiwan so the format and presentation is not foreign but Asian. It also has a solid foundation

and history of being used in over 600 schools and impacting over one million junior high students in Taiwan.”

How the Champions got started

In 1994, Dr. Steven Long and his wife went to Taiwan from the United States to invest in education. According to the website, “They started on school campuses, hoping to help young children develop self-confidence, self-discipline, and a sense of respect for themselves and the people around them with the Champions Program.”¹ The program started very small, but now more than 40% of the middle schools in Taiwan are implementing the Champions curriculum every year.

Chieko Saito from Japan was living in Taiwan with her husband when she got connected with the program. She realized how beneficial it would be if she could translate the materials and gear them towards students in Japan, and that is just what she did.

Since 2018, Chieko has trained over 1,000 people in Japan to become volunteer group leaders. The process is quite simple: she offers training sessions several times a year and participants pay 3,000 yen for a leader's booklet and eight 40-minute group lessons on Zoom.

I enrolled in Chieko's course, and it was so refreshing to join a group of committed Japanese believers who care about raising up the next generation with godly principles. At the end of each session, there was time for discussion and Q and A.

After completing the training, participants are qualified as leaders to start their own groups, usually with junior high students.

Learning to protect their bodies and hearts

A True Love Goalkeeper group meets eight times, once a week for 40 minutes in person. Groups can meet at a home, church, or somewhere else. The course is suitable for both boys and girls, Christians and non-Christians.

By the time the course is finished, students have a much healthier understanding of how to respect and care for their minds and bodies.



In this course, students learn

- how to respect their bodies, respect others, and how to guard their hearts;
- the benefits of purity and boundaries;
- how to avoid “stirring up” love prematurely; and
- what to do if they or someone they know is sexually abused.

There is space in the workbook to incorporate a Bible verse for each lesson. Ruth told me that fellow moms were, like her, concerned about their children’s well-being. There had been some bullying going on through social media, and these moms were grateful when she volunteered to lead a group for their daughters. She partnered with a Japanese Christian friend to lead the group together. One benefit of inviting her daughter’s friends to join the group was that they all now share the same common goals when it comes to self-image and personal purity.

Tackling life and its problems in a healthy way

Recently, a new course called “Problem Solving” (問題解決 *Mondai Kaiketsu*) is also being offered in Japan. Among other things, this teaches students that there are ways to solve problems without taking one’s own life or resorting to substance abuse.

Ruth said, “I know of one girl who had a very low self-image before starting the course. She couldn’t write or

give her opinions because of fear. Since she went through the Champions and Problem Solving courses, we have seen huge growth in her self-confidence. She started writing more in the workbooks and talking more about herself. Her mom is amazed at how positively she has changed. Another girl said that the new information she has received has given her and her friends a good way to protect themselves.”

I want to share Champions with you because this program is so excellently geared to help us guide youth in Japan. My hope is that you will pass on this information to your Japanese friends and coworkers who would be ideal as Champion group leaders.

You can find out more at <https://champ.org.tw>, where you can find English and Japanese translations of their history, mission, and course information, or send an email to saito.chieko@gmail.com. **JH**

1. Champions Education Association, “Champions Program,” https://champ.org.tw/?page_id=793 (accessed July 17, 2023).

Image of book cover from the Champions website

Kari Miyano, an American mom of three adult children, has a passion for purity and excellence. She teaches at an international junior and senior high school in Kyoto. She likes healthy eating and swimming in lakes.

Advertisement

Kansai WIM upcoming events

Autumn Day of Prayer

Monday, October 16, 2023

Crossroad Church Nishinomiya

WIM WOMEN IN MINISTRY
Equip—Empower—Encourage

Kansai Christian Women’s Conference
March 4, 2024

A Life Transformed: Growing Our Vision of God



Michelle Jackson served in Japan for 12 years before returning to Australia in 2020. She now works for CMS (Church Missionary Society) Victoria in pastoral care and mobilisation. She is married to Brad and has three children. She loves browsing recycle shops, walking her dog and teaching God’s word.



More information available on the JEMA WIM Facebook site:
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064638941801>

God is transforming me through Japan

Forty years of his faithfulness changed my source of strength and self-worth

By Eileen Barkman

As we approach the final lap of our journey in Japan, I want to testify that God has been so faithful to me through the years. I love the facet of God's faithfulness that is seen in 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (ESV).

God wants to *transform* us—completely! Romans 8:29 tells us that "For those he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Becoming like Jesus—that's sanctification! Because he is faithful, *he will do it*. That's a process that takes a lifetime.

God began his work of transforming me by placing me in a Christian home, fifth child out of six and the fearful one of the bunch. Sometime during those early years, I accepted Jesus as my Savior, but my fears only seemed to intensify as I grew. Some strong but kind words from our family doctor helped change the direction of my life: "Eileen, if you say that you are a Christian, you need to get serious about trusting him with *all* of your life."

After our first year of marriage, my husband, Dave, and I were challenged to consider becoming missionaries to Japan. Immediately, my fears kicked in. No! Not Asia! I would feel much "safer" going somewhere in South America. And I could *never* learn Japanese. But as I humbled myself and began to pray about Japan, God changed my heart, giving me the desire to follow him even to Japan. And I've never been sorry!

Several years later, on our fifth wedding anniversary (August 2, 1985) our little family of four left rural Kansas for the big city of Yokohama.

Hindsight informs me that God not only brought me to Japan to share Jesus's love and forgiveness with Japanese people; he also brought me here to continue transforming *my* life! At the last Kanto spring retreat for WIM (Women in Ministry), I shared just a few of the many works of ongoing transformation that God has been doing in my life:

1) **Self-worth:** from comparison with others to embracing what God says about me.

After arriving in Japan, a problem of comparison that I had carried with me for many years became even more glaring. I had grown up with an older sister whom I greatly ad-

mired. She was outstanding in every way, and I wanted to be just like her. When comparing myself with her, I always felt like I was never good enough.

When we crossed the ocean to do ministry in Japan, I was more than ready for a fresh start, with full intentions of leaving those feelings of comparison behind. But no, the qualities that I admired (and envied) in my sister were found in many of my new colleagues! And without realizing it, I began to compare myself with teammates, feeling that I wasn't measuring up, leading me to build walls between us. I pleaded with God to free me from this awful shadow that hindered me from going deeper in relationships. But I just couldn't seem to get victory.

Then one day, God, in his loving faithfulness, answered my prayer. C. J. Mahaney sums up my discovery well in a quote from *The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing*:

On a daily basis we're faced with two simple choices. We can either listen to ourselves and our constantly changing feelings about our circumstances, or we can talk to ourselves about the unchanging truth of who God is and what He's accomplished for us at the cross."¹

God was inviting me into an act of abiding 24/7 in him, drawing from him my identity and worth as his child. This was not simply a once-for-all change, which I would have preferred. Instead, it was a moment-by-moment choosing to



think *his* thoughts. God must be my source of self-worth. I must embrace what he says about me!

2) Source of strength: from leaning on myself to leaning on God.

My big fear in coming to Japan was learning the language. I knew it was impossible for me. It didn't help that we came with two babies and had two more during our first term, which was supposed to be dedicated to intensive language learning! But God provided just the right tutor who helped me begin to conquer my fears and learn Japanese.

In my effort to understand and speak Japanese, God desired for me to humble myself before him. He continues to give opportunities to acknowledge my weaknesses and his strength. He gives me the chance to put to death the innate pride that loves to protect myself and to be admired. Joni Eareckson Tada said, "The weaker we are, the harder we must lean on God. And the harder we lean on him, the stronger we discover him to be."² In my weakness of language, I am still learning to lean hard on God. Part of his work of transforming me is reminding me how desperately I need him to communicate with the people around me. It is a daily reality that without him I can do nothing.

He must be my source of strength in handling this difficult language. And he has faithfully done just that—given me strength!

3) Source of control: from what I thought was best to what God knew was best.

When we landed at Haneda Airport back in 1985, I arrived with two big "nevers." I would never put my children in Japanese schools, and I would never put them into boarding school. I had been trained as an elementary teacher and was convinced that I was ready and qualified to homeschool my children.

But God's plan was that both the local Japanese school and boarding at CAJ (Christian Academy of Japan) would become a beautiful part of my children's education! That

didn't happen without a battle since I was determined that I knew what was best for my kids. God faithfully began to expose the pride in my heart and the unwillingness to trust God with my family. It was a long process, but I remember clearly the evening when I opened my hand to God that was clutching my kids so tightly. Surely he loved these children better than I did and would do what was best for them. Through the process of releasing my precious children to him, he was continuing his work of transformation, making me more like Jesus.

In his faithfulness, God is not willing to let us continue to have that illusion of control. He desires for us to trust *his* control. He is faithful and he will do it. He will make us like his Son!

4) Source of love: from myself to God.

After the 2011 Tohoku triple disaster, we moved from the Kanto area to a town outside of Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture. Although we were able to reach out to many broken people who had lost so much in the tsunami, God still had a work of transformation to do in me. One necessary lesson was to learn to love with Jesus's love.

Soon after moving to Tohoku, I met Y-san, a lonely and needy neighbor lady. She responded quickly to my invitations to our home and eventually to church.

One summer day, we led Y-san in a prayer to believe in Jesus as her Savior, and we could see a joy and new light in her once-dark face. But after we returned from our home assignment in the US, she adamantly told me that she had quit Christianity. How disappointing! We had invested so much into Y-san. Now it all seemed in vain.

I decided to move on. But God seemed to say, "Can you love her anyway? Is your love unconditional, like mine?" And so, surrendering my longing for Y-san's positive response to Jesus, I determined to continue loving her with Christ's love, no matter how she responded. I still believe God is very interested in Y-san's salvation, but God also continues to teach *me* what his love really looks like.

God must be my source of love; my own power to love is never going to be enough.

I am still a work in process. As I look back on almost 40 years of life and ministry in Japan, I can testify that God has been faithfully showing me my heart, sanctifying me, making me more like him, and, amazingly, even using me in his transforming work in others.

The one who called us is faithful; he will surely do it! He will sanctify us completely. Praise God! **JH**

1. C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centred Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Multnomah, 2006), 36.

2. Joni Eareckson Tada, *The God I Love: A Lifetime of Walking with Jesus*, read by the author (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), audiobook, 14 hrs., 20 min.

Eileen Barkman and her husband, Dave, have served with SEND International in Japan since 1985. Giving fresh loaves of homemade whole wheat bread to neighbors and friends brings her delight.

Connecting as a “trustworthy friend”

Christian Shimbun, January 29, 2023

Translated by Hiromi Terukina

In Japan, over 40,000 children live in social care, including those living with foster families.¹ These children are forced to stand on their own once they reach the age of 18, and many of them struggle to adjust to their new lives and become financially independent. Maki Ōyabu founded Hakobune in 2012 to reach out to and support these youths.

Last November, an *oden*² party was held at Tomo Café, a meeting place operated by Hakobune in Chiba. Six girls who had just left their foster facilities attended. While one of them explodes in laughter and another chatters continuously, one sits away from the group and stares into her smartphone. “Each one of them carries different burdens,” shares



Ōyabu. “Foster children are provided with food, clothing, and shelter at their homes, but not spiritual nurturing. These youths grow up not knowing what it is to be loved and have a hard time trusting other people. To suddenly make these children live on their own in this society is like forcing them to fly without a running start. Those who grew up in a warm and loving family have their parents as role models and are able to fly. But these children, who may look like adults on the

outside, are easily shaken when they face challenges because they lack that foundation. That is exactly why we are here to support them.”

Prior to starting Hakobune, Ōyabu had visited a foster care facility every

month for five years. One day, a girl confessed to Ōyabu her fear of being forced to leave the facility in the future. Realizing that other children shared the same fear, Ōyabu decided to become a “trustworthy friend” who would continue to keep in touch with these children after they left their foster facilities. The name “Hakobune” means Noah’s ark in Japanese and was chosen with hopes that the service would be a “safe space” for the children. This decade was full of ups and downs, but five of Hakobune’s fostered youths were baptized and one of them now works on staff at Tomo Café. “Because God loves us with patience, we also continue to be actively involved with patience,” smiles Ōyabu. ■

1. Hakobune, “はこぶねとは About Us,” <https://hakobune201705.net> (accessed July 20, 2023).

2. Oden is a popular winter hotpot dish.



West News

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

If God is love, shouldn't we help those in need?

Christian Shimbun, December 18/25, 2022 Translated by Grace Koshino

Migiwa, based in Nara Prefecture, is the only nonprofit organization in Japan that arranges adoptions for infants born with disabilities. Hiroki Matsubara, who was involved in establishing the organization, worked with the homeless while pastoring a church in Amagasaki in Hyogo Prefecture. Amagasaki has a large number of homeless people, and the church was no stranger to them. Matsubara recalls a church member saying, "You say that God is love. Shouldn't we help those in need?" After moving to Nara, Matsubara started a hospice together with Yoshie Sakurai, the current representative for Migawa.

Matsubara got involved in the adoption of children with disabilities when he learned that over 100,000 babies are aborted every year. He approached obstetrician and gynecologist Dr. Yutaka Kyūkawa and said, "We will protect the lives of the infants, so please block these abortions on the front line." Dr. Kyūkawa pleaded with him to secure a means of protecting the lives of babies with Down's syndrome since babies suspected of having the disability are aborted 90% of the time. Matsubara's support would allow him to offer an option other than abortion. This is how the operation to protect babies' lives and support mothers started. Ten babies have been welcomed into new homes so far.

In addition to his three adult children, Matsubara is currently father to two adoptive children, Yamato (3) and Ema (2). Yamato has heart and lung complications linked to Down's syndrome, and Ema suffers from West syndrome, an incurable disease that requires 24-hour care. Since adopt-

ing Ema in January 2021, Matsubara has had to step down from his position as pastor in order to take care of his children.

Yamato's biological parents had been struggling with the severe disability of their son and were desperate for relief to the point of contemplating suicide. Matsubara agreed to take over the role

Of course, it was a huge decision for his family. "Rather than considering it a burden," Matsubara explains, "we wanted to see it as simply welcoming the children into our everyday lives."

Matsubara believes that Christ would draw close to such children if he were walking the earth. "After becoming a parent to disabled children



of parenthood from them. Ema had been left in a hospital room by her biological parents. Her clothes had become too small for her after she was left in the hospital for so long, and the doctor didn't know whether she would survive with her severe disability. Matsubara took her in his arms and said, "Let's go home. I may not be able to do anything. I may make mistakes, but I will be your father. Being criticized for what I do is worth so much more than not doing anything at all and avoiding the criticism."

myself, I finally understand how challenging it is. Christ's command to live together is a huge responsibility."

Matsubara's hope is that churches turn their attention toward these matters. Matsubara would eventually like to build a house for these children, too. There are children who can't live with their parents. There are some who die alone. There are some children with physical handicaps. "In this unfair world, it is Christians who should be responding to those situations," says Matsubara. ■

Gift giving and Japanese culture

The rules may be complex, but here are a few simple tips

If the Japanese have a collective love language, I think it would be giving and receiving gifts. Whenever they travel anywhere, they come back with suitcases crammed with *omiyage* (travel gifts). If they move to a new neighbourhood, they give gifts to their neighbours. They give presents on New Year's Day (*otoshidama*), Valentine's Day, White Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, at the middle of the year (*ochūgen*), at Christmas, and at the end of the year (*oseibo*), as well as at weddings, funerals, and when visiting someone in hospital.

An opportunity to embrace

All this gift giving can appear excessive to Westerners, and it might be tempting to opt out of it at times (especially if the budget is tight). But if embraced and used strategically, it can open up opportunities to talk to new people and strengthen existing relationships.

For example, the custom of giving gifts when moving into a new house or apartment provides the perfect excuse for getting to know your neighbours. Likewise, giving *omiyage* can create opportunities to chat to people you haven't seen for a while. And the act of giving a gift to someone communicates to them that the relationship is important to you.

An important aspect about giving presents in Japan is that it imparts a sense of obligation (*giri*) to the receiver. In the West, we can sometimes give a present or pay for a meal without any expectation that the favour will be returned. In contrast, there is a strong expectation that a gift in Japan will be repaid (at least in part) in the future. It can thus set in motion a constant giving and receiving that helps to maintain the relationship.

This aspect is apparent in weddings, where guests give money to the bridal couple (usually about 30,000 yen) but then receive a gift on leaving. It's also evident in how Japanese people celebrate Valentine's

Day: men who receive chocolate on February 14th give something in return on White Day (March 14th).

Learn the rules

It's important to know the rules when giving and receiving presents in Japan. You definitely want to avoid taking flowers appropriate for a funeral when visiting a friend in hospital! The rules can be quite complex for formal occasions, and even Japanese have to consult etiquette books to find out what is appropriate. Fortunately, there are several English and bilingual books that are helpful guides for giving and receiving. And there are a few simple rules that can help with giving in a general context.

When giving a present, pay attention to the wrapping and presentation and give it in an attractive bag. It's also conventional to make a depreciative comment to the effect that the present isn't anything special or an apology that it will add to the things that the person will have to carry home.

If you receive a present in person, it's usually okay not to open it straight away. If you do open it in front of the giver, do so with the utmost decorum, being careful not to rip the wrapping paper. When you receive a gift in the post, acknowledge it straight away. Japanese people will make a short phone call on receiving a present to let the giver know that it's arrived and to thank them for it. I heard of one missionary family who failed to do this and discovered their neighbours were upset the next time they met them.

Used well, gift giving can really help to build relationships, so it's worth investing the time and effort to familiarize yourself with the ground rules. And if in doubt, consult with a Japanese friend. **JH**

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Church planter: embrace your inner manager

This very plain but important role from the world of business can teach us some truths about leading teams

You cannot undertake the task of church planting alone. In reality, nobody ever does. Some church planters start with a team. Others start a church on their own but soon find themselves in a new congregation that has become their ministry and church planting team. Paul tells us that church leaders are to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12 ESV). So a church planter must be an equipper of their team and their church.

In the business world, there’s a word for a leader’s work of equipping: management. When management is done poorly, it’s either painful or the stuff of Steve Carell sitcoms. When done well, managers bring a team together to achieve things they could have never done alone. In the Bible, we see this organization of people in the work of kings and judges. We know from Romans 12:8 that leadership is a gift given to some members of the body of Christ.

But the reality is that many church planters and ministry leaders struggle with management. This may be because someone’s past success as a team member can be the very thing that makes them struggle as a leader. Business leadership authors Linda A. Hill and Kent Lineback explain in their very helpful book, *Being the Boss: The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader*:

If you were a high performer in your work before becoming a manager, you may find the journey into management particularly difficult. Because of their previous success, stars are understandably reluctant to give up the attitudes and practices they think produced their success thus far . . . They don’t know how to develop or coach people because they never needed much coaching themselves, or so they believe. They don’t know how to deal with people who lack their motivation . . . No wonder many former stars turn into mediocre bosses.¹

Maybe you were a great individual worker on your last church staff or ministry team. Once you become the per-



son in charge, your role changes dramatically. It’s time to embrace the role of equipper.

As a team leader, lead pastor, or church planter, your job is not to do all of the work but to equip your team to do the work. This involves vision casting, motivation, writing job descriptions, running meetings, giving feedback, and delegating clearly. Many in ministry are tempted to set aside the work of management and simply do everything themselves. This leads to ministries that don’t get done, burnt-out leaders, dissatisfied team members who long to do more, and church members robbed of the opportunity to grow through the works of ministry.

Church leaders! Embrace the work of management as a gift and role in the body of Christ. When you equip others, they will grow spiritually, more disciples will be made, and God will be glorified. Don’t just do the work. Do the work of helping others to do the work. **JH**

1. Linda A Hill, and Kent Lineback. *Being the Boss: The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, Introduction, Section: Were You a Star as an Individual Performer?, Paragraph 1.

Jay Greer and his wife, Caitlin, moved from the United States to Japan in 2008, and by God’s grace, they’ve done church planting in Nagoya, Osaka, and Tokyo. They currently live in Tokyo with their four children.

Effective prayer

When prayer fades out, power fades out. We are as spiritual as we are prayerful; no more, no less.
E. Stanley Jones¹

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” (James 5:16b NASB 1995)

When we pray, we tend to focus on the results of our prayers. But we should first thank God for the privilege of being able to come to the God who created the universe and pray to Him. Talking about effective prayer, let us remember that Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross so that we can approach God’s throne in prayer (Heb. 10:19–25).

Biblical examples of effective prayer

Yes, the Bible does tell us how to pray, but more so it shows us the type of person who prays effectively. The “righteous person” in James 5:16 is in a right relationship with God. God pays attention to the righteous (1 Pet. 3:12a; Ps. 34:15). “The prayer of the upright is His delight” (Prov. 15:8b).

There are many examples in both the Old and New Testaments of effective prayer. Daniel was a righteous man who prayed daily (Dan. 6:10–27). He was delivered from lions. Moses was approved by God, and in response, God sent meat, manna (Ex. 16), and water (Ex. 17:1–7).

Hannah prayed (1 Sam. 1:11), and God gave her Samuel (v. 20). Elijah was a man like us, and God answered his prayers for rain (James 5:17–18). God answers the prayers of His children (Prov. 15:29).

The stipulation for effective prayer

We can pray confidently if we pray according to His will (1 John 5:14–15). To know God’s will means to know God Himself. We get to know God by spending time in His Word and in prayer. If we don’t know what to pray for, Paul tells us that we can ask the indwelling Holy Spirit to pray for us, according to His will (Rom. 8:27).

How are we to pray?

We are to pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17), to always be in an attitude of prayer.

We are to pray persistently and not give up (Luke 18:1). We are to pray in faith

(James 1:6; Mark 11:22–23). We are to pray in Jesus’s name (John 14:13–14). We are to pray with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6) with a heart that is right with God. And we are to pray realizing that God already knows our needs (Matt. 6:8).

Barriers to prayer

But there are some things that will keep us from praying and keep God from answering. One is unconfessed sin (Isa. 59:2; Ps. 66:18). The good thing, though, is that the remedy is simply to confess (1 John 1:9).

Other barriers are selfish desires and wrong motives (James 4:3) as well as ignoring God’s advice (Prov. 1:25). If we strengthen our relationship with God, we can be sure that He hears us and will answer according to His will.

The same God

When we study and obey God’s Word, when we seek to please Him, we find God to be the same as He was in biblical times. The God who made the sun stand still at Aijalon in response to Joshua’s prayer (Josh. 10:12–13) is still the same God.

He invites us to come before His throne of grace with confidence to receive grace and mercy in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). **JH**

1. “E. Stanley Jones Quotes,” QuotesLyfe, <https://www.quoteslyfe.com/quote/When-prayer-fades-out-power-fades-out-537597> (accessed May 16, 2023).

Ken Reddington, an MK, returned to Japan as a church-planting missionary in 1978. He is on the Servant-Leader Team of the Prayer Summit for Western Japan and secretary for the Kochi Citywide Pastors Group.

Cultivating caring community

Practical tips to care for singles



We know that God does not want people to go through life alone and that He has created all of us for community. However, so many single mission workers feel alone or lonely, yearning for people to journey with them through the ups and downs of ministry and life.

As someone who has been involved in people care for over 20 years, I believe our response should be to practice caring for one another. Having never been married, I understand some of the challenges of global mission work as a single person. At times, it has been challenging lacking a supportive community to share the struggles I faced as a single person, engaging in ministry in an isolated cross-cultural setting. In my talks with many other single mission workers, I discovered that my struggles were not unique and that there was a need for more intentional community-building for single mission workers.

The New Testament is full of commands that specifically teach or direct us on how and how not to relate to “one another.” How we relate to one another in Christian community has a direct impact on our witness in communities where Christ is least known. I know the command Jesus gave for us to “love one another” (John 13:35) is not easy to live out; however, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can start by avoiding generalizations. A community is made up of many individuals. Each person is unique in personality, needs, and the way they view and respond to the world. Yet we often make generalizations about people. For example, all women like to cook, all men can fix things, or all kids/teenagers have messy rooms. How do you feel when generalizations are made about you? Sometimes we can dismiss them, or sometimes they may be hurtful and offensive. Either way, these generalizations are not helpful.

Our intentions are good, but our way of caring may be like two people speaking different languages to one another. One person feels like they gave good care while the other person leaves feeling uncared for. In building caring relationships, I believe it is important to observe and ask people how they feel and how they want to be cared for, as well as to understand their language of love. Each of us perceives love and care differently. Does this person need

quality time? Acts of service? Gifts? You might be bending over backwards to spend time with someone, but that person may just need you to be more explicit with words of encouragement or affirmation. It’s like two ships passing in the night—both wanting to care for the other and both not understanding why the message is not getting through or is not appreciated.

Here are a few suggestions for how to care for singles in your community:

- Single people have plenty of responsibilities in both work and ministry as well as looking after themselves, their homes, and hobbies. Don’t assume a worker who is single can take on extra tasks and duties. The need to respect time for rest and relaxation is vital and not dependent on status; healthy rhythms of work and life are essential for us all.
- Asking single people how they can be best supported and cared for and what they would like (or not like) is an excellent start. This enables a conversation about what might be helpful or most appreciated, paving the way to understand what boundaries our single sisters and brothers have.
- When someone lives alone, there is no one at home with whom to share and process affairs of the day or share spiritual insights and pray. Be intentional about being available to share some of these day-to-day necessities.
- Having a team member with practical skills close by can be helpful or provide a contact point for advice and help (e.g., home repairs, where to go for certain items).
- Asking people how they’re doing in their walk with the Lord is something that can be lacking in our missionary community. Single people may have no one to hold them accountable, so ask them how they’re doing spiritually, including how they’re spending time with the Lord and what God is teaching them.

Consider the other person’s perspective. Here’s a tip: people often want to be cared for in the way they show care. Instead of making assumptions or generalizations, look for what is meaningful to them, or simply ask them. God has created us to live in caring community with one another as we bring His love to the people in places where Christ is least known. Each of us is complete in Christ; let’s remember our identity as children of God and, in turn, the important role of being sacred siblings to one another. **JH**

Nancy Young served in Asia for over ten years with SIM before she joined the People Development & Care Team. Her desire is for God’s family (married or single) to value one another as dearly loved by God and uniquely created.

Who let the kids go out by themselves?

Protecting our kids when they use smartphones

It's become apparent to me that the way our children are both learning and being entertained is vastly different than the way I grew up. When it was new, the TV was easier to regulate, and it was a one-way channel of communication. But what comes in and out of our homes through smartphones has increasingly become much more difficult for parents to monitor. It's not all bad news, however. I've discovered ways to protect my kids.

This article will give a brief summary of three ways parents can protect children who use devices while still giving them the benefits devices can offer. All three methods restrict inappropriate content. I will talk about devices with built-in controls, Wi-Fi router controls, and using parental control apps from a personal use perspective.

Devices with built-in protection

Tablets and other devices designed for little kids were a good option when my son was younger. I wanted him to have access to the free apps available in the digital marketplace. I did not want him to have a true iPad or Android device, so I first opted for Amazon's Kindle Fire tablet (now called Amazon Fire). They are inexpensive, well-built, and have good parental controls on the device—including the ability to turn off marketing. Their app store is more limited than Android or Apple, also making it easier to control.

In-house Wi-Fi protection

However, as my son got older and capable of searching for himself, I knew we needed to begin filtering internet access. I opted for a parental-control router that would automatically block content via Wi-Fi. I wanted to have individual profiles for each person or device in the house (so the parents' devices would not be affected), content filtering, site blocking, time limits/scheduling, and an app to control everything on my phone. There are many options, but I settled with a company called TP-Link. They produce a series made to do all this called the Deco routers. These home routers do everything above with their free software called HomeCare service.

I continued to use this system even when we decided to change from Amazon to Android devices. Google offers some limited parental control, but it did not meet my standards. In fact, Google's Family Link would not work with accounts in different regions. Using the Deco router meant that as long as our son used our home network, HomeCare was sufficient. I could regulate every device—old ones, new ones, and even his friends'—for free.

That was until a certain grandfather promised our son an iPhone when he entered junior high. This was not an easy decision for us to accept because it could be used

anywhere, which meant it would no longer be tied to our parental control Wi-Fi router.

A real mobile solution

I scoured the internet for something that would be able to do everything that the TP-Link HomeCare system had provided, with a few extra features. The system I sought had to be usable on both iPhone and Android, affordable, have location tracking and history (showing where they are and where they have been), individual app control, offer a free demo/trial, and, most of all, work!

I tried several options, including Kaspersky Safe Kids. It looks great on paper, but I could not get the demo to work. In the end I settled on Kidslox.

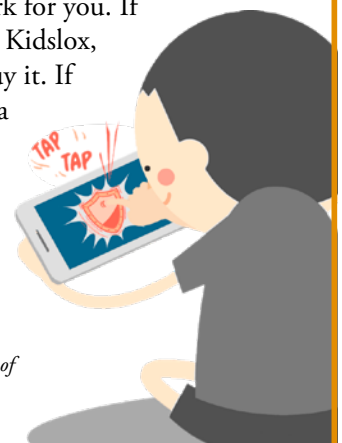
Kidslox offers a lifetime license that includes all features for a one-time payment. It cost us US\$99. This means no monthly or yearly fees. Plus, new features are always being introduced. While I have had a few issues with it, the support team has always been helpful and replies fairly quickly—sometimes within minutes.

There are several features I particularly like. I can allow apps to work when it is in Lock mode. For example, during school hours I can allow my son to use his Bible app in Lock mode but still restrict YouTube. I can take screenshots of the device at any moment with my smartphone. There are lots of statistics, but one I like the most are the web searches, including YouTube reports with video thumbnails. It also sends notifications to my phone for web searches that are inappropriate. It's not always perfect, though. I saw this once: "Your son is searching for 'to kill a mockingbird' on his device"!

Recently, I only check what he is looking at from time to time, and we have had a few conversations about searches that were somewhat inappropriate, which, if it was needed, led to instruction, repentance, and prayer. I have seen his spiritual growth, which has led to him to be able to discern what is profitable and what is not—better than any device can!

There are many options that are on the market now, and perhaps one of those will work for you. If you do, I recommend an app like Kidslox, but be sure to try it before you buy it. If you decide to let your child have a device, find a solution to guard your flock until they are mature enough to handle one. **JH**

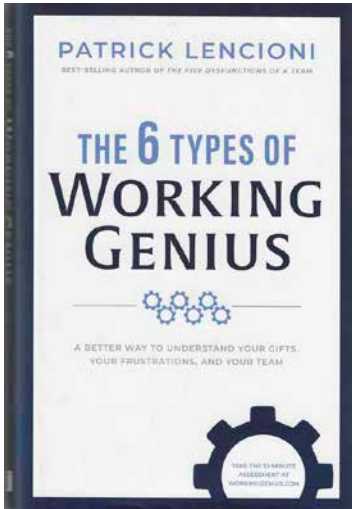
Jesse Mark Cesario is the pastor of maturity and discipleship and manages all things tech at Tokyo Baptist Church (TBC). He is saved, married, and raising three children by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.



The 6 Types of Working Genius

Patrick Lencioni (Matt Holt Books, 2022) 228 pp.

Lencioni, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and organizational health leader, explains how to understand our gifts, our frustrations, and our



team. Lencioni believes that many do not understand their work-related gifts. He provides a framework for understanding our God-given talents. Like most of his books, the first part is a fable about the six kinds of working genius. The second part is an overview of the model explaining the six types—wonder, in-

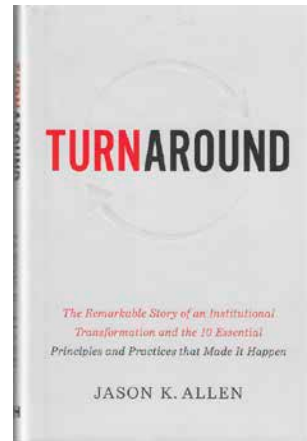
vention, discernment, galvanizing, enablement, and tenacity. Everyone has two areas where they are naturally gifted (their genius) and two areas that produce frustration and exhaustion. The two other areas are working competencies. A team needs to recognize these areas in each other so they can work together well and see where they may be missing talents that are needed. The Working Genius Team Map helps a team understand gaps they may need to fill and how they can work with passion and enthusiasm. An online assessment is available that helps to identify working geniuses. This would be an informative book for a leadership team to work through and will bring deeper understanding of how a team can work together more productively. **JH**

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

Turnaround: The Remarkable Story of an Institutional Transformation and the 10 Essential Principles and Practices that Made It Happen

Jason K. Allen (B&H Publishing, 2022) 180 pp.

Allen, president of Midwestern Seminary, one of the fastest growing seminaries in the world, shares how to rescue an organization that is in deep trouble. When he arrived on the campus in 2012, the school was in bad shape. Allen reminds us of key leadership principles that mark healthy organizations. Several themes run through the book, including God's kind providence and the importance of credibility and team leader-



ship. Allen introduces ten principles and gives practical advice on how to implement them. In the chapter "Cherish Your Team," he tells how to build a team carefully and gives practical suggestions for nurturing the team. Allen gives a fascinating view as an insider in the seminary on what God has done to bring about remark-

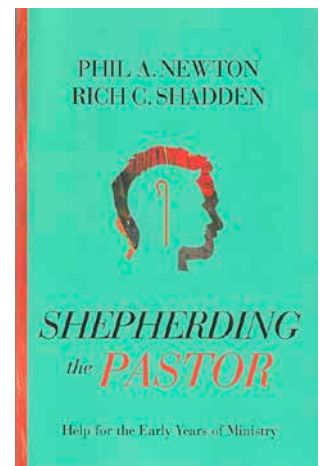
able transformation. Allen has worked hard to cultivate a healthy culture. This is a book packed with wisdom that will help any organization and leader. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Shepherding the Pastor: Help for the Early Years of Ministry

Phil A. Newton & Rich C. Shadden (New Growth Press, 2023) 160 pp.

Newton, a pastor for over 40 years, shares his process of mentoring Shadden. They want to help pastors develop healthy patterns in ministry that will enable longevity. In each chapter, Shadden tells about a challenge he faced and Newton responds by offering counsel. Shadden shares how he applies that counsel and Newton recommends next steps on how to proceed when facing similar challenges and gives additional resources. The book is a great example of how to mentor and do the work of ministry together. They look at four stages: sent out, the beginning years, the tumultuous years, and the fruitful years. Both seasoned and young leaders will find wisdom and help as they lead and mentor others. **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.

Stories communicate our message

People love a good story; we can use that to show them the needs in Japan

A big dilemma for missionaries is that many of the people who pray for and support us struggle to understand our lives and ministries. They don't live in the same country. They haven't had the many unique experiences that missionaries share, or dealt with the same challenges.

How do we bridge that gap? One good way is through stories. I have never been to the US or England or South Africa. But I have read stories set in these places and met people from there who have told me their stories. That is no substitute for lived experience, but I am not as ignorant of those places as I am of Yemen or Greenland, places I'm pretty sure I've neither read about, nor have I met anyone who has lived there.

I'm passionate about missionaries' stories as a way to explain what we do to people who haven't experienced it. A long time before I came to Japan (and a good while before the internet existed) I was reading missionary biographies and missionary prayer letters. Now we have the internet, which is an amazing vehicle for sharing short and long stories. Let's use the tools we have to help bridge the gap.

Bypass obstacles

Stories are a way into people's hearts; they allow us to bypass people's cynicism, ignorance, busyness, or distraction. Stories allow us to engage people's hearts and emotions. And as a bonus, for most people, stories are much more memorable than facts and figures, or abstract statements (see my article, "Concrete Language", on p. 37 in Autumn 2022 *Japan Harvest*).

Tell indirectly

Stories also allow us to tell people things indirectly. Here's an example:

Last time we went to Australia for home assignment we went with our teenage boys to a local library. On previous home assignments it had been a favourite place to spend time. But the library had changed—it now looked like a bookshop with books grouped on free-standing shelves with labels like "Pop science", "Award winning," and "Fantasy". The décor was black and grey, the size of the library had halved, and, most disturbingly, there were very few books on any shelves. It was only four days since we'd landed in Australia after three years away and we were all still feeling a bit raw. This unexpected shock left me feeling unsettled and uncomfortable. We struggled to hold back our exclamations about the changes and one boy struggled to hold in his anger.¹



This is obviously about reverse culture shock, but notice that I didn't use that term. Of course instead of telling a story, I could have explained the concept this way:

Reverse culture shock is when someone who has been away from their "home" culture for a period returns and finds things there have changed.

This dictionary-like explanation is shorter and simpler than telling a story, but a story will help you better understand reverse culture shock, letting you experience it second-hand. And I'm guessing that if I asked you in an hour, you may still remember my library story.

Fiction also works

On our last home assignment my husband and I told a story about a fictional missionary. Our purpose was to help show people the need for missionaries like us, who don't serve on the "front lines". We used a pile of labelled boxes to show the various responsibilities that a missionary needs to take on: extra responsibilities that non-missionaries don't necessarily know about. For example: obtaining visas, looking after short-term teams, managing financial gifts that people send, and finding new missionaries to join us in the work. We started the story with a volunteer from the audience who was given a "ministry" box to hold. Then, as we explained a variety of other responsibilities that they also need to "hold", we gave more labelled boxes to the volunteer. The pile grew tall in the volunteer's hands and people got emotionally involved: *Was the pile going to fall?*

Then, just as it looked impossible, we asked for more volunteers, and we gave each of them just one box from the pile. It immediately looked a lot easier to manage and made our point: that missionaries who do church planting and evangelism need help from others, and that often the only people who can do that are other missionaries in the same country.

Stories engage, and they also inspire people to act. They get your audience engaged actively in what they're reading. How can you use stories in your communications with supporters? **JH**

1. Story based on a blog post written by the author on her personal blog: "Unexpected changes," *on the edge of ordinary*, <https://mmuser.blogspot.com/2018/07/unexpected-changes.html> (July 12, 2018).

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.

2023 Leadership Team



Heather Town



Debbie Griffin



Hazel Schaeffer



Marion Cowell



Kari Carrico

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Kanto WIM Fall Day of Prayer Plus
October 12, 2023. Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo

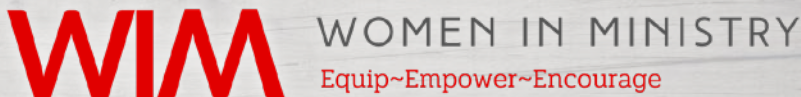
Kansai WIM Autumn Day of Prayer
October 16, 2023. Crossroad Church, Nishinomiya

Tohoku WIM Fall Day of Prayer
October 23, 2023. Shiogama Bible Baptist Church, near Sendai

Kanto WIM Winter Day of Prayer
January 17, 2024. Ochanomizu Christian Center, Tokyo

WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference
March 4, 2024. Mustard Seed Christian Church, Osaka

WIM Spring Retreat
March 6-8, 2024. Olive no Sato, Nikko



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