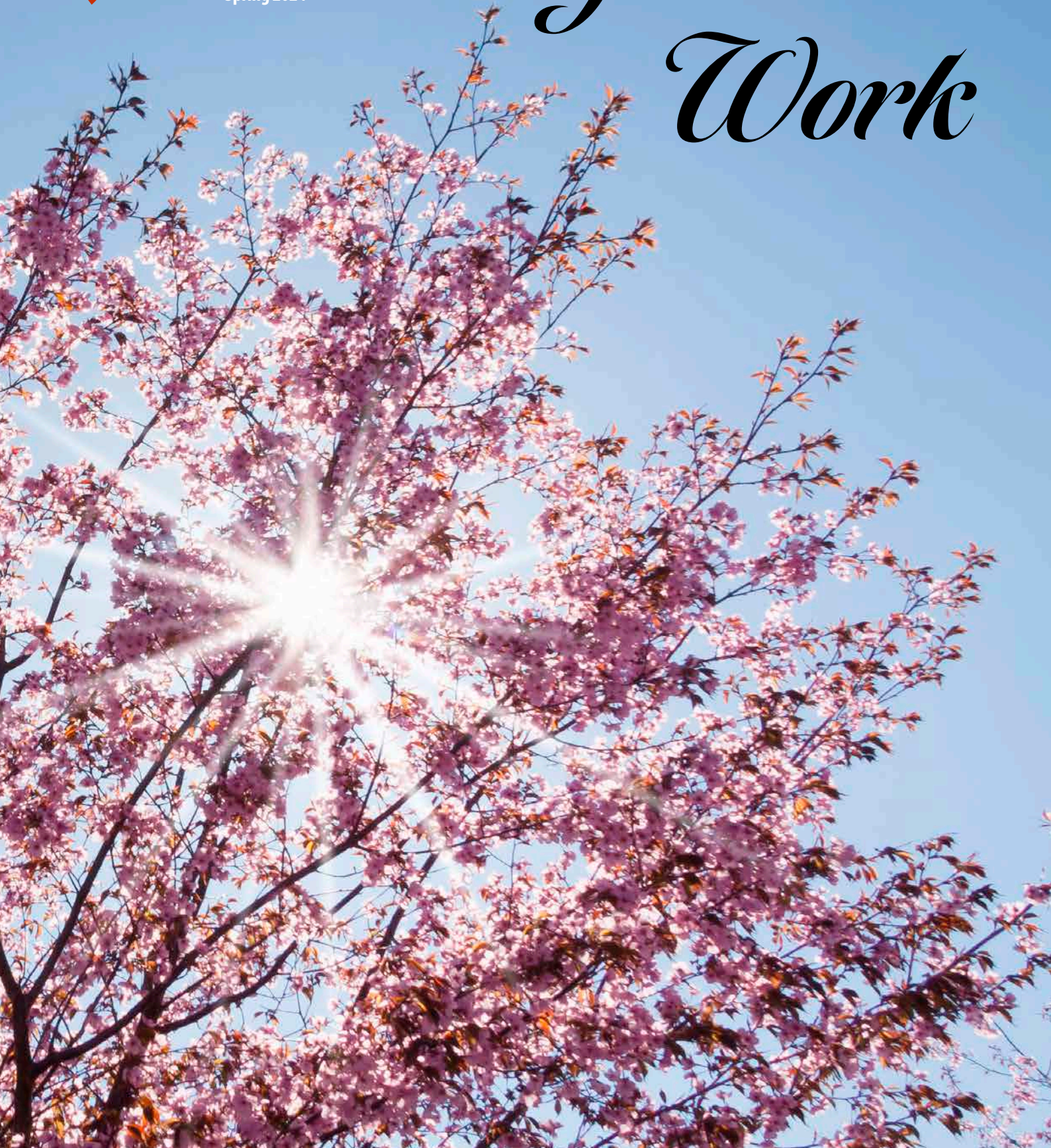




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May

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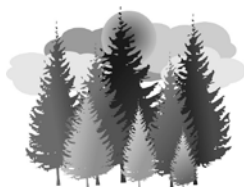


August

Karuizawa Union Church Refresh Conference

July 28–August 4, 2024

Latest info: <http://www.karuizawaunionchurch.org>



October

WIM Kanto Fall Day of Prayer Plus

October 8, 2024

Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo



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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Japan Harvest publishes articles in either US English or Commonwealth English, depending upon the author's primary English background.

Is God really at work in Japan?

Last year I edited an article for OMF International's website called "God is at work, even when we can't see it" by Roz Stimpson; it fits beautifully with our theme. Here is an excerpt:

I'm about to begin my second year of language study in Sapporo, and goodness me, it's hard to see God at work sometimes. I don't learn new languages easily. From time to time I cry after my classes because I'm frustrated at how poorly I express myself, and how little I remember after a week, month, and now almost a year. I'm no good at this. He can't really be planning to use this . . .

But maybe he is . . .

I wonder if it felt like an age for the disciples: those three days between Jesus's death and his talking and walking with them again. I wonder how long it was between his resurrection and them seeing him in the flesh that they still thought of him as dead . . . He can't really be alive . . .

But, maybe he is . . .

That hope creeps in, new and fresh every day. It pops up like the spring flowers forcing their way up after months of snow. Thank God that his power is made perfect in weakness, that in my times of discouragement and doubt, I can say with confidence that Jesus is not dead, but alive! And the living don't inhabit a graveyard. Japan is a place beloved by Jesus, who is alive, active, and working. I see it in small progress in language study, in my fellow student's small successes in speaking to locals, in opportunities to explain a Bible passage to a teacher who isn't a Christian. Many people around us haven't met him yet. How wonderful that we can be the ones who know he is risen and can run to tell them. The better we communicate, the more people can hear and understand.¹

The *Japan Harvest* team wanted this issue to be a celebration of how God is growing his kingdom in Japan, of showcasing his goodness and faithfulness through ministries all over Japan. As I read through the articles that you submitted, I was excited. God is at work in the hearts of Japanese and missionaries!

I'm writing from Australia; we're still on home assignment. It's discouraging to tell people here that the percentage of Christians in Japan hasn't changed significantly since we first arrived in 2000. Japan is a hard place to do Christian ministry. I believe that *Japan Harvest* holds a significant role in helping you, not only to continue to serve here, but to flourish, and I pray that this issue will be an encouragement to you.

Can you help spread the word about JEMA?

Every year at our annual *Japan Harvest* planning meeting, we end up talking about how we can help extend the reach of JEMA to include other missionaries in Japan. The magazine team wants to know how we can help recruit others to join us in this strategic partnership. How can we help you see the value of membership and share that with others?

We have ideas but would love to hear from you about how JEMA can provide more value to you and your ministry. But also please think about how JEMA could help missionaries in your area. Could you encourage one other person to join JEMA? Perhaps, with the support of JEMA, you could start something new in your area. Please contact Atsuko Tateishi in our JEMA office (jema-info@jema.org) with your ideas or questions.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Summer 2024: Reaching Kids and Teens

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

Winter 2024: Mental Health (proposals due by July 31)

Spring 2024: The Missionary Life Cycle (proposals due by October 31)

1. The whole article can be found here: Roz Stimpson, "God is at work even when we can't see it", OMF International, <https://omf.org/god-is-at-work-even-when-we-cant-see-it> (April 26, 2023).

God is always working

By Roberta Adair

Three stories of God's goodness shown through friendship

When I think about the theme of God's goodness, moments from three friendships come to mind. As I consider what connects them, I realize that these particular moments are times when God showed a glimpse of who he is, both to my friends and to me. I've learned that even when I'm failing, when my expectations aren't being met, and when I'm unable to connect the dots, God is working.

Weakness

Early into my first term in Japan, I met regularly with a woman who was interested in both practicing English and reading the Bible together. We decided to slowly work our way through the book of Mark, me choppily reading a few verses using the tiny furigana in my bilingual Bible and her reading much more fluently in English.

One particular day I felt down and discouraged by my lack of progress in language learning. I said, "Today's reading is in Mark 5. But just this once can you read the whole passage in Japanese while I try to follow along?" (I thought but didn't add "rather than once again butcher your beautiful language with my exhausted brain and fumbling tongue?")

From the moment my new friend started reading, I was completely lost. I tried and failed to hear a single word so that I could catch up. Because I was too embarrassed to ask her to stop and help me, she kept reading. Finally, I heard her read the words "eye" and "hand," and I understood that she was in Matthew 5 rather than Mark 5. I stopped her (around verse 30!) and apologized for wasting her time reading the wrong passage. I remember feeling ashamed for being found out for pretending to follow along when I was so lost.

She suggested that we just chat for a little while rather than read the passage in Mark. Then, after only a few rather uncomfortable minutes, she left abruptly, leaving me confused as to why my friend wasn't acting like her usual warm and cheerful self.

Weeks later, my beautiful friend, who was in a difficult marriage, told me her side of what happened that day. She was being actively pursued by a man who wasn't her husband and felt flattered but also a bit worn down. The Holy Spirit had used the "mistake" that day of reading "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matt. 5:29 NIV) to convince her to do something drastic: to cut off all contact with the man. She told him that she wouldn't talk to him anymore, blocked his number, and resolved to remain faithful to her husband.

When I remember this incident 10 years later, I am still amazed that God used me in spite of and even because of my weakness. If my Japanese had been better, I would have realized the mix-up and stopped her much earlier. If I had been less insecure, I would have admitted my confusion sooner. How good of God to not just accept my weaknesses but to use them. And how kind of God, in this case, to allow me to see him convict, protect, and empower my friend.

Control

Also early into my first term in Japan, I met a woman at weekly trash pickups at a nearby beach. Over time, we started meeting together to read the miracles of Jesus from the book of John. I had a cheat sheet with the

simple questions in Japanese: What does this passage say about God? What does this say about us? And how can we respond to what we read?

I remember being particularly excited to talk with her about Jesus feeding the 5,000 in chapter 6. It's one of my favorite passages, and I was ready with my answers to the questions even before she arrived. I was prepared to say that Jesus is not surprised or disappointed by how little we can offer because he delights in taking it and turning it into abundance. I was also eager to talk with her about the metaphor of Jesus being the bread of life—nourishing, sustaining, and delicious—and pictured her shock and amazement.

After we read the passage together, my friend's reaction was quite different than what I expected. She sat quietly for a moment and then said, "Wow, Roberta. Jesus is so thoughtful and kind. He made sure they were in a grassy place" (referencing verse 6: "there was plenty of grass in that place"). Now, 10 years later, I am less shocked by her reaction as I've learned that these qualities are noticed and appreciated by my Japanese friends. But at the time, I imagine I responded with "Yeah, yeah, but what about the real miracle?" To which she came back more strongly with "Yes, but what about the grass?"

As I remember this moment and her quiet wonder, I think about my tendency to be overly confident about how people will respond to Scripture. In this instance, I expected that what I received from a passage would be what she would (and should) receive, too. Yet the longer I'm here, I am learning to be more open-handed, expecting God to work and yet aware that it will likely not be what (or how or when or even

with whom) I expect. This mystery is something to celebrate and anticipate: we get to see people from different cultures, families, and contexts interact with the Word of God. Hopefully our response is increasing wonder and gratitude at how we grow, too, by reading Scripture together.

Connections

Shortly after we began our second term, I forgot my house key and was waiting in front of our house for my husband to arrive with our two very squirrely toddlers. A young woman walked by with her dog and stopped to introduce herself. I expected small talk about pets, the weather, travel, and language learning. She instead surprised me by asking if we could introduce her to Christians because she had recently become interested in learning more about Jesus. I remember being shocked and sputtering and stammering my excited reply.

Over the next few weeks and months, we met regularly for Bible study, but we also talked about Justin Bieber (I'm not much of a pop culture person), fathers, and *Anne of Green Gables*. We talked about the gravity of the moon, her experience related to the March 2011 earthquake, and why it's important that water expands when it freezes rather than contracts. I often felt like our conversations were all over the place and was certainly not connecting the dots about how these topics and conversations were somehow pointing her to Jesus. Yet within a year, she shared her

testimony in front of the church and was baptized.

While I was not able to see how these topics were connected to her growing faith in Jesus, I happily recognize now that God was working and wooing. Everyone has their own journey, and God uses forgotten house keys, Justin Bieber, scientific principles, and frizzy foreigners as part of turning people to him.

God is always working

While all three of these women have made declarations of faith, they are at different stages of becoming courageous, faithful, and faith-filled followers of Jesus. Yet I'm thankful for what God did in me through their friendships, their curiosity, and their responsiveness to God. When I'm struggling with language and weakness in other areas, God is working. When I'm

holding on too tightly to my agenda and wanting to control how people respond to God and his word, he is working. When I'm not seeing connections or understanding peoples' processes in turning to Jesus, God is working. He was working, is working, and will continue to work in these women and in me. **JH**

Roberta Adair, originally from Pennsylvania, USA, moved to northern Japan in 2012. Together with her husband, Robert, and four energetic boys, she works with A3 (formerly Asian Access) and partners with a Japanese church.



God's timing is

Trusting when God doesn't seem to be working

By Hoi-Yan Shea

“What do you think the Passover lamb symbolizes?” I asked Noriko during a Bible study on Exodus. After a thoughtful pause, she answered, “Jesus.” I was surprised that she made the link and asked, “In what way?” “Because Jesus died in our place,” Noriko answered without hesitation. After studying the Bible for one and a half years, she seemed to understand the gospel. But that turned out to be our last Bible study.

When we don't see the fruit

Perhaps your experience is different, but I wonder if you feel that your witness and labour here in Japan seem to bear little fruit.

I have been involved in church planting work in Iwate since 2019, and it has been hard.

I met Noriko in 2020. She was disappointed with Japanese society and was searching for the truth. My team had the joy of reading the Bible with her and seeing the Spirit reveal truths to her. Sadly, her spiritual thirst began to wane after getting married in March 2023. Adjustment to married life and

a new part-time job seemed to overwhelm and choke whatever growth had taken place, and she eventually decided not to continue with Bible studies.

In my first year in Iwate, God gave me an opportunity to study the Bible with Rie, a university student. Through various trials, her faith and hunger for God's Word grew, and we began to prepare for her baptism. One week before the baptism, however, we had to make a difficult decision to postpone because of a particular sin she refused to repent of despite many long conversations with her. She stopped Bible studies and cut off contact.

My team and I prayed and expected God not only to save Rie and Noriko but also to use them to reach their family and friends. The pain and disappointment were even greater because we had witnessed God working powerfully in their lives.

How do we respond when our hopes and expectations are dashed, when the good news seems to fall on deaf ears or is rejected, when people fall away or abandon their faith, or when God doesn't seem to be working?

How do I respond?

I question God: “Have you not heard my prayers? Do you not care? Why have you not answered? What is the point?” I am tempted to give up. “Is it even true that the labour in the Lord is not in vain? Am I just wasting my life here in Japan?” In moments of discouragement, I doubt the promises of God.

How do we keep persevering? Why do we keep persevering?

The timing of God

Recently, I noticed something profound in John's account of the raising of Lazarus (John 11). When Lazarus became ill, Martha and Mary sent for Jesus. Jesus did not immediately go to them but stayed where he was for two more days. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:32 ESV). These poignant words uttered by Martha and Mary express not only their grief for their brother's death but disappointment with Jesus. Martha, Mary, and the crowd knew of



for our benefit

Jesus's power to heal. Knowing that Jesus could have saved their brother from dying but had not would have magnified their pain and disappointment even more. I wonder if they grappled with similar questions: "Did you not hear? Do you not care? Why did you not answer?"

John's narrative seems to address these heart questions: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

In recounting Jesus's response when he saw Mary weeping and Lazarus's tomb, John makes it clear that Jesus cared. But there is still more in this passage for us to pay attention to: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was" (John 11:5–6).

I had never noticed in the past, but here John says the reason that Jesus did not go to them immediately was precisely because he loved them. In his divine wisdom and love, Jesus permitted Lazarus to die so that God's power and glory would be displayed with even greater splendour. Even though it was painful for Jesus, he withheld granting their requests so that they would see and believe that he was the Messiah who could raise the dead.

When things are hard, we want Jesus to come immediately and fix our problems, but in love, Jesus sees beyond our immediate pain and needs to our eternal good and God's glory.

"God is willing and able but has chosen not to act right now," my mentor once said to me when talking about unanswered prayers. These words are worth pondering.

Ponder, for example, God's work of redemption from creation to Jesus, which spanned over 4,000 years, including 400 years of silence. Was God idle? No. He was waiting for the fullness of time to reveal his wondrous salvation, which he had planned before the creation of the world to be displayed in glorious beauty—the birth, life, and death of his precious son, Jesus. God's work cannot be rushed. The deep and lasting work of new creation and the redemption and restoration of sinful and broken people take time. Jesus was confident that God continues to be at work (John 5:17). So should we.

I have killed many plants in the past. When I noticed that my succulents looked sickly, I asked a florist for advice. "You're giving them too much water. Only water them when the soil

feels dry and the lower leaves begin to wilt," he said. When you overwater succulents, they grow too quickly, becoming lanky and feeble. It is no different with our faith.

How can we learn to wait and hope in the Lord when our requests are quickly met? How can we learn to base our faith not on sight but on God's Word when prayers are swiftly answered? How can we learn to trust when the future is already known?

When prayers seem to be unanswered or when God doesn't seem to be working, I am learning to ask him, "How are you working in this season of waiting? How are you growing me? How are you working in others?" I am learning to trust in his beautiful timing. And this gives me hope.

Today, I am studying the Bible with a single mum whose hunger for God's Word is growing. I am learning to persevere in sowing the seeds of the gospel with faith because I know that God is working and he cares. **JH**

Hoi-Yan Shea has been with OMF since 2012 and is part of a church plant in Iwate. She hopes to develop Japanese materials on forgiveness and would love to connect with anyone who is interested in the topic.



Welcoming angels

By Elani Rottier

Everyday faithfulness and kindness make a significant impact

Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it. (Heb. 13:2, HCSB)

“When I was overseas, my host family invited me to church, so I went for the first time,” Emi said, her eyes shining. “I was moved very deeply by the worship songs and by the warm welcome so many people gave me . . . so when I returned to Japan, I decided to go to church here as well. I learned that God loved me just as I am, and my tears just flowed.”

There are many stories of Japanese people who turn towards Jesus while they are overseas. I have been told by several people that in recent years, the number of Japanese people converting to Christianity is roughly the same outside Japan as it is inside Japan. Given that only about 1% of Japanese live abroad at any given time,¹ this is remarkable. Many of these new Christians return to Japan, and those who persevere in faith have great potential to reach their own networks in Japan (and beyond) for Christ and strengthen Japanese churches and church movements.

Many, like Emi, might not become Christians while overseas. However, they often leave Japan with little exposure to Christianity but return actively interested in Jesus.

Ready to be reached?

When Japanese people go overseas for study or work, they are generally open to new things, including learning about the historical religion of the country they visit, and they are looking for friendship. Some of them are trying to escape the pressures they have experienced in Japanese society. Some are searching for peace, joy, and answers to deeper questions.

As I delved into the stories of Japanese people who returned to Japan as Christians or active seekers, I found God to be powerfully at work among these “returnees” through the small acts of his people overseas simply living their lives as faithful disciples of Jesus. I compiled these stories, and the following three themes emerged.

Hospitality

The golden thread that runs through almost all the stories I have heard is the theme of hospitality. The majority of the time, the word translated as “hospitality” or “hospitable” in the English New Testament literally means the love and care of the stranger or foreigner in the original Greek.² Before I knew that this was how the Bible talked about hospitality, I thought it just meant having people in one’s home, and especially cooking meals for them. But loving the stranger can take so many forms, and in hearing the stories of returnees, hospitality in this biblical sense had a significant impact in their walk towards faith.

Returnees talk about experiencing a welcoming feeling among Christians and are moved by the acts of kindness done for them by people who genuinely do not expect anything in return.³ They talk about practical gifts like rides offered and bank accounts opened and even more frequently about gifts of friendship and spending time like coffees and walks together, meals shared, being prayed for, and reading the Bible together one-on-one. The majority of them talk about a special feeling of warmth and friendliness they have not experienced in their lives before—some say “not even close.” They then ask, “Why are these people so different?” This leads them to finding out more about Jesus.

Sometimes Christians simply invite them to church, thinking the sermon will have an impact. In reality, while the sermon might often be above their level of English, what deeply impacts them is nonverbal, like the love and joy they sense from Christians.

One specific expression of hospitality that has a significant impact on young Japanese is a Christian homestay. Many young returnees speak about the love they saw and experienced as they lived with Christians. One man shares that he did not know families like his host family existed, and it “felt like heaven.” Other returnees, like Emi, went to church with their host family, where they had a larger kingdom experience of a loving family, which brings me to the second theme.

Christian community

When Japanese people were invited into Christian community overseas (church services, English conversation cafes, Bible studies, etc.), they were impressed with the relationships between Christians and how they cared for each other.⁴ “I was so welcomed anywhere in Christian community. It made me feel loved and comfortable, and it made me wonder who is the God they believe in!” one young lady shares. “It was helpful for me to build relationships with Christian friends and see how they relate to one another rather than just talking about the gospel.”

Another lady, soon to return to Japan after becoming a Christian, shares, “There are very few Christians in my country, but when I came to Australia, I was able to be with many Christians. I knew there was something different about them. When I was invited to read the Bible with someone, I said yes because I thought I might find answers to my questions there.”

And I did. It was Jesus and the gospel! Becoming a Christian was the most wonderful thing that could happen to me. My prayer is that God would be at the centre of my life when I live in Japan again.”

Music

The third thing often mentioned as a catalyst in drawing Japanese to Christ is music, specifically music experienced communally. Returnees share being moved to the point of tears when they experienced musical worship overseas (in some cases, simply one guitar accompanying group singing). They sense something bigger than themselves, a certain beauty that they experience for the first time, and that touches their spirits deeply.

Gospel choir ministries are fruitful in Japan, and I have personally seen deep emotional reactions to many types of music among Japanese people I rub shoulders with in a way that I have not experienced in any other place I have lived (South Africa, England, Australia). From Bach to Bethel Music, music written and produced by Christians is carefully listened to and absorbed, and hearts are touched and changed.

Imagine: A group of musicians in a small church somewhere in England turn up on a Sunday—perhaps tired after a week of work, yet faithful—to lead music at a church service. Little do

they know that they have reached the heart of a person for Christ, a person visiting from a nation that is considered unreached by the gospel, like Japan. All that by faithfully using their gifts on just another Sunday.

Perhaps not what we think

There are many more stories that do not quite fit these three themes. For example, a number of returnees who already knew the Bible was the world’s bestseller read it looking for good advice for life. Also, there was a professional footballer who was touched by the other-centeredness of the Christians in the Brazilian team he was playing for. Perhaps the most interesting story was a woman who studied English history in Scotland and was touched by the faith she saw in Queen Victoria’s diaries, which led her to seek out Christians and eventually become one.

What struck me the most was that not once in any of the stories did I hear anything along the lines of powerful gospel presentations, impressive speeches, or grand displays of any kind. Rather, it was everyday faithfulness and kindness—Christians simply and naturally sharing the grace they have received—that made the difference.

So much potential

Those not called into full-time mission are often faithful partners in God’s

worldwide mission as prayers, givers, mobilisers, senders, and more. However, in our current world of people moving countries at an unprecedented rate, partnering in missions as welcoming is perhaps an underrated area in which the Spirit is clearly at work. For those of us who live in a country that feels like home to us, if we keep our eyes open to see the strangers around us and care for them, even in the smallest of ways, God might just be ready to use us mightily in his plan to reach the unreached people of not just Japan but many nations.⁵ **JH**

1. “Number of Japanese Living Abroad Falls for Second Year Running,” Nippon.com, <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01452/> (October 12, 2022).

2. *Philoxenia*: Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2; *philoxenos*: 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8, 1 Peter 4:9; *xenodocheō*: 1 Tim. 5:10.

3. In Japan, there is a custom called *okaeshi*. Whenever one receives a gift, there is an obligation to give something smaller back in return.

4. For some returnees, it was eye-opening to find kindness in not just one Christian individual but in a collective experience among many Christians.

5. For inspiration about God’s work and “people on the move,” see the following Lausanne paper: <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lausanne-occasional-paper-people-on-the-move>.

Elani Rottier is from South Africa but has lived in Australia from 2006. In 2020, she and her husband, Riaan, moved to Japan for four years to be equipped to reach Japanese people in Australia. They serve with OMF International.



Connecting Japanese men with their heart

By Marty Woods

Mentoring builds personal relationships and fosters spiritual growth

I have been involved in mentoring for 50 years, ever since my late teenage years in Sydney, Australia. A Christian housemaster at a church boarding school showed me the love of Christ through thoughtful questions, caring, and listening. I responded, following the Christ the housemaster showed me with everything I had. My life was never the same. He not only introduced me to Christ, but he also showed me the power of being seen and of helping others be seen. Thus began a lifetime of mentoring.

A second mentor helped me to discover what I knew intuitively but couldn't articulate—how to hear my spirit. Paul reminds us we are body, soul, and spirit and we are to bring all three under the reign of Christ (1 Thess. 5:23). Jesus said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38 NIV). In Romans, Paul writes that as we "greet God with a child-like 'What's next, Papa?' God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are" (Rom. 8:15b–16 MSG).

My mentor, as well as helping me hear my spirit, would say, "Tell me what you don't want to tell me." At first, I was resistant, yet my willing spirit knew it was worth the risk. I chose to push back against my desire to keep everything secret (my flesh), and I told my mentor what was really going on inside. I experienced a life-changing liberty. In turn, I was able to help hundreds of Christian men to not only hear their spirit but to make their spirit an integrated

part of their lives as they took on their flesh. Many are now disciples multiplying disciples.

When I came to Japan for sports ministry in 2018, I was amazed at how helping young Japanese Christian men to hear their spirit grew them into disciples who made disciples. I observed them becoming free from both their flesh and cultural "noise." Alongside a group of men, we run "Welcome to Manhood" weekends, initiating young Japanese guys into manhood.

My Japanese pastor told me, "I don't know what you do, but keep going!" He sees the changes in young men's lives in our church. I'm privileged to be mentoring 25 Japanese men, as well as a number of missionaries. Some are now mentoring others, including pre-believers growing closer to the Kingdom. Below are stories from Japanese brothers I have connected with—describing their journey, their involvement in the freeing of other Japanese men, and the role of mentoring. Each wanted to pass on a word of encouragement to missionaries in Japan.

Minori, 39 Aircraft engineer, Fukuoka

I grew up as a pastor's son, but for about 15 years from when I was a teen, I lived separated from Jesus in the culture of the world. About 10 years ago, I was led back to Jesus and my relationship with God began again.

About five years ago, I joined SkateMinJapan, a skateboarding ministry. As part of the ministry, I enjoyed

skateboarding and teaching, but now my main focus is always fellowship and building relationships. The setting varies; some I meet in person, and others I talk to on the phone.

While building relationships, I would often encounter a wall that needed to be lowered before the other person opened their heart and showed their real self. To create a safe place, I simply shared my own story as honestly as I could. I watched how it created a space where they were invited to be vulnerable and have permission to share their weaknesses, bitternesses, shame, and guilt. Then we would pray together.

I keep building on all I am learning. I use affirmation—even Jesus needed to be affirmed by his Father as he began his earthly ministry. Recently, Takeshi and Akiko (pseudonyms), the parents of an 11-year-old boy I mentor, affirmed and encouraged me for my birthday. They had previously seen this modelled when we celebrated Akiko on





her birthday. Their affirmations were authentic. It had such an impact on the whole family to see everyone affirming one another. Takeshi, a successful salaryman, told me he wants to be more like me and grow in kindness. During our time together, we experienced the Kingdom coming to earth.

I'm now mentoring eleven Japanese guys from age 11 to late 30s. I help each one to explore and find their true self, identity, and masculinity as the man that God designed them to be. Interestingly, when we have an honest man-to-man conversation in a safe space, listening to their true heart (I believe it's their spirit), it helps them discover their true masculinity and reveals the noise and distractions that hold them back. This is true regardless of whether they are Christian or not.

In our life, we unconsciously create self-limiting agreements that hinder us from achieving our goals. They may be "I'm never good enough," "I'm not worthy of love" or "It's just too hard to give up porn." We break these negative agreements in Jesus's name. This helps them to leave the past and move forward with a new way of seeing themselves. We live this new freedom together. We are accountable to each

other, pray, ask hard questions, learn from mistakes, cheer one another on, and celebrate victories.

Many Japanese men need someone to walk alongside them, to do life together, and to grow together—not superficially but with authority and commitment. They need to be called out as the men God designed them to be, set free, and to help free others in their own communities. I encourage you to be that person within your community in Japan.

Masashi, 39 Paramedic, Osaka

My wife and I were both raised in Christian homes. We have been blessed with five children of our own.

As part of a men's discipleship and mentoring program, I attended a "Welcome to Manhood" weekend in 2020. This was the key to begin my relationship with the Holy Spirit and live as a disciple of Christ.

I got more involved in prayer walking and street evangelism. Currently God has led me to be part of an apostolic church, and I'm learning to better understand discipleship and training. My dream is to build a Christian community where Christian families can

live and do life together as a new style of church.

I believe men have a God-given authority to lead their families. However, the enemy has warped that identity with many deceptions and made them feel powerless so that they cannot exercise their authority in the right way. But the Lord calls us to be strong and courageous. He promises to be with us and protect us. We are free to believe this or not—we can decide for ourselves—and I've chosen to believe it.

I am convinced that there is no other truth but this way. Therefore, I have committed my life to bring the good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, and work to release the captives.



I believe that many men who are prisoners to sin need a relationship with other men to help lead them to freedom and deliverance.

I would like to encourage missionaries in Japan—as those who are often the first to wake up and stand up—to be brave and take the first steps to be vulnerable with your Japanese brothers and sisters.

Hideyan, 65 Special-needs teacher, Mie

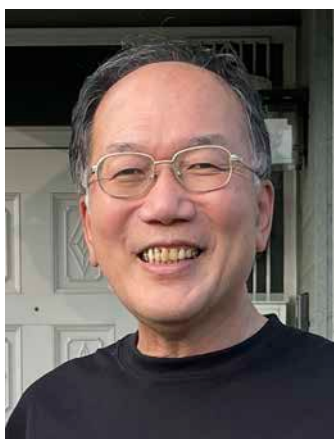
I came into contact with the Bible when I was at university, and I was baptised at 25. My wife is also a believer, and we have two grown children.

For 20 years now, I have helped run Bible-reading groups with coworkers. These are usually monthly, held at family restaurants or online via Zoom. Our aim is to have participants meet Jesus; some are gradually becoming more and more soft-hearted.

For about three years, I have been using YouVersion Bible reading plans with small groups of men. Every day, we share our insights and decisions with each other on LINE and also have fellowship once or twice a week via Zoom. Right now, I am using the *Freedom40* men's challenge.

I want to continue to work with my Christians brothers to develop and improve what we are already doing in men's ministry. I would love to see much fruit as we continue this pattern, and I pray that each one of us will be able to reach out and make new disciples of Jesus, fired by the Spirit.

I simply want to faithfully do what the Lord has planned for me and one



day hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Missionary friends, the harvest is about to come to Japan! Please be patient and persevere. Thank you for everything you do.

Makoto (Bob), 49 Businessman, Hyogo



I was raised in a non-Christian family, and my life was changed through a homestay in New Zealand at age 20. I am now married and have two university-aged children.

These days, I am passionate about seeing men set free, especially through using tools like the *33 Minute Warrior* and *Freedom40*.

I simply encourage each brother that I walk with to receive a revelation from God about their true identity as a man in Christ. They can then be reborn and let go of sinful habits. Even if it is difficult to battle against the flesh, they can fight together with other men.

I am in the process of learning to daily abide in God's truth and reject the lies of the enemy, but I still have a lot of fighting to do myself.

The healing process begins as we talk openly to each other about our sin struggles—including sexual temptations, which men often battle with—and bring each issue to God: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16 NIV).

When we confess our sins before God, they are completely forgiven. But in order to receive true healing

from the Lord, we must confess our sins to one another “so that you may be healed.” It does not mean telling everyone in the church community about our sins; rather it is important to find and share with Christian brothers we can trust.

A movement is already happening. I pray that missionaries can serve Japanese men by helping them find their true identity in God and put aside sin, pride, shame, and fear!

The cost—the joy

My friend and co-labourer in the men's ministry, Jef Linscott, developed tools like *Freedom40* and *The 33 Minute Warrior*—as well as other Bible-based plans—as means to help men connect.¹ The tools can be helpful, but nothing can replace the costly but rewarding labour of spending quality time with a brother on a regular basis.

Many Japanese men live in fear behind superficial masks, where they feel invisible to the outside world. Coming alongside them—in the Holy Spirit and with the Word of God—can be one of the most profound, life-changing endeavours we could be involved in.

It's costly and time-consuming, but what joy! When we hear the words, “I've never told anyone this before, but...”, we know that deliverance and transformation are near!

Learning to mentor

I have published a book entitled *A Willing Spirit*. It's available for free in different formats on the website awillingspirit.com, or you can purchase it through Amazon Japan. In early 2024, a Japanese translation will be released. We will be running mentoring training throughout Japan during 2024. Jef and I would be happy to connect with you at mart.woods@gmail.com or jeflinscott@icloud.com. **JH**

1. You can find these tools at <https://onfire.jp/freedom40/> and <http://www.33minute.com/>. On the YouVersion Bible app, you can search for “Freedom40” or “33.”

Marty Woods, an Australian, has been involved since 1993 in ministry at international sporting events.

God at work in the wilderness

By Devon Glenn

Patience, willingness, and hospitality make a way through the desert

At times, life can seem overwhelming, but it's not a punishment—places that seem like wildernesses are where a missionary's faith is tested and our obedience and character are formed. Don't be discouraged by the challenges you face on the mission field; in the darkest hour, we can be still and listen for the Lord's voice, which ignites our spirits. When we feel weak, we can rely on God's strength to endure the most challenging times.

Sharing the gospel effectively in Japan may seem difficult because of religious and cultural differences, but is it a missionary graveyard? Absolutely not. We see that God consistently co-labors with his followers. Let's trust in the guidance of God's Spirit and have faith that he will sustain us even in seasons of struggle and testing. Although the wilderness may seem harsh, it is where God reveals the depths of his glory. Miracles unfold before our eyes as God makes a way where there seems to be no way. I would like to share some stories of God's faithfulness in my own journey.

Heaven's Café

After our family's arrival in Japan, we stayed at my wife's family's house for almost eight months while we prayed about our next move. Although we had come to Japan with the guidance of God, we were uncertain about how he intended to use us. It was my wife who first received a message from the Lord, guiding us to open Heaven's Café. It was not long before we started seeing God at work through us. Soon, we were invited to attend a Bible study at the International University of Japan, which resulted in students asking if we would have a church service at the school. This was a miracle because this was a non-Christian school.

As things developed, our group shifted focus and started a community life group in our café. We discussed real-life issues and applied biblical principles to our everyday lives. People were repenting and accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior. We started baptizing in the parking lot, and people would stop to watch. It was a humbling experience.

The greatest miracle was when my wife's uncle's friend came in and needed prayer because he had stage four cancer with only six weeks to live. Six months later, he came back and said he was cancer free; Jesus healed him! Both men accepted Christ that day.

Empowering Japan

It's amazing to witness how God orchestrates connections between people at the perfect time. Some members of Empowering Japan (empoweringjapan.com) learned about what God was doing and decided to visit our café to see it for themselves. We are still doing ministry together seven years later.

Since November 2022, Empowering Japan has sent evangelism teams to spread the good news across Okinawa. The teams comprise intercessors, worship leaders, and evangelists, all working to lead people to salvation and unite churches. Our passion is to create a platform where believers can fulfill Matthew 28:19–20 and make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to follow God's commands.

We provide training on evangelism to the Japanese people as a way of life. Each team consists of approximately 80% Japanese believers or those who can speak Japanese. To ensure a great experience, we pair our visitors and new members with team leaders. Additionally, we partnered with Yomitan International Church to prepare a

mission building that provides a safe and cost-effective place for out-of-town missionary teams to stay.

Called to share

Our mission is more than just a mere goal; it's our calling, a purpose that fuels us to visit churches and build relationships, host Empowering Nights that uplift and train us, and bring the gospel to the community through Christian music, marketplace ministry cafés, and food trucks. And when the world sees lives touched by the Holy Spirit, our hearts overflow with gratitude and joy. Our team is blessed to organize several gospel community events each year, joining hands with worship teams and speakers who fly in to partner with our Okinawa teams. We had over seventy-five volunteers and a few hundred attendees at our November 2023 event. May the Holy Spirit spark a fire in the hearts of those we encounter and inspire them to join us as we spread the Good News.

We want to encourage everyone that being a missionary is an honor and privilege, and together we are advancing the Kingdom of God daily. If you plan to visit Okinawa, please join us as we share the gospel and witness God's work.¹

“In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams’” (Acts 2:17 NIV). **JH**

1. You can read more about our ministry work at www.winloveministries.com.

Devon Glenn was a Grammy-nominated songwriter and drummer with a number-one hit on the Billboard charts. He and his wife, Mie, are now missionaries in Okinawa. They inspire leadership and share strategies for marketplace ministry, discipleship, and evangelism.



God's team-building to reach a city in the snow

By John Edwards

Prayer brings a missionary couple and Japanese church leaders together to reach a town with no church

This Facebook post in February 2021 on the Operation Japan Prayer page captured my attention:

Obanazawa is one of four cities in Tohoku that still lacks a church. Shion Christ Church in nearby Murayama city has had an outreach in Obanazawa, but a church has not yet been established there.¹

At the time, COVID had significantly reduced our existing ministries, with D House interns unable to enter Japan and most outreach activities in our house and in our church canceled for the foreseeable future. My wife, Susan, and I had decided to visit smaller communities to see the churches and perhaps meet the pastors. Specifically, we were looking for an opportunity to assist a Japanese church *and* relocate the D House internship program to a less urban area.

It was at that time, a couple months away from home service, that I read the Facebook post about Obanazawa. The city grabbed my attention because a few years earlier in August 2018, Susan and I had driven to Yamagata Prefecture from our home in Sendai for a short vacation. While we were there, we learned that the Hanagasa Festival was happening in Obanazawa and that Ginzan, a picturesque *onsen* village, was located there. We drove about an hour north from Yamagata City and spent a day in Obanazawa.

Another visit

Back to 2021. Susan and I drove to Shion Christ Church in Murayama

City on a Monday morning in March, arriving there shortly before noon. A man was just driving away from the church. We ate lunch and returned to the church. The man was back changing light bulbs in the sanctuary.

I introduced myself: “Hello, we’re missionaries in Sendai. We read that this church is doing outreach in Obanazawa, and we’d like to know more about it.”

“I’m not the pastor. Let me call him,” the man replied. (I later learned his name is Oyama-san, and he’s a member of the church leadership committee.)

Mr. Oyama handed me his phone.

“Hello? Who is this?” Pastor Ken’ichi Sakamoto asked hesitantly (I learned his name later). After introducing myself and my purpose for visiting Shion Christ Church, Pastor Sakamoto said, “I’d really like to meet you in person. Can we meet you at the church tomorrow morning?” Susan and I had planned a two-day trip, so we agreed to a 10:00 a.m. meeting.

Susan and I then drove up to Obanazawa. The closer we got, the deeper the snow. We drove around the town. We located the elementary school and the middle school. We saw lots of local shops and a few chain stores—Tsuruha drugstore, the Komeri home center, and Aeon Big supermarket. We greeted one man on the street and commented about the deep snow (about two meters). He told us that half of it had already melted! We drove to Ginzan to see what it looked like in the winter. It’s beautiful! We then spent

the night at a hotel 21 km south in the big city of Higashine.

The next morning, we drove back to Shion Christ Church. Expecting to see only the pastor, we were greeted by Pastor Sakamoto, Mr. Oyama, and two women—Mika, the pastor’s wife, and Mrs. Wada, a retired elementary school principal and a member of the church leadership committee. They sat us down and showed us a PowerPoint presentation about the history and vision of the church. The church was started by Dr. Haneda, a Christian medical doctor, who started Bible studies in his clinic.

The vision for the church is threefold:

1. to establish local chapels in the area towns;
2. to serve the community through education, social welfare, and medical care; and
3. to contribute to world missions. (Dr. Haneda and his wife went to Nepal for a few years as medical missionaries after establishing Shion Christ Church.)

Regarding Obanazawa, they told us about Dennis Foster, a black American missionary who lived in Obanazawa for 25 years. Three Japanese women who were now part of the Shion Christ Church had been high school students when Dennis disciplined them. (For more about Dennis Foster, see the Summer 2023 issue of *Japan Harvest*.²) They talked about a few other missionaries who served in Obanazawa in the 1990s up until 2004. None had remained more than four years.

After the presentation, Pastor Sakamoto turned to us and said, “When you called yesterday, I want to say I was thankful, but honestly, I was shocked. You see, the day before you came to our church, we had a leaders’ meeting to talk about how to reach Obanazawa. One of our members said we really needed to find a missionary to live in Obanazawa and assist the believers there. The next day, you walked in!” Later, we learned that another woman at that leaders’ meeting exclaimed, “Find a missionary to come live in Obanazawa? Let’s be realistic!” After we moved to Obanazawa, she confessed to us her lack of faith with a happy smile on her face.

Susan and I talked a little bit about ourselves. We shared our faith journey and how we came to Japan. We stated our ministry experience in Japan till that point. We explained the D House internship program. We promised to talk with our SEND Japan leadership about the possibility of moving to Obanazawa in Spring 2022 after home service.

Are you coming to Obanazawa?

Returning to Sendai, we wrote down all the details of our two days in Obanazawa and at Shion Christ Church. We jotted down our observations, our questions, and our concerns. I talked with leaders within SEND. I also contacted missionaries and Japanese pastors Pastor Sakamoto had mentioned he knew. In June, we returned to Shion Christ Church with two of SEND Japan’s leaders. The same four people met us at the church and served us lunch. They drove us to Obanazawa and showed us the area. We returned to the church and talked a little bit more. As our time together drew to an end, Mrs. Wada asked, “So are you coming to Obanazawa?” When we responded that we would pray about it and talk with our supporters in America, Mrs. Wada threw up her hands and exclaimed, “Why can’t we get an answer now?” She’s been a great encourager and ministry partner for us. Her energy and passion are infectious.

We moved to Yamagata in April 2022 after home service. A first-term

missionary, Andrew Phillips, joined us. We initially lived in temporary accommodation, then moved into our house in Obanazawa in June 2022. The location is perfect as it’s across the street from a park where children play. Andrew moved into an apartment.

Obanazawa is known for three things: snow (about three meters every winter), *suika* (watermelon), and the *Hanagasa Odori Uta* (Flower Hat Dance Song, created when Lake Tokura was dug up as a reservoir for the rice fields).

Since moving to Obanazawa, we have found ways to get involved in the community. However, the simplest way is to engage people in regular life activities—grocery shopping, eating at local restaurants, shoveling snow (a daily activity and necessary for good relationships with neighbors), playing in the park, walking or jogging the streets, and soaking in a local onsen.

Something we did not foresee was the need for fellowship among rural believers. They rarely saw each other except on Sunday mornings, and Shion Christ Church is a fairly long drive for people living in Obanazawa, especially in the winter. Opening up our house once a month for believers only and then weekly for anyone has hugely

benefited local Christians in their faith walk.

By having D House (more in the Summer 2022 *Japan Harvest* issue³) in Obanazawa, we expose potential long-term missionaries to the needs and opportunities in rural communities and give Japanese believers an opportunity to share their testimonies and their vision for their beloved home communities.

God is at work, sometimes in miraculous ways, in lesser-known areas in Japan. Clearly, there are Japanese churches like Shion Christ Church that want to reach not only their own community but also neighboring unreached towns and villages. Perhaps they, too, are praying for harvest workers to assist them. **JH**

1. Don Wright (Operation Japan Prayer), “Prayer for Yamagata’s Unchurched Areas,” Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/operationjapan/posts/6079771765435887> (February 18, 2021).
2. John Edwards, “Dennis Foster’s Lasting Impact,” *Japan Harvest* 74, no. 3 (Summer 2023), 14–15.
3. John Edwards, “The D House Internship,” *Japan Harvest* 73, no. 3 (Summer 2022), 10.

John Edwards, with his wife, Susan, has been a missionary in Japan since 1993 (with SEND International since 2002). They are currently doing evangelistic work in Obanazawa, Yamagata, and are leading the D House internship program.



From left to right: SEND leader Chris Harrington, Mrs. Toshiko Wada, Susan Edwards, Mrs. Mika Sakamoto, Pastor Kenichi Sakamoto, John Edwards, and SEND leader Dave Barkman

Joy came before the healing

By Keiko Gray

Before God healed my daughter's eating disorder, He changed me first

The crisis came to our family when our 16-year-old daughter was in her second year as a high school boarder. One day, Elizabeth phoned me to say that she was not well, not eating very much, and not going to school. I thought she had a cold or stomach problem.

Some days later, she got in touch with us again. This time, she said that she had been out of breath and had to skip PE class. With this call, I thought there was something more than just a cold. We discovered then that she had hardly been eating anything, just drinking some milk with soybean powder each day.

Troubling news

I had become a missionary when I married David, the first missionary sent by the British Methodist Church to Japan. He worked with the United Church of Christ, teaching English at Okinawa Christian College. After our marriage, I started to help local churches in Okinawa.

Elizabeth had gone to live in a school dormitory at a Catholic high school in Chiba Prefecture. It was the first time that she lived away from us,

and it must have been difficult for her to get used to this new life.

She was a scholarship student and studied very hard to get a good score in every subject. She was our pride. However, one thing that concerned us was her diet. She started to have allergic reactions to onion. So we had to ask the dormitory to prepare special meals for her. Still, she wasn't happy about the dormitory food.

Then we had that phone call where she told us she was hardly eating anything, so we arranged for her to come home for recuperation.

When she came home, she looked so bony and showed symptoms of anorexia. However, she thought she was fat and felt guilty about eating. At her request, we went to a psychiatrist. But she was unwilling to take any medication, not even an IV drip. Instead, we went to a chemist and got nutritional supplements she liked. What Elizabeth really wanted was to see a Christian counsellor, but it was not easy to find one in Okinawa.

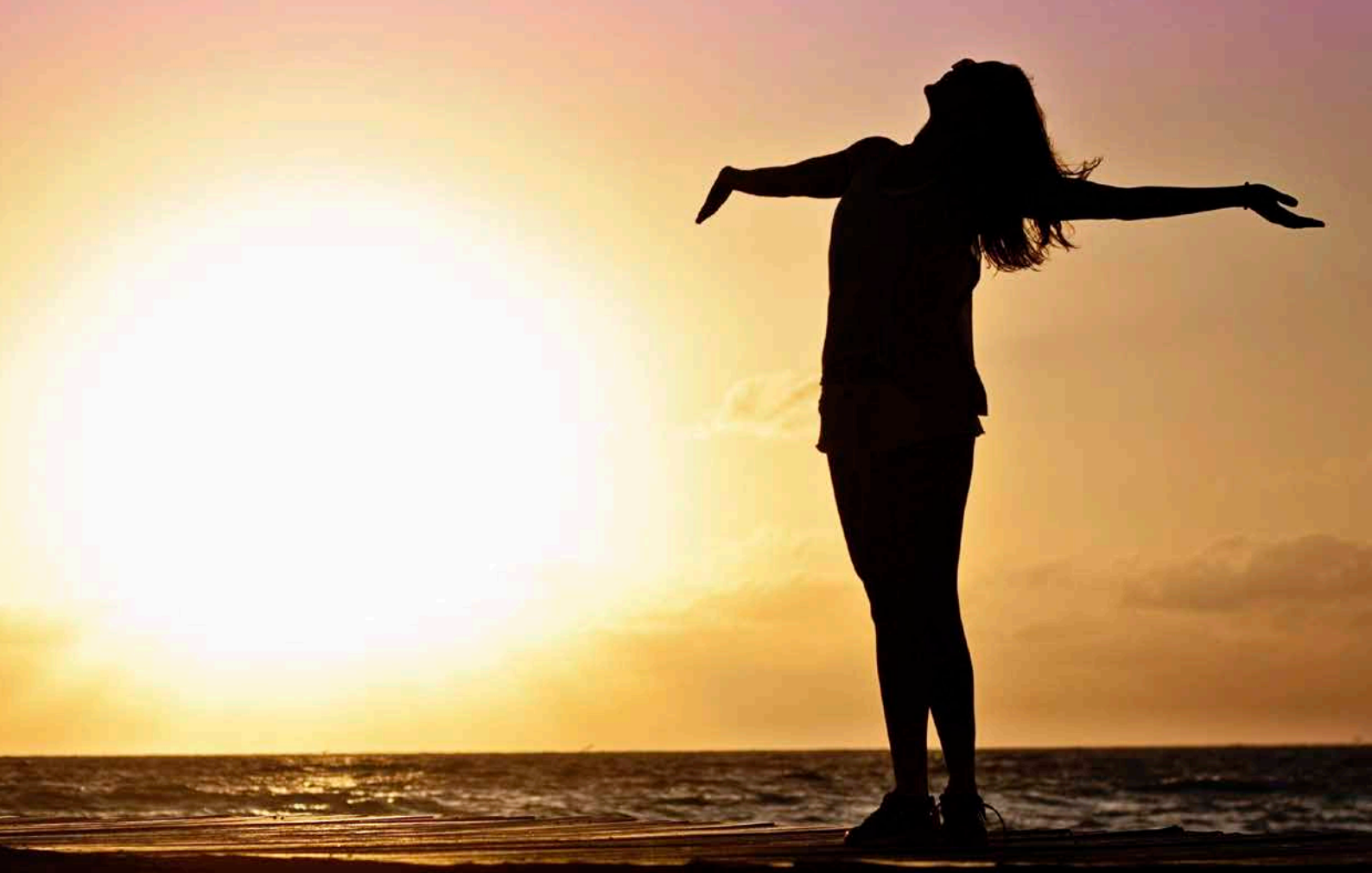
It was a time of struggle for the family that we couldn't share openly with others. Anorexia wasn't well known at that time in Japan. Our pride as par-

ents was really shaken, and we were in despair. However, a tremendous change came unexpectedly.

How God intervened in our family

Elizabeth and I were having breakfast together one day after David and our son, Paul, had left. In front of Elizabeth on her table mat was a pudding. She had refused to eat it for supper the night before and promised me she would eat it the next morning. But she looked very reluctant to eat it. I said to her sternly, "You promised you would eat it!" After a pause, she started to eat.

As a mother, I was very relieved. However, when I looked at her again, I saw that she was crying as she ate. When I saw her tears, my eyes were suddenly opened and I was able to understand how bad it was to force her to do something she didn't want to do. I felt that I had to say sorry to her. It took me a while. Then, when I did, we both cried together. It was a moment when our mother-daughter relationship deepened. That was also when the Holy Spirit became so real to me and I was dramatically changed in a way I hadn't been before.



As I was hanging the washing on the balcony, I felt like singing a song. So I started singing Naida Hearn's song of praise "Jesus, Name above all Names." Suddenly a spring of joy bubbled up in my heart. I felt so joyful that the colour of the sky changed before me. The sun was shining brightly. I felt almost like St. Paul meeting Jesus on the way to Damascus. It was an awesome experience. While I couldn't share it with my family straight away, it didn't take long for them to realise something had changed. It was my son who first noticed it. "Mummy, you have changed!" I used to tell him off a lot for not studying hard enough, but now I was less hard on him.

The joy that I experienced that day stayed with me and changed my life. I became more active, which helped with my health. I became bolder and that led me to try new things. I had more trust in God, so I wasn't disturbed when Elizabeth swung from undereating to overeating. The Lord also gave me wisdom to help people in trouble. Above all was the sense of closeness to God, the feeling that because God is with me, I am okay.

The changes I experienced were a great help for my daughter's recovery. I became more ready to listen to her, so she started talking about things she felt she couldn't share with me before. In short, I became her best counsellor.

Don't despair!

When Elizabeth got better, she went back to the school in Chiba but still wasn't happy about the school and its dormitory life. So, with the help of our mission board, she was able to finish her studies in New Zealand instead and went to university there. While she was studying in New Zealand, she even started ballroom dancing. She eventually went on to dance all over the world as a professional.

As I read books about eating disorders, there were two things mentioned that were possible positive outcomes, and we got to experience both. One is that recovery gives the person a new life. Elizabeth became more lively and was able to express herself more freely. The second is a positive change in family life. Our home became more comfortable and peaceful for each of us. In particular, the children didn't

need to hear any more shouting from me. As Galatians 5:22–23 says, "But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (GNT).

God's help often comes in unexpected ways. To help my daughter recover, He changed me. Meanwhile, it took about one year for Elizabeth to become well, and she didn't have a relapse.

I have heard that it can take a long time to recover from eating disorders. In some cases, it never goes away. Our case is just one example of the different ways that God intervenes. The important thing is that we don't despair and keep trusting in Him. He can bring something good out of a crisis. I pray that our story gives you some hints for recovery if you are going through similar trouble. May the name of the Lord be glorified through it all! **JH**

Keiko Gray, born in Japan, was a missionary in Okinawa for 23 years with her British husband, David Gray. After David passed away, Keiko studied in England, then returned as a lay church worker in at Kanuma Kirisuto Kyokai.

“Such as I have, I give you”

By Rae-Anna Hedorin

Purity discipleship among single women

When having conversations with single women in Japan in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, the topics of romance and sexuality come up quickly and continuously. This “good thing” has been elevated to the pinnacle of life for so many, both believers and nonbelievers.

How do we disciple people in this area? After hearing someone share their desires, responding with “Just hold on until marriage” is not sufficient. Alternatively, simply saying “Jesus is enough,” while being true, is not sufficient discipleship.

Having real conversations, even about uncomfortable topics, and having them often, is key to pressing into Jesus ourselves and freely sharing with others how he shows himself to us in our daily lives.

A pivotal day

At a church one Sunday, I met a Christian Japanese woman in her 30s. She shared her desire to be married, and we spent some time praying for each other. She cried as I prayed for her—it was a deep and meaningful conversation. Yet I felt strangely unsettled as I walked away, and I asked God why. The story of Peter and John’s interaction with the man asking for money came to mind:

He asked for alms and held out his palms
And this is what Peter did say:
‘Silver and gold have I none,
but such as I have give I thee.’
(song lyrics based on Acts 3:6)

As I prayed into it, I realized that, in this scenario, the “silver and gold” that we were asking God for was the practical, human solution to the desire we felt—marriage. But, as in the story in Acts, there was something that God knows we need even more for the deepest longing of our hearts that cannot

be fulfilled by anything on Earth, even marriage. And that thing, I knew immediately, was *intimacy with him*. And I realized that I did not have this myself, not to the depth I want and need. The thing she needed I could not give her because I did not carry it myself. Wow!

This set me on a focused pursuit of spiritual intimacy. This was for myself but also not just for myself so that next time, I could be like Peter and say, “I can’t give you what you are longing for, but what I *do* have, I give to you! The intimate closeness of walking with Jesus throughout the day—of knowing him and knowing he knows you—is real and an invitation for each of us!”

A practical discipleship tool

I felt led to record my journey of personal discipleship in the area of purity and share it with the body of Christ. I shared this journey in depth in the “55 Day PureHeart Challenge for Women” and a condensed version in five parts in “The PureHeart Challenge” on YouVersion for both women and men (<https://onfire.jp/en/pureheartjapan>).

My vision is that every Christian would know Jesus as first place in their life and walk in freedom and wholeness in God’s design for their sexuality and relationships, that they can give freely what they have found in him to those around them, and that each person would be a “fire starter” of purity in Japan!

After these bilingual Bible plans I wrote were put on YouVersion, I was blown away by the

response: nearly 50,000 people subscribed in the first several months. It showed me how many Christians struggle in the area of their sexuality.

Here are some of the Japanese testimonies (translated):

I’ve struggled in the area of sexual purity since my teen years. Being brought up in a Christian family, I knew what I was doing was wrong and wanted to change, but I kept going back to it no matter how determined I was. I started the PureHeart Challenge five months ago, and it was so eye-opening. The author shared her own story and her journal entries, and it made me feel like I was not the only one going through this struggle. N, 20s

I learned that God’s love is powerful and complete. I want to know and experience God’s love clearly. I’ve discovered that having a healthy heart in a love relationship with God makes all relationships healthy. T, 40s



God told me I'm clean—that my sins are whiter than snow. N, 40s

God showed me that this single life was a wonderful time given to me, a time to know and improve and polish myself, a time to deepen my personal relationship with God and to remain in his love. More than finding a partner, it was about deepening my relationship with God, knowing that he has a plan for me and that he loves me deeply. Y, 20s

The gold in walking together

The PureHeart Challenge Discipleship Tool is intended to help initiate deep conversations on these difficult topics with those we are walking together with. There are dozens of deep questions that lead the person to go before Jesus with the entire contents of their hearts. There is gold that comes with sharing with someone as you go through the challenge—sharing what God has been showing you, sharing your struggles and prayer requests.

We asked registrants, “What was it like to share with your friend?” Here are some of their answers:

Before starting the PureHeart Challenge, I was heartbroken and stuck in sexual sin. I invited some girlfriends and we started the journey of vulnerability together. The PureHeart Challenge was the tool I needed to remind me who God is and who

I am in him. Through the daily scriptures and testimonies, the Holy Spirit worked his healing in my heart and I began to walk in the intimacy with God that I had been missing. My sisters in Christ also experienced healing as we shared with one another. M, 30s

It reminded me that I am not alone. I have sisters who have gone through similar experiences. D, 50s

It was a way to grow closer through knowing each other's personal experiences and thoughts. S, 20s

I learned that I am not alone and others are struggling with sexuality. I, 40s

It was so encouraging to know that there are Christians who are struggling with the same issues. K, 20s

My friend and I felt safe to share past hurts and experiences and found we shared a common past. It deepened our sisterhood and also inspired both of us to share more of what God has done and is doing in our lives, especially to women around us. A, 20s

It was a bit scary, and it took courage. It was rewarding. There was relief and healing in the sharing. A, 30s

During the process, I was struggling with a thought that I shared with my older sister in Christ who I walk in the light with. Immediately she responded, “That's not your thought—I know you! That thought is in total contrast to the things you are continuously talking about!” Because I shared this thought, I was able to realize right away that it was a thought from the enemy and not my own. R, 30s

When asked “How did it feel to share vulnerably during the 55 Day PureHeart Challenge?” this was what one Japanese woman shared:

Because my friend opened up so much, I was able to open up. She also didn't judge but kept saying, “Let's ask God what he says.” It became a very safe place for me. I had a

traumatic experience before when I shared my sin with a Christian friend. She judged me and I still haven't heard from her.

Before this, I really had not experienced other Christians sharing so openly, so I never learned how to share vulnerably or listen to others.

You can talk with confidence when you have someone like [my missionary friend] who is open to hear your story.

Like [my missionary friend], if you just listen, don't judge, and remain sensitive to God, you will help people open up little by little.

If you are a person like [my missionary friend] who trusts in God and has shared her process of learning to trust him more and more, it makes it easy to open up and share even about areas I don't yet trust him in and then pray together. I, 40s

Join me in praying, as God teaches us more and more, that it will no longer be rare that people are able to share vulnerably with another Christian and feel safe, but it will be the norm. Walking together in this way is costly—it takes time and requires us to model vulnerability, but it is so rewarding and is discipleship at the simplest level that can multiply across the nations.

And such as we have, we give Japan

In a recent prayer walk through the red light district, I walked through an area where young women were standing, waiting for customers. I watched as a Japanese man in his 30s went from woman to woman to try and negotiate an acceptable price. I saw such thirst in his eyes.

May we (every believer in Japan) know Jesus as the One who quenches thirst so that we can then share this truth with everyone around us in this precious nation.

Lord, may the Christians in Japan be able to say, “Such that I have, I give you . . .” JH

Rae-Anna Hedorin is originally from Canada though was 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.



Faithful fruitfulness despite brokenness

By Dale Viljoen

Discovering God is at work, even when it doesn't look like it

God's ministry

Woken by the phone ringing, I found myself lying on the floor of my apartment in Asahikawa, having collapsed in exhaustion. A fellow missionary was phoning to ask how my first evangelistic event after leaving language school had gone. "No one came!" I replied.

The following year (1982), I was shocked when the World Literature Crusade¹ Every Home Campaign tract and church flyer I politely handed to a lady working in her garden were tossed onto the burning leaves. Her pointed action of turning her back to me pierced my soul. Yes, ministry in Japan was hard, but wasn't this deliberate rebuke too much?

Before I finished my first four-year term, I realized I had no one to evaluate my performance. I longed for someone to come alongside me, even if only to tell me how much I had failed in ministry. However, in the farewell service before I left for home assignment, three people responded to the salvation appeal by the visiting speaker!

I was beginning to learn that ministry in Japan is God's ministry, not mine, and that faithfulness can lead to fruitfulness.

A long obedience in the same direction

In my third term in Hakodate, Peter Holgate, the OMF national director of South Africa, gave me *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* by Eugene H.

Peterson.² Using Psalms 120–134 (the Songs of Ascents), Eugene Peterson stresses the importance of growing in faithfulness to God while moving forward one step at a time.

Over many years, I have continued to learn that I am first called to live in communion with Jesus, being led by his Spirit. As I learn to walk faithfully in his present Kingdom, I realise my self-worth is not in my work but in Jesus's unconditional acceptance of me. This is when ministry deepens and where fruitfulness is manifested in unexpected ways.

Paul and Susan Kummer write,

Joy in the Spirit flows from confidence in God; it comes from a life of rest. Therefore, you can stop striving to prove yourself to Him or others. Cease comparing yourself to others, reject thoughts that time is running out, or that somehow you are missing God. These thoughts bring stress and fearfulness! This is no way to live. Yes, souls need to be saved. Yes, your teaching has and will change lives . . . These are important, but God's not worried, nor does He take a break. He is always working.³

Be ready for the unexpected

Fast forward to December 2018. I had already been ministering in Hokkaido for 40 years and was comfortably busy preaching monthly in two pastor-less

churches, officiating at weddings, and serving on various boards of Christian groups. I was content.

I returned from mobilisation in South Africa and went with my wife, Karen, to see the COEN ministry on 10 December. Café COEN, COEN English, and the COEN Bible Community were started over 16 years ago by Evangelical Free missionaries Mark and Athlee Bowman. They desired to have a place where life-changing connections could take place. The Bowsmans were working towards retirement and were looking for a person to take over from them. The customers had been told that the café and English



Dale and Karen at Café COEN



Café COEN with short term worker Alistair

programme would finish at the end of March 2019.

“This is a great ministry. If only I were fifteen years younger!” I said on leaving the café. That night, my wife and I could not sleep well and, independently of each other, knew that God was leading us to this ministry. A week later, we said we would take over.

Karen became the café manager, and lead team member Hiromi Takahashi became the head of the English programme.

We did not know what we were getting into! The first year included many 15-hour days as we tried to learn the Japanese tax system, taught 11 hours of English a week, and cooked for and ran the café. How could we be salt and light to our customers when exhausted? Where would we find money to fund the monthly deficits? Then we entered the COVID-19 years!

But even when we felt barren and tired, God continued to minister in and through us and provide all we needed. We learned to trust Jesus more deeply, daily asking him what to do. God revealed his love to those who entered the café’s door by the way we showed up and by being ourselves. Our customers and English students said they felt at home in the café, interacting well with each other regardless of social status or age differences. God provided many helpful short-term workers from all over the world, along with amazing gifts that enabled us to continue to pay a quarter of a mil-

lion yen in monthly rent plus all the other costs.

A new way of evaluation

Shortly after we took over, we drafted a lead team document capturing what we saw as essential in our ministry. Our “why” for Café COEN was this: “COEN exists to manifest God’s love in a community, fostering an atmosphere that invites us to love God and people through life-changing connections in Hokkaido. Jesus Christ is central to COEN and the ministry at COEN. When we look at Jesus, we see God (Col. 1:15–17, 2:9; John 1:18, 14:9; Heb. 1:3). We seek to be Jesus to our congregation/ customers. . . . Our evangelism is non-threatening. This means we do not want to push our beliefs on those in the community. Instead, we initiate showing and wait for them to share. . . . We do not force conversation, ‘redirect’ conversation to faith issues, or forcefully debate Christian apologetics without being asked to do so.”

How can we evaluate how well we are achieving this? Many supporters want to know how many people have come to faith in Jesus Christ. However, I saw that my role is more like asking how much has my ministry moved this person towards Jesus? How much have I helped that person grow in faith? (See the illustration to the right.)

- We have seen a gruff retired professor change

over the years to enjoy the café a few times a week and, in his own way, care for those also seated at the big table. Has he moved from -4 to +1? (We are waiting for him to confess his faith.)

- We have seen a Christian seemingly fall away from fellowship but be renewed in a vibrant and growing faith, introducing her daughter and son to us. Maybe she was moved by the Holy Spirit from +1 to +6?
- We have seen a person on the autistic spectrum timidly enter the café, gain confidence, and come in almost every day. From -9 to -6?

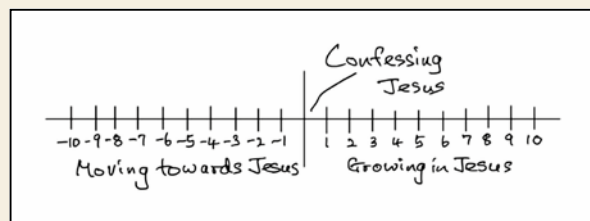
God works despite setbacks and tragedy

We have experienced many setbacks. Some volunteers had to return to their home countries during their ministry because of medical needs. One person in whom we invested a lot of time and energy ended up totally rejecting us. The biggest shock was when we heard that our coworker, Hiromi Takahashi, had died on 18 June, 2023, in a head-on collision between a bus and a truck in Yakumo.⁴ Hiromi was the kingpin in the English program, the café, and the Bible Community.

Yet God was at work—in the newspaper and TV interviews; through the outpouring of grief by our customers as we ministered together, consoling each other; and through the amazing NHK clip on the Hokkaido evening news after her memorial service.⁵

What’s next?

Karen and I have always said that because God pushed us into this COEN ministry, we should not quit because things are tough. Jesus would need to lead us out clearly. This happened in October 2023, four months after Hiromi’s “graduation.” Despite our customers’ disappointment, the café closed on 2 December.



What will happen next? As Scott Erickson depicts in his illustration, there is always resurrection after death; new life springs from the coffin.⁶



We continue to keep in contact with our café regulars online, meeting in smaller groups over meals. We thought we would need to spend a tonne of money to restore the rented space to its original condition before returning it to the landlord. However, a long-time COEN-connected family will take over the café as a children's café and activ-

ity centre called Open Sesame starting April 2024. This means that the COEN Bible Community (church) can continue to rent a room on Sundays, remaining in the same place!

These past five years have been the hardest of my 45 years in Japan, but they have also been the best! I think that I have been able to interact with people at a deeper, more personal level than any church plant with which I have been involved. I look forward to the future, taking one step at a time. **JH**

1. World Literature Crusade was renamed Every Home for Christ in 1987.
2. The current version: Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Westmont, IL: IVP Signature Collection, 2019).
3. Paul and Susan Kummer, *Equipping the Saints: Raising Up Everyday Revivalists Who Sustain the*

Move of God (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2022), 122–123.

4. “Did the truck stray out of the lane? Collision with a bus, 5 people died in Yakumo-cho, Hokkaido” トラックが車線をはみ出したか バスと衝突、5人死亡 北海道八雲町, Asahi Shimbun (Japanese website), <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASR6L4VL1R6LI-IP007.html> (June 19, 2023).
5. I have saved an English translation of the NHK video transcript and corresponding article about Hiromi's memorial service in my personal Dropbox files: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/diq1ujk071qfyfx9h5oym/2023-07-18-NHK-News.pdf> (accessed January 12, 2024).
6. Scott Erickson on Instagram. Scott gave permission for this illustration's use in this article.

Dale Viljoen, a South African, celebrates 45 years of ministry in Hokkaido, serving with OMF International. He married Karen Harless after his first wife's death and continues to be amazed by God's unconditional love.

Answering God's call to pray for Japan

By Lorna Ferguson and Sarah Chang

Beneath the Surface prayer guide is a tool to mobilize prayer for spiritual breakthrough



In 2019, *Japan Harvest* published an article in the Winter issue entitled “Missionaries in Japan: A snapshot in space and time.”¹ It included a graph showing the trend of the number of missionaries in Japan over the years. After a three-decade decline, missionary numbers started going up again in 2015. This graph confirms what many mission organizations in Japan have been recently feeling as they grapple with the wonderful, yet challenging reality that there are so many people around the world who have a heart for Japan.

This encouraging increase, however, is juxtaposed with a discouraging snapshot of the

state of the church. The average age of pastors is between 60 and 70.² Churches are small and aging. Baptisms and seminary enrollments are down. The number of pastor-less churches is increasing, and youth in churches are few and far between.

It's at this intersection that we felt God's calling to focus on the work of mobilizing prayer for spiritual breakthrough in Japan. This is a conviction we share with so many missionaries across Japan. It is not a new conviction either, as we know faithful brothers and sisters who have been praying for Japan for decades.

All of this confirmed for us that God is at work. And our desire was to

respond by joining him in what he is already doing.

The firstfruits of the partnership

In summer 2019, after conferring with various Japanese and missionary leaders, including the JEMA leadership team, and after much prayer, we felt the Lord was leading us to publish a prayer guide that could be used by any Christian to pray for Japan. Missionaries and Japanese church leaders helped us to choose 30 prayer topics through surveys. Members of 17 organizations wrote short articles on these topics and, by God's grace, in November 2020, we published the first edition of *Beneath the Surface: 30 Ways to Pray for Japan*.

In faith we printed 16,000 copies and were so moved when all of them were sold within a few months. We estimate that about 20,000 copies have been sold so far. It has been translated into German and French, and traditional and simplified Chinese versions will be available in 2024.

The road to the Japanese edition

From the beginning, our heart has been to pray for spiritual breakthrough alongside our Japanese brothers and sisters and to see Japanese churches leading a movement of prayer.

We were hesitant, however, about creating a Japanese version of the prayer guide. We were not sure that something written primarily by missionaries would be useful in local Japanese churches. But Japanese believers continued to ask about a Japanese version, and in fall 2022, we started a few months of prayerful consultation. As

God brought a Japanese editorial team together, we felt that he was inviting us into this work.

The process was not without its challenges, from translation to editing to design, and even in shipment. But each challenge was accompanied by a timely answer to prayer, as God continued to keep our hearts steady and helped us to finish the work.



We are grateful for the Japanese leaders from various local churches, student ministries, and returnee ministries who reviewed the text for us. By God's grace, in May 2023, we published the Japanese edition entitled 「御心が地にもなるように: 日本のために祈る30項目」 (translation: May your will be done on earth: 30 things to pray for Japan), just in time for the Global Returnees Conference. At that time, we also published a second edition of the English version with updated statistics.

The prayer guide in local churches

Here are some ways that the Japanese prayer guide is being used:

This booklet is helping us to pray together as a church for the challenges facing Japan. We read and pray for one topic at the church prayer meeting every Thursday. The observations missionaries have made about Japan today, and their insights into what they are thinking and feeling, give us

a very clear picture of the challenges our country is facing. —Pastor Mizuguchi, Sakuragaoka Free Methodist Church, Tokyo

I distributed the prayer guide to each of the church members. This guide helps us to know what to pray for our country and provides an easy way to do so. Japanese people can really empathize with many of the topics, and I felt that the guide portrays the current situation in Japan well. Through the prayer guide, I was again reminded that in order to reach out to those in Sendai, Tohoku, or other regional areas, we cannot avoid addressing local religious customs such as ancestor worship through funeral and grave traditions. —A pastor in Sendai

A Christian lady in Osaka got the booklet from me and started praying with three other ladies of their church every day. They knew they should pray for Japan but never knew how. They have received great help in knowing how to pray for their own country for the first time through the booklet. —A pastor in Fukushima

What can I do?

We would love it if you could introduce the prayer guide to your church or ministry as a way of encouraging Japanese believers to pray for Japan. And please continue to let your supporters know about the booklet, or perhaps gift it to them.

If you would like to order the *Beneath the Surface: 30 Ways to Pray for Japan* prayer guide in English or Japanese, please visit our website at www.japanprayerguide.com. **JH**

1. Simon Pleasants, "Missionaries in Japan: A snapshot in space and time," *Japan Harvest*, <https://japanharvest.org/missionaries-in-japan-a-snapshot-in-space-and-time> (Winter 2019).
2. Caroline Anderson, "New Strategies Emerge as Japanese Churches Face Future Without Pastors," *imb.org*, <https://www.imb.org/2021/08/02/new-strategies-emerge-japanese-churches-face-future-without-pastors> (August 2, 2021).

Lorna Ferguson, from the UK, has been with OMF International since 1998. She currently serves on the leadership team overseeing mobilization and member care as well as at Masago Baptist Church.

Sarah Chang, from the US, has been with Pioneers in Japan since 2014. She is currently partnering with OMF in prayer mobilization and also serves on the JEMA prayer leadership team.



Japan's greatest area of need

Japan's ultralow social capital is both a crying need and an opportunity for ministry

By Simon Pleasants

Japan is ranked 16th out of 167 countries in the 2023 Legatum Prosperity Index.¹ No surprises there, you might think. It reflects the fact that Japan is a prosperous nation with the fourth-largest economy in the world. It boasts excellent health and education systems and enjoys good law and order.

But what is surprising—really shocking, in fact—is that Japan is ranked a pitiful 141st in terms of social capital—a measure of “the strength of personal and social relationships, social norms, civic participation in a country, and social tolerance.” Countries such as Rwanda, Iraq, and Cambodia are rated higher than Japan for social capital, and only 26 countries have a lower rating.

Social capital refers to the networks of relationships among people in a society. People in a society with high social capital generally feel connected to others and feel they can rely on their social network for the support they need. Social capital has been linked with a wide range of benefits, including community resilience, economic development, and mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how important social contact and community support are.

Why is social capital in Japan so low?

After noting that social capital in Japan has dropped 40 ranks since 2013, the Legatum report² attributes this decline to an ageing society: “An ageing population and declining birth rate have significantly challenged Japanese society . . . fewer people feel respected, willing or able to help other households because of a rising dependency ratio within the country” (39). Certainly, older people tend to have fewer social connections and find it harder to make meaningful contributions to society.

But even at its peak of 89th in 2012 (it rose 31 places in 2012, possibly because the triple disaster of 2011 had the effect of bringing people together), social capital in Japan wasn't great. Other factors that may contribute to its low ranking could be long working hours, high urbanization, and cultural norms that make it hard for people to connect.

To gain a more complete picture of social capital in Japan, it's helpful to drill down into the categories the Legatum ranking is based on. Legatum breaks social capital down into five elements (see Table 1), which in turn are based on 14 indicators (see

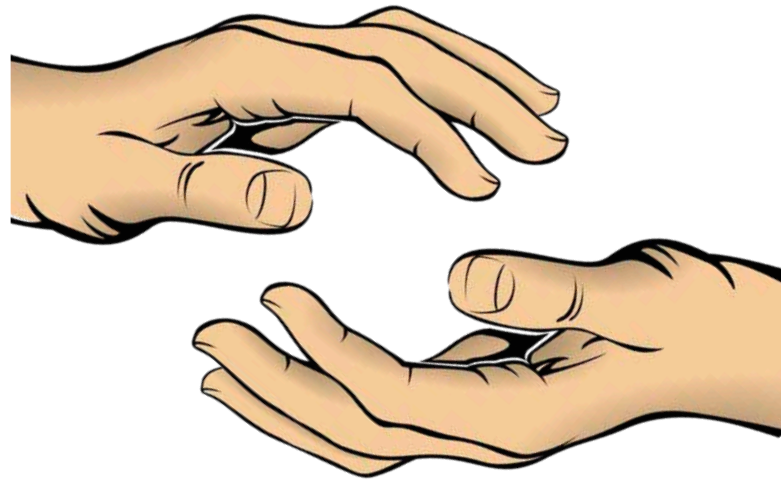


Table 2). It's fascinating to look at the various aspects that contribute to Japan's low social capital.

Of the five elements, **social tolerance** is ranked much higher (85th out of 167) than the other four, indicating that Japan is a reasonably tolerant society. Interestingly, the perceived tolerance for LGBT people (ranked 69th) is considerably higher than those for immigrants (103rd) and ethnic minorities (128th). If this perceived tolerance to LGBT people were removed from the equation, social tolerance would presumably drop to the levels of the next two elements and the overall social capital rating would be even lower. I also suspect that tolerance for Westerners is much higher than for people of other ethnicities.

Personal and family relationships is ranked second at 113th. What is really intriguing is the stark difference between the two indicators: many people felt they could rely on help from family and friends when in trouble (34th), whereas extremely few received positive energy from their

family (163rd). This suggests that family members can be relied on for support in difficult times, but that family life is not very revitalizing for the vast majority of people. It might indicate that people are more compelled by a sense of duty towards their families rather than affection.

The two elements that make up **interpersonal trust** are even more polarised. On the one hand, there is a high level of generalised interpersonal trust (ranked 25th in the

Table 1: Rankings of the five elements that make up Japan's social capital (rankings out of 167 countries)

| Ranking | Element |
|---------|-----------------------------------|
| 85 | Social tolerance |
| 113 | Personal and family relationships |
| 116 | Interpersonal trust |
| 139 | Civic and social participation |
| 165 | Social networks |

world). But on the other hand, extremely few people have helped a stranger (165th). Only two countries in the world (Belarus and Cambodia) have lower rates of helping strangers. This really highlights the social contract people have in Japan—they are polite, considerate, and honest towards others but are very hesitant to get involved in the affairs of others, even when someone is clearly in need.

The four elements of **civic and social participation** are less spread out with voter turnout ranked 92nd, voiced opinion to a public official 125th, volunteering 132nd, and donated money to charity 138th. It's interesting that rates of volunteering and donating money are so low in Japan.

An opportunity to seize

Japan's low social capital has important implications for ministry in Japan. In general, Japan is a wealthy nation and most of its residents enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. This is in contrast to many other mission fields that have very visible needs such as poor access to good water, low educational standards, endemic corruption and injustice, poor health systems, and large economic disparity.

But just as these needs in other countries provide an opportunity for missionaries to care for people in tangible ways that express God's love for them, so Japan's low social capital is an opportunity for us to meet this important need. In particular, loneliness is one of the greatest felt needs of many people.

The most obvious way we can meet that need is through providing a loving community that welcomes anyone. This is one of the strongest draws for churches. But since many people find it hard to enter a church, we have to make an effort to meet them where they are and find ways to engage people in the community.

One of the most valuable services we can render is to provide ways for Japanese people to connect with others. A student in English classes run by my church confided that she wasn't really interested in learning English, but she came to meet others.

We can also sometimes break social conventions that make it hard for people to connect with each other. The good Samaritan is a good example of someone who flouted deeply entrenched social conventions to help someone in need. Another example is a missionary I know who saw a woman at a station struggling up the stairs with a stroller. He went up to her and offered to help, but she refused, saying she could manage on her own. However, the missionary went ahead and carried the stroller up the stairs anyway. He said that she appeared genuinely grateful afterwards.

What I find fascinating is that all the countries ranked in the top ten for social capital (Scandinavian countries, New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands, USA, and Canada) have a strong Protestant tradition. This suggests that

the gospel will naturally enhance the social capital of a culture. Let's see if it can't have the same effect in Japan. **JH**

1. "Japan: Prosperity Score," The 2023 Legatum Prosperity Index, https://docs.prosperity.com/6716/7689/8105/Japan_2023_Picountryprofile.pdf (accessed February 5, 2024).
2. The 2023 Legatum Prosperity Index, 16th edition is available for download at: <https://www.prosperity.com/about/resources>

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

Table 2: Rankings of the 14 elements that make up Japan's social capital (rankings out of 167 countries)

| Ranking | Indicator | Element |
|---------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 25 | Generalised interpersonal trust | Interpersonal trust |
| 34 | Help from family and friends when in trouble | Personal and Family Relationships |
| 69 | Perceived tolerance of LGBT individuals | Social Tolerance |
| 92 | Voter turnout | Civic and Social Participation |
| 103 | Perceived tolerance of immigrants | Social Tolerance |
| 125 | Voiced opinion to a public official | Civic and Social Participation |
| 128 | Perceived tolerance of ethnic minorities | Social Tolerance |
| 132 | Volunteering | Civic and Social Participation |
| 135 | Opportunity to make friends | Social Networks |
| 138 | Donated money to charity | Civic and Social Participation |
| 155 | Helped another household | Social Networks |
| 163 | Family give positive energy | Personal and Family Relationships |
| 164 | Respect | Social Networks |
| 165 | Helped a stranger | Interpersonal Trust |

Finally, the three elements of **social networks** are all very low, resulting in Japan having the third lowest ranking for **social networks** globally (only Sudan and Syria are ranked lower). The opportunity to make friends was ranked 135th, helped another household 155th, and respect 164th. These numbers paint a grim picture of a society where it is hard to make friends, there is little support between households, and people don't feel respected. The extremely low ranking for respect (only Ethiopia, Laos, and Syria are ranked lower) is surprising given that Japan has a shame-honour culture that places a high value on respect.

Biblical counselling and its powerful impact

Hope, healing, and restoration in Jesus Christ

By Sara Wolsey

“What do you hope to get out of this seminar?” I enthusiastically enquired.

“Well, a woman I knew of tragically died by suicide recently. I want to learn more about how to help and biblically counsel people in such challenging situations,” a fellow participant replied reflectively.

This conversation took place at a two-day biblical counselling training seminar in Kansai in March 2023. This event was the first module of a two-year biannual training programme run by OIC Japan, a JEMA-endorsed ministry. (OIC here stands for Overseas Instruction in Counselling: <https://discoveroic.org>)

Sociocultural issues in Japan

Two major sociocultural issues in Japan are suicide and hikikomori (social shut-ins). According to Statista, “In 2022, over 21.8 thousand people died by suicide in Japan. The overall number of suicides had shown a steady downward trend over the past decade but began to rise again in 2020. The unexpected upward trend is likely to be connected to the COVID-19 pandemic.”¹

Referencing hikikomori, Rooksby, McLeod, and Furuhashi state, “Given at least 1.2% of the population (around a million people) are affected, hikikomori is a significant social and health problem.”²

An answer

What can help alleviate these and other major challenges in modern-day Japan? One answer is biblical counselling and its powerful impact on people, churches, and communities. What is biblical counselling? Biblical counselling is rooted in knowing Jesus Christ and is the process of applying biblical teaching to the challenges of life. This results in inner change and a focus on living a life that is pleasing to God. The following example illustrates this point. Sandria was suicidal in



her younger years. She tried to take her life several times from the age of five to her twenties. At 28 with over 200 visits with secular psychiatrists and having received absolutely no help or hope, Sandria scheduled regular biblical counselling with a local pastor. During the counselling, Sandria and her husband realised they needed Jesus, so they accepted him as their Lord. Sandria says, “When I accepted Christ, it felt as if a burden was lifted from my shoulders. Christ changed me in a second.”³ Sandria found hope, healing, and restoration in God as a result of participating in biblical counselling and by finding faith in Jesus Christ.

OIC trains people worldwide in Bible-based soul restoration so that they can offer counselling and train others in biblical counselling. OIC offers various

seminars and courses such as introductory seminars and the Church Leadership Training (CLT) certified course with four modules.

Kansai training seminars

Module 1 was about the theory of biblical counselling and covered seventeen areas of spiritual growth.⁴ The bilingual teaching included presentations, a video testimony, small group discussions, roleplaying by the trainers, and question-and-answer sessions. One highlight was watching a powerful video testimony by a former hikikomori who had become a Christian believer as a result of biblical counselling. Last autumn, I participated in Module 2 of the Kansai training, titled “How do you do it?” This module was more practical and answered the question of how biblical counselling is done. Participants received counselling projects to complete before the next module, for example, conducting some discipleship meetings with believers who need help and hope. Modules 3 and 4 focus on effectiveness and how to share, respectively.

Powerful real-life testimony

Two friends of mine, Rev. Bruce Allen and his wife, Dorothy, successfully biblically counselled a schizophrenic man for three years. He came to believe in God. They also counselled a suicidal Japanese university student. They boldly asked her if they could have Wednesday evening church in her apartment. She agreed, and they met weekly for counselling and fellowship. After a year, the student gratefully remarked that their biblical counsel had saved her life.

Conclusion

Participating in an Overseas Instruction in Counseling training course will encourage, inspire, and equip mature Christians to counsel others more effectively and lead them into a deeper relationship with the 'master counsellor', our Lord Jesus Christ. OIC Japan is praying for more churches throughout Japan to host the Overseas Instruction in Counseling training. For more information, please see the OIC Japan entry on page 114 of the 2023 JEMA Directory or contact Takayuki Hayashi: oicjapan.counseling@gmail.com at OIC Japan. **JH**



Useful resources (books are available in Japanese):

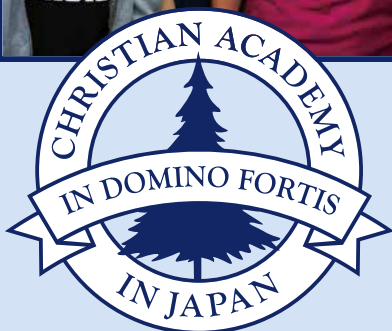
- J. E. Adams, *Christ and Your Problems*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1999).
- Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2002).
- Edward T. Welch, *Motives: "Why Do I Do the Things I Do?"* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2003).
- Powerful testimonies of lives changed by biblical counseling can be watched at Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries' website: <https://www.faithlafayette.org/counseling/get-help/testimonials>

1. "Total number of suicides committed in Japan from 2013 to 2022," Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/622065/japan-suicide-number/> (accessed July 24, 2023).
2. Maki Rooksby, Hamish J. McLeod, and Tadaaki Furuhashi, "Hikikomori: understanding the people who choose to live in extreme isolation," *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/hikikomori-understanding-the-people-who-choose-to-live-in-extreme-isolation-148482> (October 29, 2020).
3. "Sandria," [faithlafayette.org](https://www.faithlafayette.org/counseling/get-help/testimonials), <https://www.faithlafayette.org/counseling/get-help/testimonials> (accessed February 14, 2024).
4. "Church Leadership Training Program Modules Topics," Overseas Instruction in Counseling, <https://discoveroic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/OIC-CLT-Modules-Topics-2020-06-29.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2024).

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

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“Help is available if you come” to Toyohashi Church of the Evangelical Holiness Denomination of Brazil

Christian Shimbun, August 13, 2023 Translated by Hiromi Terukina

Toyohashi Church of the Evangelical Holiness Denomination of Brazil is in Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture, the city that holds the second-largest Brazilian population in Japan. The church serves as a gathering spot for the Brazilians living as “foreigners” in Japan and continues to search for ways to serve the local community.

Over a century ago, a large group of Japanese immigrants traveled overseas and settled in Brazil. At the same time, many missionaries were sent to Brazil to reach out to these immigrants. The Evangelical Holiness Denomination of Brazil was founded as a result of that process, and now 45 churches throughout Brazil, one in Peru, one in Macao, and four in Japan count themselves as part of the denomination. In the past 40 years, descendants of these immigrants have “returned” to Japan to make a living. Christian migrant workers gathered to worship, and that eventually grew into churches. These days, missionaries are sent from Brazil to Japan to support these churches. One of these missionaries is Adriano Kuroki, pastor of Toyohashi Church.

Growing up in Brazil, Adriano had a desire to serve the Lord but ran off to Aomori, Japan, at age 17 to distance himself from his worsening family environment. However, with zero knowledge of Japanese, it was difficult for him to continue his church life, and gradually he distanced himself from God as well. In time, Adriano returned to Brazil

and completed two years of training at a mission organization. At age 25, he was ready to return to Japan to spread the gospel. This time, following the church’s advice that “study in the Japanese language is a must in order to serve in Japan,” Adriano completed three years of study at Tokyo Biblical Seminary and began pastoring at Toyohashi Church in 2017.

The Toyohashi Church holds worship services in Portuguese and Japanese, hosting around 60 people each week, with 25 being children. Most of the church members are migrant workers in their thirties with children. The church serves as a gathering spot for these families living as “foreigners.”

Toyohashi has a large population of foreigners not limited to Brazilians, and many of the local schools have a high percentage of non-Japanese students. In some schools, there are as many as 100 non-Japanese students out of 600 in the school, and some-



Migrant workers have many children, making the church lively

times 10 in a class of 35. With such a high percentage of multinational students, it is virtually impossible for teachers to closely support them all. A decade ago, a non-Japanese junior high student shared with Adriano his struggle at school due to his lack of familiarity with the Japanese language. Since then, Adriano has stepped into the field of education as a volunteer to help these children with their Japanese. “Seeing both the children and the teachers struggle, I realized schools were my mission field. There were so many lonely children.” Adriano now rents a space two days a week to help teenagers with their studies. Not only Brazilian, but also Filipino, Vietnam-



Pastor Adriano Kuroki and his wife, Mayumi



Supporting the homeless as a church gives non-Japanese-speaking members an opportunity to serve

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!"

ese, and even Japanese teenagers come seeking help.

The Toyohashi Church works to spread support in a wide range of areas. Twelve years ago, in the hope of reaching out to the local Japanese community, the church began to hold gospel music classes, which led to two people believing in Jesus. Adriano comments, "Japanese people need a lot of time to come to Jesus. It is a difficult decision to become a Christian in this community. But once they believe, they persevere." For over two decades, the church has reached out to the homeless. Some church members are not fluent in Japanese but actively take part in cooking and passing out meals to the homeless. Before COVID-19, church members served as volunteers at nursing homes. There is an opportunity for every church member to serve the community.



Adriano teaches math to high schoolers two days a week

Toyohashi Church is earnestly praying for a church building that will not only serve as a gathering space for believers but also for the community. Adriano shares, "We know what it is to live as a 'foreigner.' Therefore, we hope to become a home for other foreigners living in Japan and also for the Japanese." The church hopes to have a shower room for the homeless, guest rooms for the outreach teams, a dorm for children who have left foster homes, and a cafeteria for local children in need. "We want this church to become a safe space for everyone and a place where help is available if you come." ■

Where the fragrance of coffee and Christ blend: Little Light Church

Christian Shimbun, September 23, 2023 Translated by Grace Koshino

Little Light Church is situated in Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture. When American missionaries told the director of a local pediatric clinic, who was also a Christian, that they wanted to plant a church, he told them that they could use the clinic's waiting room. Little Light Church began life there.

The current pastor of Little Light Church is Josiah Henderson, originally from California.

After graduating from high school, he attended seminary, where he was given the desire to go to Japan as a missionary. He felt a connection to Japan since his mother is Japanese-American. He had also experienced suicidal thoughts as a result of his depression, which is a common problem in Japanese society. When he learned that there were many people in Japan also going through the struggles he went through, he felt led to share the love of God with them.

Josiah and his wife, Noel, who is Japanese and who also happened to sit at the desk next to him in seminary, first moved to Karuizawa. They eventually moved to Takasaki, where Josiah has served as Little Light's pastor since 2022. The church has particularly drawn families with young children and people with an international background.

The café, Little Light Coffee, was established in 2019. Most of the employees are Christian. It is their aim to "become a light and to develop good relationships with each of the custom-

ers so that everyone can build a relationship with God."

Josiah worked at Starbucks while he was studying. This is where his love for coffee was cultivated. After graduating from seminary, he became the manager at one of their newly opened cafés and trained others to become baristas there. "The café later closed, but I believe God gave me that opportunity to learn the necessary skills



Josiah, Noel, and their children

and knowledge for running a café," says Josiah.

Customers travel from near and far to visit Little Light Coffee. The café is known for its good quality coffee. "Through providing good quality coffee at the café, we are able to bring glory to God."

The café and church work hand-in-hand, and together they are the essential parts of the ministry. Various people visit both the café and church. Some café visitors may be familiar with the church, and others may not have any interest at all, but having both allows for the gospel to be shared with a broader audience.

"Some people are lonely or just want to chat. It is our desire that more people like this come to the church and café and hear the gospel naturally."

One customer was led to baptism after taking part in a Bible study held at the café. "When we witnessed that, it was like God was giving us confirmation to run both the church and café." ■

Traces of Christianity in Japanese novels

Three recent reads reveal Christian overtones and biblical quotations

Imagine opening a Japanese novel and encountering two quotes straight from Matthew's gospel on the first page. That's what happened when I started to read the novel *Lost Care* by Aki Hamanaka.¹

To my surprise, three novels I've read recently contained Christian references to varying degrees. With all three, I chose to read them because they looked interesting, had good reviews, and had movies based on them (that way, reading can help reinforce my listening ability).

Of the three, *Lost Care* had the most overt Christian references, which included mention of Jacob's ladder (p. 303) and quotes from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:7–11; p. 285), Jesus's teaching about bringing a sword to the Earth (Matt. 10:34–39; p. 287), and Matthew's account of the crucifixion (Matt. 27:45–50; p. 289). While the main character wasn't a Christian himself, his parents were (although it seems they attended a liberal church).



Throughout the book, Jesus's words "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12 ESV) were cited. There were also quite lengthy and accurate descriptions of the state of Christianity in Japan. The author must either have had firsthand experience of Christianity in Japan or have done his research well.

Another novel in which the main character came from a Christian family is *Kyrie's Song* by Shunji Iwai.² The names of both the main character, Luca, and her older sister, Kyrie, were chosen because of the Christian connections (Luke and the Greek word for Lord, respectively). Because of her Christian upbringing, Kyrie has never entered a Shinto shrine in her life. When she becomes pregnant by her boyfriend while still a high school student, her mother is very accepting of her boyfriend and welcomes him into the family—much to his surprise. Kyrie utters the plea



"have mercy on me, a sinner" a couple of times too (Luke 18:13 NIV).

The book with the most subtle references to Christianity was *Hôtei Yūgi* (The Courtroom Game) by Ritsuto Igarashi (spoiler ahead).³ Set in a law school and later a court, it has strong themes of justice running throughout. The maxim from Exodus 21:24 ("eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . .") surfaced several times. It was pointed out that while it might appear harsh, the intention behind this law was to place limits on how much punishment someone who was wronged could exact.

The clearest reference to Christianity appeared on the last page when, instead of blindfolded Lady Justice holding a pair of scales, a cross appeared. While it lacked redemptive overtones, its significance was that the character had chosen to bear the punishment of his own sin, which showed surprising insight into the cross.

A sample of three is too small to make statistical inferences. But given the low proportion of Christians in Japan, it's intriguing that three recent novels, which were also made into movies, have such strong connections to Christianity.

I find that Christians tend to be treated as curiosities in books and films, and inevitably the author or director has to provide significant background as explanation. But, unlike in the West, Christians are often portrayed quite positively. On television in Australia, Christians seem almost always cast in a negative light, whereas on NHK, they are frequently depicted positively.

It's encouraging that Christianity is making an appearance in films and novels. Hopefully, they will make Japanese people more curious about Christianity and provide valuable entry points for discussions with Japanese people about spiritual things. **JH**

1. Aki Hamanaka 葉真中 顕, *ロスト・ケア* [Lost Care] (Tokyo: Kobunsha 光文社, 2013).
2. Shunji Iwai 岩井 俊二, *キリエのうた* [Kyrie's Song] (Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko 文藝春秋, 2023).
3. Ritsuto Igarashi 五十嵐 律人, *法廷遊戯* [*Hôtei Yūgi*, The Courtroom Game] (Tokyo: Kodansha 講談社, 2023).

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



Glorious victories, related dangers

Our basic identity and worth are not the triumph of our efforts. They are the free gift of God.

I hope you've known the joy of a long-resistant friend coming to faith in Christ or experienced God's powerful work in and through you. What a privilege to see God at work and be part of what he is doing! However, such glorious victories come with at least three related dangers.

Danger 1: Striving for success more than seeking God. Surely all missionaries want to excel at Japanese language and culture, and to be effective evangelists and preachers. Focusing too much on success subtly shifts our focus from seeking God to relying on ourselves. These desires can become idols. And worshipping success has two miserable side-effects.

Firstly, dissatisfaction. If two people respond to church invitations this month, next month we want five! If one person is baptised this year, next year we want three. Praiseworthy desires, but are we seeking God's glory or personal success?

Secondly, resentment. How many missionaries feel envious when they see the success or superior language abilities of other missionaries? Henri Nouwen says, "Much sadness and gladness in my life flows directly from my comparing, and most, if not all, of this comparing is useless and a terrible waste of time and energy."¹

Danger 2: Self-congratulation more than praising God. If our focus is success, instead of praising God, we congratulate ourselves. If local evangelism bears fruit or people turn to Christ and grow through our preaching, we may begin to believe it's all down to us! Kenneth Carder describes this as "functional atheism."²

Danger 3: Enjoying the gift more than thanking the Giver. Further, focusing on success leads to enjoying the gifts rather than thanking the Giver. For instance, if children flock to your kids' club because of your ability to tell Bible stories or do puppetry, this temptation can arise quickly.

How can we overcome these dangers?

Safeguard 1: Know God. "But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD" (Jer. 9:24 NIV UK 1986). The challenge for us is how we can grow to know God more deeply and walk with him more closely. Knowing God and boasting about him only is our first safeguard.

Safeguard 2: Follow Jesus's example. Jesus, though God, "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7 NIV). When the devil tempted Jesus with worldly power and authority, he answered, "It is writ-



ten: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only' (Luke 4:8 NIV). We should not be those who seek personal glory or satisfaction. Jesus's practical humility and servant-hearted obedience is our example and our model.

Safeguard 3: Be the person God made you to be. The Apostle Paul says, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Phil. 3:12 NIV). Christ took hold of you. As incredible as it sounds, Jesus chose you and me. And God made you and me, each of us to His unique blueprint. God doesn't make mistakes! Let's delight in being who God made each of us to be.

Safeguard 4: Be a good steward of God's gifts to you. Our one-of-a-kind blueprints provide each of us with unique opportunities. Again, Paul tells us, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Eph. 2:10 NIV). How can we be good stewards of the personality and gifts God has given us? Are we doing what we are equipped and asked to do? Nouwen says, "Each child of God has . . . his or her unique place, all of them places of God."³

Final word

"The glorious, triumphant news is that it is all a gift. We cannot earn our worth and relationship as God's son or daughter . . . Our worth lies in the One to whom we belong . . . Our basic identity and worth are not the triumph of our efforts. They are the free gift of God."⁴

Pause and Reflect:

- How have I been striving for success more than seeking God?
- What should I praise God for rather than congratulating myself?
- What gifts can I thank God for?
- How can I get to know God more?
- How can I follow Jesus's example more closely?
- Am I being obedient to what God has called me to be and do? **JH**

1. Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1994), 103.

2. Kenneth L. Carder, "Temptations and triumphs of ministry," *Faith & Leadership*, <https://faithandleadership.com/temptations-and-triumphs-ministry> (August 16, 2010).

3. Nouwen, *The Return*, 81.

4. Carder, "Temptations and triumphs of ministry."

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

Kingdom prayer at ground level

Let's pray and walk (with eyes open) for God's Kingdom in Japan

For several years, my husband and I have come to Japan to pray and walk in different areas, praying alongside pastors, Kingdom workers, and Japanese people. We came to Japan in 2019, 2022, and October 2023. We go where the Lord leads—primarily rural areas—with a goal of praying and walking in every prefecture, God willing!

We know that Jesus is already present in Japan and that his Spirit continues to be at work there, so we join him. We talk to him as we walk along the way, on trains and in train stations, in busy cities and in the quiet countryside. We ask him to show us where he is at work and how to pray.

Sometimes we get “God sightings,” reminders of his presence in Japan. Last October, we visited a cave in Taketa, Oita Prefecture, that had been used for worship by hidden Christians centuries ago. We also see Japan as it is: abandoned buildings in contrast with busy shopping malls, numerous shrines and roadside idols, and so many people in Japan who have not met Jesus, the One who loves them.

Interested in prayer and walking?

To encourage you to go out to pray and walk in Japan, here are some things we have learned.

Prayer support needed—We go in the name of Jesus with the support and encouragement of our church and a community of people who pray for us. During COVID, we could not travel to Japan but became part of a continuing weekly prayer time online as part of Reaching Japanese for Christ Network, and they pray for us. Invite your church and faith community to pray for you.

Planning bathed in prayer—Every aspect of every trip is bathed in prayer: who, what, when, and where. We consult the *Operation Japan Prayer Guide*.¹ We make time for a sabbath rest each week, attending a local church if possible. Ask the Lord to direct your path.

Stay grounded in your daily devotions—Be intentional to immerse yourself in Jesus and his Word daily as you prepare to go out to pray and walk in his name.

Go with someone if possible—We know that Jesus sent out disciples two by two, and there's good wisdom in going with another person if possible.

Sometimes we quietly pray aloud with each other, but most of the time, each one is silently talking to God according to his leading. More than one pair? Pairs can spread out and then reconnect later to debrief and pray.

Hard stuff—Prayer as you walk is hard work, and spiritual warfare is real. Sometimes I discern and pray for light against darkness; sometimes I experience it as confusion or doubt. Then I refocus on Jesus by saying his name, saying the Lord's Prayer, singing choruses or hymns, or reciting a simple passage of Scripture that focuses on him. Stand firm in Jesus.

What and how to pray and walk—Our prayers are mostly unspoken but directed to the Lord with praise and thanksgiving as we keep our eyes on him. It's about Jesus—his Kingdom come, his will be done. Ask the Lord for eyes to see the poor and disadvantaged and the lost in Japan and to open your hearts to his compassion toward them. With eyes open, ask him to direct your prayers but trust outcomes to him.

Let's go

Any Jesus follower can pray Kingdom prayers and walk, if physically able, in Japan. Go in faith and in the power of Jesus's name. Pray big prayers to our God, who is able to do abundantly beyond our expectations. Pray for the people of Japan to come to know and believe in Jesus as their Savior, for his Kingdom to spread through gospel outreach and church planting, for spiritual renewal and revival in the churches, for the encouragement of pastors and Kingdom workers, and for the Lord to send more workers with his heart for reaching the Japanese people. Pray along with the *Operation Japan Prayer Guide*. Be confident in this: God hears and answers prayer, and he will use the prayers of his people for his glory. 卍

1. Don Wright, *Operation Japan Prayer Guide*, 5th ed. (Independent Publisher, 2019). There is also a Japanese version of *Operation Japan Prayer Guide*: Don Wright, *オペレーション日本 祈りのガイド*, Japanese ed. (Independent Publisher, 2023). Both books are available on Amazon.

Linda Grimms, along with her husband, Doug, is a JEMA Overseas Associate Member from Kansas, USA. A retired attorney with an MA in biblical and theological studies, she is the prayer facilitator for the Rural Japan Outreach prayer time.

Writing that stands on its own

It's important to do our best to ensure what we write is not misunderstood by our readers

I've read several books recently about writing. One idea that stood out to me is that we need "to write as if your sentences will be orphaned."¹

"Once our sentences are written and sent out into the world to be read, they are on their own. Most of us cling to a residual belief that we will still be there, hovering over the reader as she reads, to explain, when she stumbles over our words, what we really meant. We won't. . . . Writing a sentence is . . . hard because you have to arrange them in such a way that they can be deciphered in your absence."²

Of course, the idea that sentences are orphans is an exaggeration. Sentences are generally read in the context of other sentences. Yet how often have you wished you could go with your writing to explain it to readers and to answer their questions? The reality is that we can't. Most of the time our writing needs to stand on its own, without us.

This is where we need to be especially aware of our audience. What will they understand? What will they stumble over? That's not always easy to figure out, especially if we're writing for a magazine like *Japan Harvest*, where the audience comes from a myriad of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

So how do we figure out if our writing is going to be understood by others? Here are some ideas:

- Ask another person, perhaps one who somewhat represents your intended audience, to read what you've written and give you honest feedback. A couple of years ago, I edited a fiction book about a military chaplain. I gave a lot of feedback to the author, a former military chaplain, about what a civilian audience would probably not understand.
- Read your work out loud. This is a good way to figure out where a reader might stumble, where further explanation is required, or where a different word or phrase would work better.
- Grow your own understanding of what words and phrases are used and understood by people in your audience. Naturally, this is easier if your audience uses the same English as you. If you are writing a prayer letter, it's worth remembering that your audi-

ence possibly won't understand the common Japanese phrases you use with other missionaries here.

- Read books, articles, and other writing from different cultural perspectives. Be sure to read current writing, not just writing from several decades ago, so that you get a sense of what is current English.
- Read across different genres. If you spend a lot of your time reading theological or academic writing, you will probably struggle to write something in a different genre (like an article for *Japan Harvest* or a prayer letter).
- Stay away from colloquial phraseology and words that are narrow in usage. For example, an international audience would probably struggle if I write "I went down to Bunnings for a sausage sizzle." Better writing might be "I went to a fundraiser where they were selling barbecued sausages on bread."
- Anticipate your readers' questions and answer them early rather than leave them wondering. For example, at the start of this article, I didn't tell you the names of all the books I've read, nor why I've been reading them. I got straight to the point I wanted to make.
- Use straightforward language and shorter, rather than longer, sentences. Shorter sentences are easier to get right and easier to read.

Writing is an intimate act, and publishing it can feel like you lose control of your words. Therefore, we need to do our best to ensure that our writing will be understood by most people who happen upon it. **JH**

1. Verlyn Klinkenborg, "The Trouble with Intentions," *New York Times*, <https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/24/the-trouble-with-intentions/> (September 24, 2012).
2. Joe Moran, *First You Write a Sentence. : The Elements of Reading, Writing . . . and Life* (London: Viking, 2018), 24–25.

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



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