



Reaching Children and Teens

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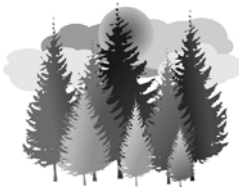
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January

WIM Kanto Winter Day of Prayer

January 16, 2025
Ochanomizu Christian Center

February

JEMA Connect

February 17-19, 2025
Ochanomizu Christian Center



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

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



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Managing Editor: Wendy Marshall (wmarshall@jema.org)
Associate Editors: Rachel Hughes, Ariane Peveto
Editorial Assistants: Elena Kua, Jackie Peveto, Jenn Bello, Hallur Mortensen, David McIntyre
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JEMA
#204 OCC Bldg., 2-1 Kanda Surugadai
Chiyoda Ku, Tokyo 101-0062
Tel: 03-3295-1949 Fax: 03-3295-1354
Email: jema-info@jema.org
Website: jema.org

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Reaching children and teens

This topic, in many ways, is the opposite of the one we focused on in the Spring 2023 issue—ministry in an ageing society. The statistics I quoted in that editorial showed us that Japan is the “oldest” nation in the world. I realised that the flip side of that is that the percentage of children in this country must be one of the smallest in the world: in fact, statistics from the United Nations in 2022 say that it’s at the bottom of the table—only South Korea has a smaller percentage of children than Japan. In 2022, children aged 0–14 in Japan made up 11.62% of the Japanese population (South Korea had 11.57%), so only about one in ten Japanese people are 14 or under.¹ That, of course, doesn’t mean that ministry to children is less important, but perhaps it means that one of the reasons we see fewer children in churches is in part because there is such a low percentage of them in society.

I did some research prior to writing this editorial, seeking to clearly identify the issues facing Japanese society in relation to their young people, and I discovered that “Japan has the highest poverty rate of single-parent families (56 percent) and the highest share of single mothers in the labour force of all industrialised countries.”² This probably doesn’t come as a surprise to those who know Japan well. It was good to be reminded that in recent years, *Japan Harvest* has published a couple of translated news articles about churches running community dining halls to address child poverty and those supporting families and children who are at risk of abuse or neglect (Autumn 2016 and Autumn 2018).

Another issue that faces Japan’s young and vulnerable is child trafficking. I have heard of at least three Christian organisations that work in this area in Japan. I encourage you to check out the websites of ZOE Japan or Not for Sale Japan to learn about the exploitation of children and young people in Japan, and find out ways that you can make a difference: <https://www.eng.gozoe.jp/> and <https://notforsalejapan.org/en/>

Young people in this nation struggle with life satisfaction. According to the OECD (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) only “about 24% of 15 year-olds in Japan report being very satisfied with their lives as a whole (compared to an OECD average of 34%), while roughly 16% report being not satisfied with their lives (compared to an average of 12%).”³ And sadly youth suicide increased during the pandemic, with over 500 young people under 18 dying by suicide in 2022, the first time in recorded history that this statistic has been over 500.⁴

Enough statistics! Perhaps you don’t feel this issue is relevant to you. One of our articles will challenge you to think otherwise: Karolina Tenzler ponders why there are so few children in Japanese churches and prompts us to think about how we can change that, even if we don’t feel called specifically to ministry to this age group. In this issue, you will also read about ministries people are doing with children, about resources you can use, and also articles about third culture kids (TCKs). I hope that even if you don’t work with this age group, you will find nuggets of wisdom and be encouraged to see how God is working through others as they serve with the gifts he has given them, or perhaps to be challenged to notice the children on the periphery of your ministry and to think about what you can do to touch their lives too.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Autumn 2024: Listening to Japanese Christians

Winter 2024: Mental Health

(proposals due by July 31)

Spring 2024: The Missionary Life Cycle

(proposals due by October 31)

Summer 2025: Missiology: Theory and Practice

(proposals due by January 31)

1. “Percent children – Country rankings,” The Global Economy.com, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/percent_children/ (accessed March 7, 2024).
2. Nana Oishi, “Suicide, under-employment and poverty: the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Japan,” *Melbourne Asia Review*, no. 5, <https://melbourneasiareview.edu.au/increasing-suicides-pseudo-employment-and-hidden-poverty-the-gendered-impacts-of-covid-19-in-japan/> (January 3, 2021).
3. “How does Japan compare on child well-being?” OECD Child Well-Being Data Portal Country Factsheet: Japan, https://www.oecd.org/els/family/CWBBDP_Factsheet_JPN.pdf (November 2017).
4. Tomoe Ishikawa, “Suicides top 500 among young students for 1st time ever,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14861109> (March 14, 2023).

Grandpa and Gr

By Chris Sadowitz

Taking a ministry position of vulnerable weakness for God's glory

The way we carry out gospel ministry—God's ministry—to children, teens, and adults is of vital importance. Unfortunately, the “how” of ministry is often colored by our ethnic, theological, and home church cultures. For example, my American and church cultures often suggest that ministry done from a position of power, whether it be economic, technological, lingual, or educational, is best. However, over the last 30 years of ministry in Japan, God has graciously taught us that a ministry position of weakness is better.

Soccer in the park

If we were seeking to do ministry with kids and teens by attracting and wowing people, Donna and I would fail miserably. Let's face it, being 61 and 60 respectively, we have nothing of ourselves that impresses the youth of today. In fact, we have every excuse not to play soccer with kids in the park: “We're too old,” “Japanese grandparents don't do this,” “we might get hurt,” “we can't understand them,” “they will laugh at us,” and more. These excuses have some validity, as we have experienced them in various ways. And yet these weaknesses have become the very vehicle for God to get great glory.

A few years ago when God said, “Hey, Chris and Donna, why not play soccer in the park near the church and get your exercise with kids?” we began to lug our portable goals, cones, and balls to the park weekly. We almost

always start with a story from the tract called *The Happy Letter*¹ and explain topics such as God, Jesus, creation, sin and forgiveness, and purpose for life. Sometimes we even sing and pray, and often we invite them to church. Next comes the fun as boys and girls, beginners and more experienced kids, join the ranks of those who want to play with these two old foreigners! We are blessed and bemused at how something so simple can bring such joy and meet so many needs, even beyond the spiritual ones. Kids long for acceptance, love, and simply time to be noticed. We are also humbled to be noticed, as even on non-soccer days, kids seeing us walking in the park will run to us with greetings, smiles, and affirmation of attendance at the next soccer day.

With little spiritual fruit that can be seen, some may wonder why soccer, or why kids? In our later years, God is enabling us to take a long view of ministry (see 2 Peter 3:9). While we cannot always see spiritual outcomes, we are always encouraged to continue when kids greet us at the park with words like “Soccer *Jiji*, (Grandpa), we are here early today for the Happy Letter!” Or “Miss Donna, I read the whole Happy Letter, and today I brought friends to hear it too.”

In our minds, we enter ministry

with vulnerable weakness because the park is their turf. We are using a vehicle for ministry that they like and that they can relate to. When I teach English, I am operating more in my comfort zone and from a position of power, as I am good and able in English. In soccer, not so. These bodies can only do so much. With kids and teens, not so. Our ears can only hear so much, and our minds can only understand so much. Oh, to be able to understand everything that is going on around us is often our heart's cry, but God still says, “Go be with kids at the park . . . and stop whining.”

An old friend returns

At this year's Valentine's Day church outreach, many attended, but one person was exceptionally exciting for us. Yuri, now a third-year junior high school student, showed up and asked, “Do you remember me? In fifth grade, I used to play soccer with you at the park.” Here five years later, Yuri shows up at our evangelistic event after being invited and brought by a new attendee at our church. This attendee was a childhood friend and schoolmate of Yuri's mother, and they had not seen each other for 30 years! God's ways are beyond our ways and marvelous!

Being at the park and playing soccer with kids has yielded



andma Soccer

numerous contacts and given us ministry opportunities beyond the park. At the above-mentioned Valentine's Day event, special music was provided by a young man in his mid-thirties who teaches kids' soccer at the park from time to time. After the event, he asked us to officiate at his wedding in the fall and invited us to speak about God even though he himself is not a Christian yet.

Vulnerable weakness

The difference between operating with power (think human accomplishments) or vulnerable weakness (think reliance on God) in ministry can be seen in the two letters Paul penned to the believers in Corinth. Here the cross is used as a foil to the two competing ministry power methodologies that were in vogue at the time. Greeks valued wisdom expressed through oratory skill. Paul proposed the foolishness of God in the message of the cross. Jews demanded a sign. They wanted a ministry validated with power. Paul countered with a crucified Messiah, a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor. 1:18–25). To us, teaching English seems to be ministry done with power, as it puts the one who must learn it at a disadvantage. Jesus did not say that Japanese must learn English to come to him. In our case, we like sports but are not professional in any sense of the word, nor do we expect the kids and teens to be great. We come alongside them and offer them time, attention, and love in a land where not much of that seems to be happening.

In the beginning of this article, I suggested that how we do ministry is of vital importance. Adopting the practice of vulnerable weakness (in our case, the ability to be laughed at by kids and not understanding their words or feelings) is a God-approved and validated way to carry out his ministry and mission. In other words, fear concerning our inabilities, age, or lack of resources should not stop us from trying something in ministry. The more we lack, the more God infuses that opportunity with his power so that he gets the glory. God's Word gives us a credible basis for which to enter any ministry boldly despite our many inadequacies and weaknesses. This basis is to adopt, in thought and practice, a ministry that is at home in God-dependent vulnerable weakness: "We can do ministry and mission through small, insignificant ways, in failure, in suffering, in obscurity, focusing on God's relationship building matrix towards people."²

In recent years, I volunteered for the reading program at a local elementary school and got to read stories of my choice to various grades. I used the Children's Bible and told them that these were true stories and not made-up ones. As at the park, children were receptive, listened well, and even had questions. I attribute this to God keeping his word to us that he will bring the increase though we may not see it at present. Ministry from positions of power ask questions like who's the famous speaker, how many attended, how big was the event, and so on. If asked how we validate spending time at

the park playing with kids, my answer is that we don't have to validate it. It is God, not statistics, who validates ministry methodology. He works over the long term. This long-term orientation to ministry and hope may seem weak to those who support us or to those we are accountable to, but D. A. Carson reminds us, "We must return again and again to the cross of Jesus Christ [weakness to Jews and foolishness to Greeks] if we are to take the measure of our Christian living, our Christian service, our Christian ministry."³

Soccer with kids and teens in the park is ministry done in vulnerable weakness. It is a weakness of venturing out of our comfort zone and away from human abilities. It is a weakness born of relinquishment of fame, name, and accomplishments while trusting in God to keep our bodies moving and rust from setting in. God validates this just as he validated what happened on the cross. God uses human weakness to do his ministry so that he gets much glory. **JH**

1. Yada Kanta 矢田貫太「ハッピーレター」[The Happy Letter], 3rd ed. (Japan: Glory Books, 2012).
2. Christopher Sadowitz and Jim Harries, eds., *Paul Planted, Apollos Watered, but God: Vulnerable Weakness in Ministry and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2023), 40.
3. D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 13.

Chris Sadowitz (DMin), along with his wife, Donna, is a missionary with the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism serving in Miyazaki Prefecture. There, they co-pastor Miyakonojo Christian Center along with their missionary son, Daniel Sadowitz.



Reaching children is a lifestyle

By Karolina Tenzler

If faith is a natural part of daily life, it will reach kids

The youngest Japanese member of our church is 49 years old.

It is an evangelical church situated in Kitami, a city in eastern Hokkaido. Although on the church member list one can find some younger people, they are the grown children of current members and now live far away.

Thus our church community is missing four generations: kids, teens, and people in their twenties and thirties. While Kitami is the biggest city in the Okhotsk region, it has lost over 10% of its population in the past decade. The small engineering university and available jobs here simply cannot compete with the opportunities of the big cities. However, that is not the real problem.

Even when the now grown children were younger, they rarely took part in church life. From middle school on, kids in Japan are extremely busy with school and social activities. In addition, church activities are often not oriented towards children. My husband and I observed the weekly program for children in several churches and were surprised to see they were copies of the adult service, including a sermon and even a money offering. The sermon was hard to follow with lots of unexplained “Christianese” words. No pictures, no engaging material. Last year, we witnessed a Christmas celebration for kids at a church in a neighboring city. The Christmas story was the low point of the event; the kids’ attention was lost within one minute. Those same kids had just intently followed a Japanese folklore story from a gorgeous picture book presented before, accompanied by all the atmosphere-creating Japanese onomatopoeia.

The same people who can tell a story in an exciting way often seem to forget all the rules of engaging children when it comes to the Bible. For me, it is a sign that the reality of the Bible message has not fully reached their hearts yet. It has not penetrated their daily reality so they can share it in a natural way.

From what I’ve observed, the Bible and God belong to the “church bubble” but barely reach the daily life of many Japanese Christians. This becomes painfully evident in how both are handled within the family. In our ministry, we engage with university students and have attended two KGK (Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai, i.e., Fellowship of Christian Students) student retreats so far. Students who come from Christian homes tell a very similar story; they attended church until the beginning of primary school, then got busy and barely went to church for six to ten years. However, what truly shocked me was that they also had never read the Bible for themselves.

My dad, formerly an atheist, became a believer when he was forty. When he turned to God, he understood that God is life, knowing God is life, and the Bible teaches true wisdom. He acted on this conviction by studying the Bible, excitedly sharing with his children what he had learned, getting us age-appropriate study materials, and helping us grow in our walk with God. When there were difficult decisions to be made or life’s questions to be tackled, he would pray and consult the Bible and, by his example, taught us to do the same. It was important to him, so it was important to teach this to his children.

Hearing that many students from Christian homes had opened the Bible for the first time at a KGK event made me think: “How do their parents view God and the Bible?” I am sure that loving Christian Japanese parents strive to teach their children how to grow up well and become responsible adults. They do not leave that to the education system or teachers outside the family. In the same way, a relationship with God and the Bible should be taught first and foremost at home. It simply needs to be the foundation of daily family life. It is not about theoretical teaching or knowledge about God. It is knowing God personally and living with him.

It all boils down to this question: How can a relationship with God and his Word become a reality for the Japanese? How can Japanese children be reached in a way that they understand that knowing God is life itself? It is only possible through the Holy Spirit and people who live with God and share their life with the Japanese as Jesus did with his disciples. It is vital that missionaries or pastors not only teach about God, but help the Japanese to personally connect with God and walk with him, trusting him in all the situations of their lives. Through their personal, daily walk with God, such Japanese believers will be real-life examples who naturally pass their faith on to their children and fellow countrymen as exactly that—life! **JH**

Karolina Tenzler, born in Uzbekistan, moved to Germany at the age of eight. With an MS in mathematics and an MA in business administration, she was called to mission in 2017 and has been working with her husband as OMF missionaries in Japan since 2020.

Why tell Bible stories?

The epic stories of the Bible still have the power to transform kids and help them grow in Christ

By Helene Ramsay

“My child loves Jesus and loves to hear stories about Jesus, but he does not cooperate at Sunday School.” This was written on the sign-up form for summer Bible camp—next to my child’s name. To this day, he does not willingly participate in games, songs, or crafts. But I have one consolation. He loves to hear Bible stories and still brings me his children’s Bible each night to read together. He engages with the stories and asks thoughtful questions. It’s a comfort to me because I know that the little stories of the Bible and the big story of God and his people are the most important information he could ever hear.

It might be tempting to keep giving kids the bare facts of the gospel to try to get them over the line into the kingdom more quickly. It might be reassuring to our system-oriented adult brains to summarise all the doctrine we want kids to know and drill it until they can repeat it verbatim.

But what our kids need to know is the person Jesus Christ—as revealed throughout all of scripture—through stories that anticipate him, stories he told, and stories that unpack what it all means. I want kids to know Jesus, and that’s why, at home and at church, I tell Bible stories.



God speaks through stories

Story is the major vehicle God uses to teach throughout the Bible. Even the letters and wisdom literature are woven through with narrative. God knows and understands the brains he has given us, and those brains learn well through stories. He gives us many stories; they are mysterious, puzzling, vivid, humorous, creative, and captivating. This is how he reveals himself.

Children learn through stories

Children don’t learn abstract thought until they reach puberty. Their world stays in the concrete until that time, and for the most part, they lack the ability to take an abstract idea and apply it elsewhere. It is a kindness to give them stories that make the invisible God both visible and concrete.

Avoid double translation

When learning language, we were taught to avoid double translation. Rather than learning that りんご (*ringo*) = apple = the sweet red fruit we eat, you should go straight from りんご to the fruit that’s in your hand. That way, our brain makes the connection efficiently without translating.

In the same way, we want to teach kids efficiently. For example, we may want to teach kids about redemption. We may explain about buying something back. We may tell the story of Ruth and the sacrificial way Boaz stepped in, endangering his own legacy so that Ruth’s future could be secure and her family restored to Israel. But this is double translation. Simply set out with the goal of teaching the story of Ruth. Then kids will have a beautiful, concrete picture of redemption that, once they are old enough, they can overlay on the word “redemption.” You may or may not use the word “re-



demption” in your lesson, but you will set kids up to understand what it means in time.

Avoid rote memorization

While leading a small group of kids, my husband asked, “What is sin?” One child responded with a word-for-word quote from the catechism.

Curious, my husband asked her what it meant. “I don’t know,” she replied. He explained simply for the group. We appreciate that, God willing, this girl will grow into an understanding of the words she has memorised. But we are all too aware of how

all too aware of how



children can learn to look and sound Christian while their hearts remain far from the Lord. The Bible itself warns us that rote learning can become a substitute for real spiritual formation.

I can’t guarantee that Bible stories will bring your kids to spiritual maturity. But I believe that we need to give our kids a love for God’s Word, teaching them to hear it, puzzle over it, laugh when it’s funny, and cry when it’s sad. As they do, they can begin putting all the pieces together like a puzzle and working out where they fit in the grand narrative that God is still at work in.

It is my hope and prayer that in sharing Bible stories with kids, they can stay mesmerised by the God who reveals himself through stories.

Kids love Bible stories

At church, we help out with a kids’ English class that always includes a Bible time in Japanese. One time, a guest read to the kids from the *Jesus Storybook Bible* the story of Noah in English with translation. I quietly rolled my eyes, wondering why couldn’t he have prepared something more interesting and shorter. But when he finished, an excited little girl said, “Hey, that’s not the end! That book is really thick. There are heaps more stories in there. Read more!” We are regularly thrilled that kids love English class and not for the candy, games, teachers, or even for the English itself—they love hearing Bible stories.

God has spoken to us, his children, through stories. We speak to children through stories too. In knowing these stories, we know the God who spoke them and can come to rightly worship him. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Helene Ramsay is a CMS missionary seconded to Mission to the World, growing kids ministry in her local church in Chiba and beyond. She longs to see great kids ministry resources being developed and shared in Japanese.



How do you get your daughter to obey?

How parenting questions at yōchien turned into a far-reaching ministry

By Barbara Bauman

When mothers at my child’s yōchien (kindergarten) asked me, “How do you get your daughter to obey?” I didn’t know how to answer.

I knew my daughter didn’t obey all the time. In fact, her strong will sometimes put me at my wit’s end. But it made me ask myself:

Why are they asking?

What are they seeing in our interactions?

What are some of the biggest challenges in parenting that Japanese moms face?

*Do they have reliable resources to help?
Do they know that their children are unique and special and created by God, who loves every human being?*

I began to feel a lot of compassion for these women, knowing that they love their children just as much as any mother. I also knew that for many of them, their husbands were so involved in their companies that they were essentially absent when it came to being involved in the care and discipline of

their children (this was around 1991 in Tokyo).

Then, in 1996, two women in the church where my husband and I were partnering asked me out of the blue if we could start a class on parenting. God had provided the right moment! I now had the opening to gather several mothers together to talk about this topic. I was excited to think that the passion God had been growing in my heart might bear fruit.

Creating a curriculum

My Japanese ministry partner and I began to develop lessons in both English and Japanese and write them out by hand. We based them on what Japanese moms like those at my daughter's *yōchien* shared with me as their greatest needs in parenting. We tried to make the lessons Bible-based and principle-focused with an emphasis on discerning how the principles fit into Japanese culture.

A highlight from that first group of women who met in my apartment was a not-yet-believer saying, “This week, I tried the approach with my kids that we talked about at our last meeting, and it worked! Please teach me more about what the Bible has to say about raising kids and living life.”

Before long, more women wanted to join the class. Having decided in the beginning that we wanted to keep groups small enough for women to be able to openly share with one another (ideally, no more than five or six), we multiplied by creating a new group when it expanded beyond six.

Multiplication

Eventually, two of the Christian women in the original group started groups in their own homes, using copies of the handwritten notes. Then missionary women began hearing about how this ministry was growing, and some of them also asked if they could use the lesson notes.

By the time we realized we couldn't keep up with the multiplication of



classes, we had a notebook full of handwritten lessons that we decided to share in book form as a leader's guide with outlines at the end of each lesson that could be copied and passed out to participants.

That led to the first edition of *見つけた子育てのよろこび / Discovering the Joy of Parenting* in 2002 as a spiral-bound A4 size book.

What became clear was that every participant wanted their own copy of the book. The first print run of 600 copies sold out in a bit over a year, then we printed a second run and a third. We then reduced the size to B5, used a standard glue binding, and dropped the price.

By 2017, we had gone through six printings with around 10,000 books in the hands of Japanese mothers. It was time for an update, so keeping the same principle-based content, we totally revised the book and released a new edition in 2019 with three new lessons on managing money, time, and technology. We had to do a second printing in 2023.

Reaching moms and children all over the world

Even as classes proliferated around Japan and among groups of expatriate Japanese mothers in other countries, I continued holding small classes in my home. Usually, we would meet around the dining room table while drinking tea. But in groups of mothers with babies and toddlers, we would meet sitting on the living room floor with the children playing in the middle. This gave us real-life situations (e.g., not sharing toys) that we would learn how to deal with on the spot.

But teaching biblical parenting skills was only one goal of the parenting ministry. To my great joy, as we heard about classes around Japan and other places in the world, we were also hearing about women who were committing their lives to Jesus as a result of learning about parenting through this resource.

When I started meeting with a group of six mothers in my apartment in 1996, did I have any of the rest of this story in mind? Not in my wildest dreams!

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph. 3:20–21 NIV)”.

After studying and teaching parenting for so many years, as I write this article, the question I need to ask myself is how did I apply these principles in my own life and parenting? Did my strong-willed daughter learn to obey?



The truth is, I personally learned so many things from other moms through being open and honest about my own parenting as I shared biblical principles with them. Even though I made many mistakes along the way, God has been gracious. He redeems our mistakes. Today, my daughter is a seminary graduate and ministers bilingually as a co-pastor at an international church in Japan!

見つけた子育てのよろこび / Discovering the Joy of Parenting is a fully bilingual resource (English on the left-hand page, Japanese on the right) available at Christian bookstores in Japan and through Family Forum Japan (<https://ffj-shop.ocnk.net/product/44>) and Amazon Japan (<https://tiny.one/kosodate>). **JH**

Book cover image submitted by author

Barbara Bauman, with her husband, Gary, has served with A3 (formerly Asian Access) since 1988. Parenting ministry is a passion she didn't expect, but she enjoys having tea with moms to discuss raising children.

The Bible's not boring—so we shouldn't be either!

By Rachel Hughes

Creative ways to convey the truths of God's Word

Once I went to a youth leaders' training event where the speaker held his Bible up high, saying something like, "These are words of the God of the universe. How dare we let them be boring!" Since then, I've been convinced that whatever we do in our ministry programs, the Bible time should be the highlight and definitely not *the boring bit*.

Why be creative in Bible teaching?

Firstly, God is creative, and it's his Word we're passing on.

I passionately believe that the Bible's message is relevant and understandable for all people of every age. We have myriad examples of teaching styles demonstrated in the Bible: instructions for rote learning, object lessons, trial and error of experience, allegory and parables, philosophical debate, and artistic expression. In his ultimate act of teaching, God himself became a person. The Word was a living, breathing child, teen, and adult. Jesus expressed himself in many ways and used a variety of methods to teach his disciples, none of which involved a worksheet, but at various times did involve pointing at flowers, picking up children, and turning over tables.

Secondly, the Bible is more like a life-skills manual than a textbook to study and memorise. At school, everyone liked home economics because we got to create something (often delicious) and learn skills that we could actually use at home. The purpose of the Bible is to change people so that we can live as God's children. If we teach Bible stories like chapters in a textbook, kids and teens may end up thinking of the Bible as something that is studied in church but irrelevant to their daily lives. Therefore, our approach should

be more like teaching a home economics or wood-work class. Jesus practically demonstrated concepts like love and showed how being God-like is something that happens in the everyday, ordinary aspects of life and relationships. God sets us the example of teaching and communicating in a way that is practical, relatable, and applied to the everyday of human life.

Preparation

The process I follow begins with the same preparation for any teaching—first understand the passage. Consider the passage in context of the overall Bible storyline, the original situation (who is telling whom and why?), how it points to Jesus, and how it relates to us now.

Secondly, I think about my students. The Bible is multilayered in meaning, and you can read the same passage multiple times and each time discover new aspects of God, more about yourself, be convicted, encouraged, or find new sources of joy. From the simplest reading for the youngest child to the understanding of the wisest elder, there are many possible teaching points that could be conveyed. Just pick one. What is going to be helpful for these particular students in their context? It might be what we can know of God's character from this story. It might be how people trusted God despite not seeing how he was at work. It might be what sin is like and how it is to be fixed.



The third step is to find a connection between the Bible passage and us. If there are people in the story, does it tell us how they felt? If it's a historical passage and you were there at that time, what would you see, feel, hear, touch, taste? Did someone in the passage make a mistake? What are the experiences—can we relate? Is there wisdom for daily life? Does it tell us what God is like? Does it tell us what people are like? Then, consider your students and whether they've had any of the same feelings, senses, mistakes, experiences, need for wisdom, need to know God's character, or need to learn about people. At this point, I'm considering how to help them see that the Bible accounts are of real people just like us. They had feelings and responses just like us. They probably didn't like the smell of old bananas, liked hanging out with their friends, and some of them didn't like broccoli! If the people then were amazed at Jesus's teaching, how can we help our students feel like that too? Is there a way to help them feel the reality of how amazing Jesus's teaching was and still is?

Think outside the box!

Step four is to use an illustration that helps the kids to understand the bible passage and its connection to us. While a preacher tells his illustrations to help a congregation understand the nuance of a passage, we get to do the illustration as an object lesson all together.

For example, in Luke 8:40–56, Jesus healed the bleeding woman and Jairus's daughter. Jesus emphasises that someone has touched him when the bleeding woman comes to him. He takes the hand of Jairus's girl, who they say is dead. Both acts would have made him unclean, but Jesus made it clear that he would act lovingly to people who society would have considered "gross." So a game where people are blindfolded and challenged to touch various gross things and identify what they are will not only be fun and hilarious but will help all the kids realise what a big deal it was that Jesus told everyone that the woman touched him and that he took the dead girl's hand. The kids can understand how the audience would have felt when they saw the sick woman and realised Jesus welcomed her to engage with him: "Ew! Her?" And then maybe the kids might be able to identify people in their own lives about whom people might think "Ew? That kid?" and realise those are the people Jesus loves and who we ought to love too.



Assembling memory verses

More creative ideas

How about a chemistry experiment where tainted water becomes clear? If there is an experience in the passage that our students don't have, can we help them have it? Can we help them feel like a lost sheep in a cardboard box maze? Can we go to the park with a giant box and create a "belly of a whale" for them to sit in (complete with stinky kelp)? Can we treat them like slaves with a series of hardworking challenges, then let them escape only to come to a river they cannot cross, only for a path to become open at the last minute? Or it can be smaller things like trying to control a ping-pong ball in a straight line with a handheld fan blowing against it, then consider that Jesus controlled the wind of a storm. Each of these examples is seeking to answer the question: How can I help these kids experience or act out the reality and truth of this Bible passage?

Finally, if you're able, try to use each part of the program—songs, memory verse, craft, games, etc.—to teach about the same point in a variety of ways. If the story is the lost sheep, you could print out the story on numbered pages that you hide around the space and have kids search to find each page and read the story in order. You could make a memory verse bottle with the words or phrases of the memory verse on a card inside, along with coloured dry rice and a tiny toy sheep so kids can turn the bottle until they find each word in order. You could sing "Amazing Grace," emphasising the line "I once was lost but now am found." You could play hide-and-seek.

Long-term planning

If you can, think about the program for the whole term and choose an entire book of the Bible to work through or a series such as people who met Jesus. Each lesson, have something that you build on so



Bible story playing cards

that the kids are always being reminded of what came before (so they can see that Bible stories come with context). For example, if you're doing a Bible overview, each lesson could have a giant puzzle piece that connects to the next. Or you could add to a poster of what we learnt about God each lesson. You could have pages that each student gradually builds into a book or make collectible cards for characters in the series.

And a word of encouragement—I get most of my ideas from other friends or the internet! If you know of a good object lesson, why not share with friends who teach Sunday school in another church? I find many great ideas on Pinterest (you'll find more ideas if you search in English). You don't have to recreate the wheel. Pray also that God will help you to make this story come alive for the kids and that he would supply you with great ideas to communicate its truths.

God's Word is the most important message any of us will ever hear, so let's make it the most memorable part of every program! **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Rachel Hughes lives with her husband and two sons in Amagasaki and is involved in a variety of ministries including kids' music and English classes, monthly evangelistic family events, youth group, Kansai WIM, and the Karuizawa Refresh conference.

Community Festivals— Reaching Children, Reaching Families

By Marty Woods

Intentional, welcoming relationships build community and create impact

I recall being at an opening night festival of the Sydney Olympics in 2000 when someone commented, “Look, the Christians have left their church buildings and come out into the open!” I knew this was what I wanted to commit myself to—the church being at the heart of the community, showing and helping those who don’t know him to taste and experience what the Kingdom is like.

We are born with two desires: for purpose and meaning and, secondly, to belong and experience community. Larry Crabb captures it this way: “As surely as birds were made to fly and fish to swim, we were made for community.”¹ We all have an innate desire to be known and to belong, to be seen and recognised for who we are.

Connections and trust often take a long time to build, yet around the world and specifically across Japan, Open Crowd Community Festivals provide an opportunity to build connections and trust, a chance for everyone to feel valued and to be seen. As we say at festivals, “No strangers here—just friends you haven’t met.” People can arrive defensive, questioning who we are, yet a few hours later, they leave smiling and asking how they can connect.

Goals, values, and characteristics

Festivals are a celebration, a party, a wedding feast (Matt. 22:2). Celebration comes from the human spirit. With the help of the Spirit, we build community and attract others to join in. The more we are free, the more others are free. This is the secret, the “fairy dust” of festivals. Once it is there, people taste a freedom—“Where the

Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17 NIV).

Jesus says in John 15:15, “I no longer call you servants . . . instead I call you friends” (GNT). Festivals provide a possibility for all those who turn up to become friends with Jesus. We find that it happens more through what people see and feel than what anyone says to them. They witness and experience the Kingdom being lived out.

The three values we emphasise at festivals are generosity, hospitality, and kindness. God has been generous to us, so we make everything at a festival available for free. This creates a spirit of hospitality—people feeling welcomed. The value of kindness results in people not only having their day impacted; it may lead to a life transformed. We remind our team as we begin, “People matter—build them up and help them grow.”

How do we most effectively do this? We have discovered that rather than making the focus on entertainment or activities, we make children the stars. We run games at the centre of the festival that focus on children. We encourage our team to learn the children’s names and to celebrate them whenever they can. By ensuring that celebration and fun are at the heart, people can quickly connect with team members.

What happens after a festival?

Events never change the world. Commitment does. An Open Crowd Festival by itself won’t bring change to a community. What we do to follow up is the key element in making a lasting impact. We ensure that our next steps are both well-planned and clear to everyone. At our church at Hongodai, Yokohama, we run festivals regularly, inviting children to fun day camps and

to our weekly JoyJoy Chapel, a fun Sunday children’s program.

We carefully choose the location of our festivals. If at all possible, we run a festival at a venue where people in our community meet. Jesus met a woman who needed restoring at the community centre of her time—a well (John 4). Discipleship began for her the moment Jesus asked her for a drink of water.

Where is your well? Outside a supermarket? A park or sports ground? A local school or kindergarten? Choose a place where people gather or pass by. We run our festivals outside the local train station. I smile when I see how our local council actually invites us to run festivals as they see the impact it makes in our community.

By knowing your community and its resources, combined with praying and building a committed team, an Open Crowd Festival may open new doors for you. C. S. Lewis said, “The little knots of Friends who turn their backs on the ‘World’ are those who really transform it.”² Pray for and build this small group of friends—committed, passionate, and willing to have a go.

To run a festival, we need a Kingdom vision and a heart for transforming our community. Festivals create strategic moments to meet people, specifically children from the community. Enter your community and begin a process of making disciples. **JH**

Japan International Sports Partnership is willing to run training to help your church understand the heart of a festival and to give you keys to make it work. For training sessions and resources, see www.open-crowdfestivaltraining.com. The Japanese website can be found at www.opencrowdfestivaljapan.com. You can also contact us at jisp2024@gmail.com.

Here are two stories where festivals led to two people becoming disciples, which is always our goal. We intentionally seek to find people of peace who are ready to join the Kingdom.

I am Ai. I am a member of Hongodai Christ Church in Yokohama, Japan. I started attending church when I was in the third grade of elementary school, exactly six years ago, when a friend invited me to a festival.

In my early grades of elementary school, I was very frail and rarely had a chance to go outside. In the third grade, I started to feel better and had more opportunities to play with friends. One day, I was invited to a community festival. I felt that if I could play with my friends, there was no reason to refuse, so I joined the festival. As a third grader who had rarely been out of the house, I was just amazed. I still vividly recall the many children, the clowns running around barefoot, the lady enthusiastically MCing the centre game, and the lady who painted hearts on faces. The most memorable moment was when a very funny man with a beard told us the story of God and Jesus's cross. I was so impressed with the story of God and the cross of Jesus. After the festival was over, the funny guy with the beard invited me to come to the JoyJoy Chapel (kids' service). The next day, I attended my first JoyJoy Chapel service. There, I learned for the first time that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and that He loved us even to the point of dying for us!

From there, I started going every week to JoyJoy and then invited many of my friends to church and church festivals. At first, I was embarrassed, but I wanted as many people as possible to know about God. I want everyone to be saved. I tried my best. God gave me courage, and I was able to pray and invite my friends without giving up.

I am Takuya Hashimoto. I hadn't had much to do with God except for studying at a Christian-based university. That was a long time ago now, and what I learnt there faded from my memory. Years later at the kindergarten that my son went to, we met the parents of my son's friend who were missionaries from Germany. The wife invited our family to a festival the local church was running. I was impressed, even surprised, by what was happening there. I watched people getting close to each other, becoming friends. The lady who runs the kindergarten where my son went asked if I could help with the barbecue. It helped me to feel like I belonged. I was contributing.

I was excited by how our kids really enjoyed the festival. There were many attractions, games, and, at the end, dancing. I met many people that day who are now good friends. After the festival, the children's worker invited me to cook again at the next festival. I accepted. People on that day continued to be very friendly and kind to me. I could talk easily with them. The children's worker invited us as a family to JoyJoy Chapel. My kids all wanted to go, so we went as a whole family. I helped play with the younger kids. Here, I saw people praying for the first time. It was all very new to me.

The German missionaries would often invite us to their home. They listened to our story and answered our questions. My wife and I made commitments. On Easter Sunday in 2020, we were baptised. Our lives were totally changed. My wife and her parents kept telling me how different I was. I realized that baptism [making a commitment to Christ] made me better! Now our whole family is at church. My eldest daughter enjoys being at the Christian school. Her dream is to either become a pastor or a missionary with YWAM.



1. Larry Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A Profound Vision of What the Church Can Be* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1999), 121.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1960), 101.

Photo submitted by author

Marty Woods and his wife, Jenny, work with Japan International Sports Partnership, building teams to run Open Crowd Community Festivals. Marty has been involved in growing these festivals for 36 years. Currently, these festivals are held in over 100 countries.

Going to where the children are

By John Edwards

Building relationships and creating opportunities through daily activities

When we moved to Sendai in 2013, I discovered when jogging one day that children walked to school at the same time each morning (see my Summer 2016 *Japan Harvest* article, “Running as a Ministry”). By consistently running in the area for eight years, I met many children.

In 2019, we moved to another section of Sendai, and I kept up the practice of jogging by the local schools. One of the local mothers I knew encouraged me to run on the grounds of the local middle school where her children attended. The principal approached me, and when I told him my connection to the area, he invited me to run with the students who were practicing for an *ekiden* (long-distance relay race) over the summer break.

Then COVID came to that location, and we were unable to have gatherings. But I still met many children on my jogs. I began to write postcards to the schools to let them know I was praying for them and to thank them for their greetings. Some of the students and staff I met on my jogs thanked me for the encouraging letters. On one occasion, a group of mentally challenged girls I often met when they were walking from their dorm to their high school stopped me, and one of the girls handed me several letters thanking me for greeting them and sending them postcards. I also introduced myself to the crossing guards on the route then greeted them by name each morning. During my last week in that area, I let them know that I would be preaching at the local church one last time. One of the crossing guards came to the worship service with a bag of gifts from the principal of the school to

thank me for greeting the children and sending them encouraging letters.

Getting involved in Obanazawa

Now my wife and I are in Obanazawa in Yamagata Prefecture. There is no church building here. Again, I run by the local elementary school and middle school. On snowy or rainy days, I walk to the school and stand by the front door to greet the children as they arrive to school. The first week of running there, I carried *meishi* (business cards) and introduced myself to the principals and other staff who might be standing in front of the school. My coworker and I also introduced ourselves to the local police, who stopped to question us on our first week running. Now the police sometimes call out a greeting on their patrol car speakers when they see me.

My wife and I have been invited to school events such as *undōkai* (sports days), cross-country ski races, and *imonikai* (an outdoor gathering common in the fall in Tohoku to make and eat a meat and vegetable hotpot). At the middle school *undōkai*, my friend and I were invited to sit with the local VIPs. I was also asked to be a referee of sorts for one of the games.

Being present in daily life

We often see children with their parents at the grocery store or other places. The children introduce us to their parents. (Usually, the children whisper to the parents who we are, and then the parents greet us.)

We live across the street from a park. When children are there, we sometimes go to the park to chat with the children. Often, they ask us to play games with them—tag and dodgeball are most common. There are signs that say the children can't play soccer or baseball because of the fairly busy street on the other side of the park. My wife introduced the children to the game of S-P-U-D, a game we played growing up. She renamed it S-T-O-P, and now children will actually come to our door and ask if we can come out and play with them. It really is funny when a child comes to the door and asks, “Can Sue-chan or John-san come out to play?” My wife also leaves some balls in the outer *genkan* for children to borrow whenever they want.

Getting creative with connections

We have intentionally been moving slowly to gain trust in this new town. However, last November, our Fall 2023 D House interns (see *Japan Harvest*



Summer 2022 article about D House) who were either jogging or walking to the local schools to greet the children started a simple 30-minute children's English time at our house. In the four weeks they did it, they had 13 different children come. More recently, my wife started an English cooking class at our house. Several mothers come and bring their children. I think this will evolve very quickly into a children's outreach ministry, and because of lack of space, we'll probably have to move to a community center.

Before Christmas, I asked the elementary school principal if my wife, coworker, and I would be helpful or distracting if we dressed as Christmas characters before their New Year's break. The principal said the children would love it and that Christmas morning would be best since it was the last day of school before the break. The reaction of the children and staff and parents was remarkable when they saw Santa, Mrs. Claus, and an elf standing by their school to greet them. One little boy ran into my arms to give me (Santa) a hug. From the school, we went to the city office in costume; the reaction among the office workers there was equally as enthusiastic, and we were even taken to the mayor's office.



In February, some of our coworkers in Tokyo came to see us and our ministry in Obanazawa. Just for fun, we went to Tokura Lake Snow Land, a place to sled and play in the snow. A *yōchien* (preschool) class happened to be there. We sledded down the hill with them. One boy right away wanted to sled with one of the young missionaries. They shared a sled several times down the hill. As the group of children was about to board the bus to return



to the *yōchien*, the principal had them thank us in synchronized Japanese style. Then I exchanged *meishi* with him, and he invited us to come play at the *yōchien*.

Intergenerational outreach

In all three locations we've lived in Tohoku, we've volunteered at the local after-school program (called *jidōkan* in Sendai and *gakudō* here in Obanazawa). Sometimes the children will almost fight with each other to be able to be with one of us. Where we live now, one of the *gakudō* teachers is a Christian. We've not only been able to serve by occasionally being there but also by providing various craft supplies (this is something my wife is very good at).

One of the desires of the church we cooperate with is that we reach out to the young people. As the church is primarily made up of people in their sixties and older, they didn't have natural connections to children. However, I had worked with high school students in hi-b.a. for many years, and my wife had been an elementary school and preschool teacher. Through the connections we're making and through the involvement of church members in some of our activities like the English cooking class, the Japanese believers are connecting with the children.

There are many ways to get children to come to where believers are, to come

to the local church. We're planning more of those even now. Additionally, I also think there are numerous opportunities for us to go where children are to initiate relationships, build trust within their community (school, family, etc.), and then create opportunities for more direct communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ. **JH**

Photos submitted by author



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.

YEAH!会

Witnessing God's trustworthiness through the formation of a youth group

By Shan Reed

youth ministry in Japan

“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come” (Psa. 71:18 NIV).

Over years of ministry in Japan, I have heard the statistics of suicide, bullying, and depression among youth in this country. So I have prayed for the people who minister to these precious souls, as well as for the junior and senior high students who love Jesus but may be the only Christian in their class or school. Although I have helped at the denominational level in planning and speaking at our youth camps, I was surprised when God opened the door for me to start a youth group at our church.

It was 2020, and we did not know how the world was about to change. Our sister church across town had just called a new pastor who had two daughters. At our church, one student had just started junior high school and another had just started high school. It seemed like a great time to start a small youth group.

I was willing to start the group. However, I had three questions brewing in my mind:

1. How could I relate to young Japanese students?
2. How would they interact with each other?
3. How could we develop a way for the students to invite friends?

My first question was based on the fact that I had just turned 50 years old, and it had been a long time since I was in high school. One morning, I was reading Psalm 71, and verse 18 jumped out at me. I had been finding new gray hairs every day, and my body was feeling all its 50 years. But the psalmist asks God not to forsake him even when he is old and gray. His desire is to

declare God's power and mighty acts to the next generation. I resonated with these words even as I wondered if I could relate to the students.

I prayed fervently and then offered to start a youth group with the four young people. They were thrilled, which amazed me. Their parents were also thrilled that someone wanted to hang out with their children and talk about Jesus.

Jesus reminded me that it does not matter how old I am or if I can speak Japanese perfectly or if it has been decades since I was a teenager. What matters is that I love the students and let his love pour out of me into them.

The second question for me was how the students would relate to each other. There was one high school boy and three girls of various ages. Would they get along? The students from the two churches had not had many opportunities to interact. Would they sit quietly? Would they talk?

We started with a pizza and movie party. We had a great time and made plans to start meeting once a month. It was 2020, and large church gatherings weren't possible/permitted, and when we were, it was in distanced groups of just a few. Thankfully, we were a small enough group that we could meet, even in our small church, and keep the proper distance.

The first official meeting was a bit quiet, and my wondering started to grow into worry. However, when the snacks came out, everything changed! Food and teenagers are a universal pairing.

As we shared prayer requests at our first meeting, I used shorthand in my notebook, writing the first letters of each one's first name: Y, E, A, H. I thought, *Hey, that would be a fun name*



for our group. We want to remember that being Jesus followers is not all solemn and quiet but also full of fun. So we named ourselves YEAH!会 (“yeah meeting”). Even though some students have since graduated and new ones have joined us, we still use the name.

Our meetings are full of singing, reading the Bible together, sharing what we are learning, prayer, games, and snack time. In the beginning, we had a student who played guitar, so she would accompany us as we sang. We have also used YouTube videos to lead our singing. The students did not seem to be concerned with the accompaniment method. They just enjoyed singing praises together. I was encouraged by their enthusiasm.

I did not have a curriculum to use and again started to wonder





about my relatability. Yet God's word is living, active, and useful for instruction. We found that reading a Bible passage together, sharing what stood out to us and why, and asking any questions we might have about it gave us more than enough applicable material for learning. Through these times, God reassured me that my presence and vulnerability with the students was enough. He also showed me how open the students could be with each other.

Once more, God reminded me that he is always showing us new ways to find and follow him.

Our denomination has a well-established youth ministry with gatherings four times a year. We meet for two one-day gatherings in autumn and winter. Then we have two camps, a one-night camp during spring holidays and a three-day camp during summer holidays. Because we were not able to gather for camps in person from 2020–2022, YEAH!会 became even more important for our local students. God's timing was certainly right on time.

Also, because we had established the youth group at our church, the students were more willing to join in the denominational gatherings when they resumed because they would be attending them with each other. We enjoyed meeting at church

for online gatherings and also riding together, singing, and playing games when in-person gatherings resumed. Here was God reminding me again of his trustworthiness in helping the students to build relationships with each other.

I love one of the traditions of our denominational youth gatherings. At the end of our time, we go around the room, each student and leader sharing what they learned or what encouraged them from that gathering. When I first joined the committee and heard they were going to do this, I was skeptical. But it pleasantly surprised me to

hear the students share their hearts with each other. And when I was the speaker, I was encouraged to hear that they were paying attention! One of my favorite things I heard was from a high school girl attending for the first time. She said, "I learned that I am not the only one!" She had felt so alone as a Christian in her school and neighborhood. Even though these students do not live near each other, these times together encourage them.

I will be returning to the US next year, and at the moment, there is no one to take over the leadership of YEAH!会. As I have been praying about this and about my third question, how students could invite their friends, God showed us another local ministry. A pastor at a church nearby, whom we have known since starting our church, is a local leader for hi-b.a., a high school youth ministry. My former coworker also worked with this ministry.

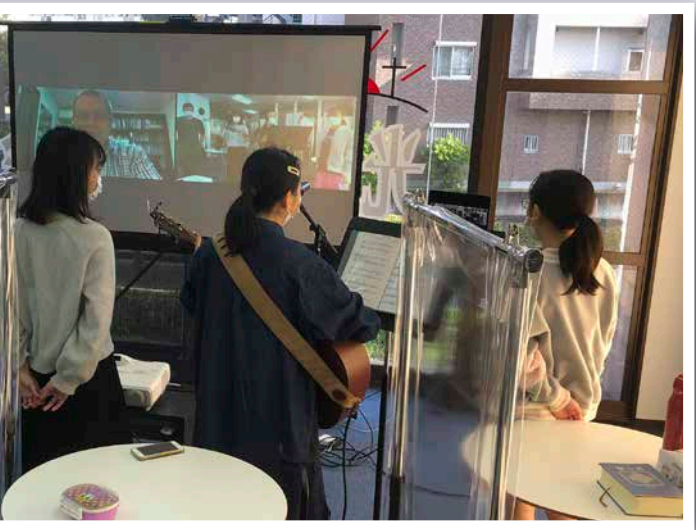
Just as I was starting to write this article, I attended a hi-b.a. meeting with two of my YEAH!会 students. One is a girl who has been attending off and on throughout her first year of high school. The other is a boy who just finished junior high school and will be starting high school soon. He loved the youth gathering and is excited to go back.

Since it was the last meeting of the school year, one of the third-year students was asked to share his testimony. He talked about how he was invited to the meeting by a friend and met Jesus through this ministry. Then the pastor shared about hi-b.a.'s purpose: to connect students from different schools, encourage them in their faith, and for the students to become evangelists in their own schools. My third question was answered.

It has been a joy for me to be part of YEAH!会 and to witness God's work in each student, within our church, and inside my own heart. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

***Shan Reed** (DMin) has been a missionary in Japan since 2001 with North American Baptist Conference and is involved in church planting, women's ministry, youth ministry, and English ministry. She is originally from South Dakota, US.*



We have found YouTube videos from the BibleProject (聖書プロジェクト) to be interesting and helpful in our studies. The first time we watched one of these videos, the students were enthralled and immediately pulled out their phones to look it up for themselves. Sometimes we take turns reading verses, or sometimes we listen to the passage being read through the Drama Bible app (聴くドラマ聖書). The variation in voices adds to the richness of the passage. This is a free app and, again, the students pull out their phones to look it up.



TCKs and Same country,

By Tanya Crossman

When parents aren't aware their kids experience life abroad differently, everyone may end up frustrated

Something I've heard a lot of expat parents say is that their whole family is "in it together" or that they are called together. The basic assumption is that all members of the family go abroad and live overseas together; they are bonded by the same experience. When I hear this, however, I think two things: First, I am so glad you and your kids are on the same team! Second, are you aware that you aren't sharing the same experience?

To explain what I mean, I need to define some confusingly similar acronyms: TCK, ATCK, and TCA.

TCK stands for third culture kid: a young person who has spent a significant part of childhood outside her passport country. ATCK is adult third culture kid: an adult who had a TCK childhood. TCA is third culture adult: an adult who has lived outside his passport country but only as an adult.

Same country, different experiences

An important thing to grasp is that TCKs (who become ATCKs) begin their expat journey as children while TCAs do not live abroad until adulthood.

It might sound subtle, but the difference is actually very significant. The children of expat families are TCKs, but the parents are usually TCAs. They are living in the same country, but while parents experience and process

the challenge of cross-cultural living as adults, TCKs grow up and form their identities in the middle of it. Essentially, the parents and children live in the same country, but they are affected differently.

Overseas life is different for TCAs and TCKs in a few ways. These differences do not mean the TCK has a better (or worse) experience. If these differences go unnoticed, however, they lead to misunderstandings between parents and children. This leaves many parents feeling frustrated and many children feeling unheard.

I've worked with TCKs for over 18 years (most of them in China and Cambodia), including ten years researching the TCK experience both qualitatively and quantitatively—which means I've talked to hundreds of TCKs, ATCKs, and TCAs as well as spent a lot of time analysing data about their experiences. Most ATCKs and TCKs were aware that they experienced their host countries and passport countries differently to their parents; unfortunately, many felt their parents were far less aware of the differences. In fact, one-third of the 750 TCKs I surveyed for my first book said they felt misunderstood by their parents. (All data mentioned here comes from my book *Misunderstood: The Impact of Growing Up Overseas in the 21st Century*.)

I am going to outline three of the differences between what a TCA and a

TCK experience overseas: connection, identity, and choice.

Connection

A TCA moves abroad having experienced comprehensive connections to one country as a child. A TCA has deep emotional connections to their passport country because a large percentage of their life was spent there. These emotional connections are experiential—memories of life lived there.

A TCK, however, experiences multiple countries/cultures during childhood. Two-thirds of the TCKs I surveyed first moved abroad before age five, 58% spent more than half their childhoods abroad, and 30% spent less than three years in their passport countries. This means many TCKs have spent more time in their host countries than in their passport countries, so most of their emotional connections were made in those places abroad.

TCK children will not have the same emotional connection to the people, places, and activities of the parents' country and their childhood. Things that mean the world to the parents may not mean much to the child. They may dislike the parents' comfort foods, find a favourite sport boring, or be unmoved by things that bring their parents to tears. They may intellectually understand that these things are supposed to matter but not feel a connection to them. If they fear

parents:

different lives

disapproval, they may learn to fake the expected emotion. Giving TCKs space to feel differently, even if it is sad or disappointing to the parents, is vital to maintaining open communication and strong understanding.

Identity

A TCA comes abroad with a fully formed sense of self, connected to a particular country, the place that is home. A TCK grows up caught between two places that are both home. Most TCKs develop their personal identity against a backdrop of frequent change. TCKs are not just experiencing life overseas; they are trying to make sense of the world (and themselves) while doing so.

The events of international life certainly affect TCAs, but they affect TCKs much more deeply, becoming part of the bedrock of their emotional worlds. For example, many TCKs I interviewed spoke of learning that “everyone leaves.” Watching friends leave or moving on themselves affected how they saw the world. Woven into their sense of self was the knowledge that nothing is permanent.

TCKs are individuals, and they deal with international life differently. But regardless of how they process the experience, living overseas will impact how they see the world and the people in it. This can lead to what may be a very different worldview from that of

their parents. When a child’s perspective clashes, parents should take time to understand why the child thinks this way rather than trying to correct that perspective.

Choice

Being an adult, a TCA has far more control over the decision to live abroad. No one becomes a TCK by choice. Not that it’s a bad thing (quite the opposite: 92% of missionary kids I surveyed were thankful for their experience), but it happens because a decision has been made on the child’s behalf. Even when a child (especially an older child) is consulted about moving abroad, it is still the parent who has the power to actually make the decision.

While a few TCKs from missionary backgrounds I interviewed said they felt that living abroad was their own calling as well as their parents’, most did not share this feeling. A few expressed strong resentment that these choices were made on their behalf (12% of MKs I surveyed felt resentment about their childhoods).

All parents make decisions on behalf of their children, but the decision to take a child overseas means giving them a very different childhood. It is important for parents to understand their choices have created a culture gap. That gap is not evidence of a bad decision—it is a natural consequence of a different cultural upbringing. Denying that a

gap exists or trying to make it disappear will not help the child. What does make a positive difference is recognizing the gap and taking steps to listen to the child’s point of view.

Understanding the difference

Parents and children live abroad together. But the impact of that life is different. My book is titled *Misunderstood*¹ because that is how many young TCKs feel. Having spent years helping expat parents understand their children, I wrote a book to do what I do—give insights into the perspective of TCKs.

When parents and other adults recognize the difference between an adult’s experience of life overseas and a child’s experience, it is a huge step toward the sort of understanding that encourages and comforts TCKs. Parents and children are on the same team. While they experience life abroad differently, with awareness and care, they can still understand each other deeply. **JH**

An earlier version of this article first appeared on the blog *A Life Overseas* and is reproduced with permission.

1. See the next page for a book review of this book by a missionary parent.

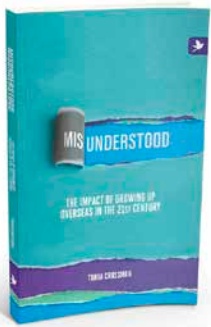
Tanya Crossman is the director of research and international education at TCK Training and author of *Misunderstood: The Impact of Growing Up Overseas in the 21st Century*. She has 19 years’ experience in TCK family care.

The secret life of TCKs

A book review of *Misunderstood* by Tanya Crossman

By Helane Ramsay

According to Tanya Crossman's book, *Misunderstood: The Impact of Growing Up Overseas in the 21st Century*, it's likely your third culture kid (TCK) has a secret life you don't know



about, and it's hurting them. She argues that the life of the TCK rewards adaptation, academic excellence, and preserving the reputation of their parents, their country, and their God. All this effort on the outside leaves them burdened with the effort

of masking their inner life of grief, loneliness, and identity confusion. If you love a TCK, it is essential to find out what is going on inside.

The most valuable and compelling part of this book is the quotes from TCKs, and they say things you have

probably never heard before. One TCK shares, "Almost every TCK I know knows how to hide their anxiety from their parents."¹ Another says, "I feel a continuous frustration with my parents for their feeling of entitlement to their children's sense of home,"² and still another states, "I swore to myself I was going to hide my identity from now on."³ More and more research points to the perils of adolescents maintaining a double life. We don't want our kids to live under that stress.

The book is not all bad news. TCKs can integrate their inner and outer worlds. They can learn to settle and call a place home. They can develop their emotional vocabulary. Some of their turmoil comes from believing things that don't have to be true, things they can be released from. They can also feel wonderfully at home in the company of other TCKs. However, they will not

do any of this alone or automatically. They need adults they trust to ask them about their experiences and be okay with the answers.

I recommend this book for anyone who loves a TCK and for TCKs themselves. The author has worked with TCKs for over a decade. The fruit of her work is a colourful tapestry that vividly reveals the world our global nomads dwell in. If you've already done some reading in this space, the initial chapters that cover definitions may feel slow. Don't be put off. The later chapters are well worth the effort. This is a well-researched and hopeful book that bridges a gap between TCKs and the adults who love them. Have a read. 📖

1. Tanya Crossman, *Misunderstood: The Impact of Growing Up Overseas in the 21st Century* (London: Summertime Publishing, 2016), 247.
2. *Ibid.*, 225–226
3. *Ibid.*, 230.

Advertisement

WIM
WOMEN IN MINISTRY
Equip~Empower~Encourage

WIM is a JEMA ministry

DAYS OF PRAYER

Kanto Fall Day of Prayer Plus
October 8, 2024, Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo

Kansai 2024 events
Information will be on the JEMA website

WIM Tohoku (near Sendai)
2024 events: Information will be on the JEMA website

WIM Kanto Winter Day of Prayer
January 16, 2025, Ochanomizu Christian Centre, Tokyo

Today's media reaching tomorrow's Japan

By Michael Höhn

Christian media producers equipping you for the harvest among the youth

The needs of the Japanese young generation are huge but rarely appear in the news headlines. Broken families, peer pressure, burnt-out school teachers, and the absence of trustworthy role models in society are just some of their challenges. All over the world, a flood of social media entangles the hearts of children and teenagers. In Japan, adequate media education is lacking, but there are some organizations seeking to produce useful digital resources for children and teens to address the issues they are dealing with. These resources are based on Christian values and offer the hope of the gospel online.

Today we have Christian media producers making the best of immense opportunities through online technology. This article aims to introduce some of the Christian ministries that produce online material particularly for ministering to children and teens in Japan. We can understand their vision by outlining their BEST: **B**asic mission and target groups; **E**quipping online, and other resources; **S**trategies, training, and activities; **T**ogether for kingdom networking.

One Hope Japan (onehopejapan.net)

B - The mission of One Hope Japan is "To affect destiny by providing God's eternal Word to all the children and youth of the world."

E - One Hope's resources include:

- A range of print and online resources that include gospel material and teacher resources. Their booklets and tracts such as *Manga Mission* and *Super-Book Story of Hope* cover segments of the Bible and address issues relevant to Japanese youth.
- An online Sunday School began during COVID and is still going.



You can read the story behind this in the next article.

- A series of films for older teens address serious issues such as dysfunctional families, dysfunctional dating relationships, social media addiction, suicide, fear of others, and misled moral decisions like compensated dating.
- The Bible App for Kids is a series of interactive animated Bible stories with narration and fun quizzes built in.

S - One Hope's strategy is to create evangelistic tools based on research of their target audience (Japanese kids) and to provide training for local churches and Christians to be effective in using those tools. They hope to encourage interaction between the generations through media at church.

T - Together with churches, they reach out to the community through evangelism both online and in person.

hi.-b.a. (High School Born-againers) (www.hi-ba.com)

B - hi.-b.a. ministry is targeted at high school students, as they aim to reach the next

generation of believers. Their goals are: 1) Trust in God, 2) Value people, 3) High school evangelism as mission, and 4) Serve the church.

E - hi.-b.a. has a YouTube channel featuring songs, interviews, testimonies, recordings of meetings and other videos. They also have accounts on Instagram, Line, Facebook, and Spotify, which have helpful ideas for topics or songs for people ministering with young people.

S - They have regular in-person meetings in some areas for prayer, Bible study, outreach to friends, as well as special events and camps.

T - They network intentionally with multiple organizations reaching young people.

Onfire Japan (onfire.jp)

B - Onfire Japan's goals are to empower and equip Christians of any age—particularly teens—with a kingdom and disciple-making vision. They want to see people filled, healed, trained, and sent with the presence and power of God.

E - Life-transforming tools:

- The 55-day PureHeart challenge helps girls to develop a healthy, biblical understanding of their sexuality and value in Christ.
- Their YouTube channel and Facebook page contain online worship, prayer, and Bible readings.
- They sell a range of tracts, such as *Father's Love Letter* (multilingual) and *Kotoba Quiz* (Japanese), through their website.

S - Onfire Japan's Discovery Bible Study and mentoring are other practical ways they seek to connect young Christians with other generations of believers.

T - Online networking provides fellowship, worship, prayer, and outreach.



Family Forum Japan (ffj.gr.jp)

B - FFJ exists to strengthen homes and churches and to proclaim the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ through biblical truths about family life, marriage, parenting, sexuality, and gender.

E - Their online shop sells books and leaflets such as *Futatsu no Doa* (*Two Doors*), a fairy-tale style story that helps children learn how to make God-pleasing choices, and *Otokoto Onna no Monogatari* (*The Story of Man and Woman*) uses stories to help parents teach children about biblical sexuality. For youth and young adults, *Otōsan kara no Jū no Tegami* (*Ten Letters from a Father*) walks readers through a biblical understanding of sexuality, gender, dating, and preparation for marriage.



You can also find talks about sexuality and gender for youth in their YouTube playlist (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbWGNWXXVN_ZyxDpWFfpUjFd9zF1WrAue) and material on marriage for adults on their Facebook page.

S - FFJ produces online resources, publications, radio broadcasts, seminars, and lectures.

T - Originally connected with Focus on the Family and TEAM, FFJ is currently cooperating with Network for Biblical Understanding of Sexuality (NBUS) in providing seminars on gender issues online and in various parts of Japan.

Besides the organizations mentioned above, there are several more producing print and online resources for ministry to young Japanese people:

- New Day Today (newdaytoday.net) is a ministry founded by Dr. Andy and Junko Meeko. They have a large range of print and digital resources available for many dif-

ferent age groups. Those focused particularly for children and teens are the *Treasure Hunt* series, which includes a manga tract, discipleship Bible reading guides, and associated apps, and *Risk Ride*, a set of resources that aims to help people ministering to young people struggling with thoughts of suicide.

- J-House Media shop (<https://jhouse.tv/shop>). Growing from a youth and student church, J-House now reaches second and third generation Christians, sharing Christ's love and grace according to the Great Commission. They have produced bilingual study manuals like *Curious* and *Grow* that answer many commonly asked questions and connect extremely well with today's Japanese young people.
- New Life Ministries (newlifeministries.jp) produces their impactful, multilingual *Manga Bible* series.
- Word of Life Press (wlpn.or.jp) sells many children's books in their online shop and has some kids'

videos on their YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@user-lk7ep1ps7y>).

- Alpha (japan.alpha.org) is an introductory course to Christianity that is now available in Japanese and is offered by many churches across Japan in person and online.
- Our Daily Bread (japanese-odb.org) has a website with many videos including content for kids with Bible stories, a Sunday school show, and crafts.

With such rich resources, we remember still that praying and obeying through the power of the Holy Spirit is what will ultimately equip us to carry out our calling: to reach the children and teens of today for the Japanese society of tomorrow. **JH**

Logos from author and respective websites

Michael Höhn, from Germany, has served the Lord in Osaka since 1993 in local and regional prayer movements, home church and campus ministries, discipleship training, and networking. He and his wife, Yuko, enjoy two daughters.

Providing the ingredients for children's ministry

By Hisho Uga

Shared resources from OneHope can reach children with a wide variety of media

Do you remember April 2020? It's probably more memorable than most months, even though some of us wish we could erase it from our memory. An unknown virus was beginning to sweep across Japan, and a state of emergency issued by the government confirmed it as a national crisis.

I remember a new reality sinking in—that we would not be gathering together at church on Sunday. Instead, we would be meeting online. It was at that time that my colleague Mitsuru pointed out that although Sunday services were going online, most

Sunday schools were likely going to be canceled altogether.

So three days later, Mitsuru uploaded the first episode of our online Sunday school (こども聖書クラスオンライン) to YouTube. It used the images and videos from 41 Bible stories from the Bible App for Kids, which OneHope launched in Japanese in 2016.

Using the app today

We have now uploaded a Sunday school video every week for four years. It has been a great experience to be able to reach thousands of children that we had not been able to reach before and

to help children engage with scripture in a new way.

We have found that these images and videos can be used in all kinds of ways for both print and digital media. In 2016 we made a gospel booklet called the Bible App for Kids Book



From one of the Sunday school videos

of Hope (こども聖書アプリブック), which has been distributed to 700,000 children. We also created *kamishibai* (picture storytelling cards) with Word of Life Press (いのちのことば社), which sold out. We even made *karuta* (playing cards) and a coloring book that allows a child to see a Bible story as they color it in.



Karuta card game

Children responding to the Word

We've received stories of both Christian children and not yet believing children learning about God and Jesus through the different formats of the Bible App for Kids content.

One Japanese boy living in San Francisco watches our online Sunday school every week. When he received birthday money from his grandpa, he gave it to support the online Sunday school program. Mitsuru made a thank-you video and sent it to him, which then made the boy so happy he nearly cried! Although they have never met in person and live across the Pacific from one another, God built a new friendship through the videos.

Another boy in Saitama Ken wandered into church for the first time for a church's Christmas event. The kids at the church were playing Bible App for Kids *karuta*. To win at *karuta*, you have to memorize the *yomifuda* (reading cards) that have short Bible story summaries. The boy had a great time, but

he didn't come back to church for a while. Then he came again six months later and joined the Sunday school. When the teacher started sharing about Moses splitting the sea, the boy exclaimed, "I know that story!" and started to say the *yomifuda* that he memorized six months prior. It was an incredible example of how *karuta* could be effective for young children to get acquainted with the Bible. We learned that children engage with the Bible in different ways and at different places and times, and it reminded us of the value of having different media for children to engage with from the Bible App for Kids.



in Japan can use these assets to make PowerPoints, flyers, *kamishibai*, videos, and more.

It seemed to us that the team at OneHope were chefs providing a completed dish to the local church. Then we realized that our assets could be ingredients that we give to the local church so that *they* can be chefs, cooking up a dish in whatever way they want. This empowers the local church to create programs that fit what they want to do.

We are living in an age where digital assets are abundant and accessible. If you look around for open-source resources to help share the Bible, you can find plenty of artwork and media that help communicate the truth and beauty of the gospel.

I've also been privileged to work with BibleProject over the past several years to bring their images and videos to Japan, and these, too, are available for free download. You can use and combine these resources to serve your ministry.

Next time you are preparing for children's ministry, perhaps you can look around for

some fine ingredients and add a new flavor to your program so that the children you serve can experience the Bible and encounter God in a fresh way. **JH**

Images from website; QR codes from author

Hisbo Uga was born and raised in Tokyo and is the OneHope director for Japan. He and his wife, Ami, have three children.

Links to resources

Download Bible App for Kids assets

<https://onehopejapan.net/kids-bible-app-sozai>



Online Sunday school

<https://www.youtube.com/@kodokura>

Sunday school curriculum

https://note.com/kodokura_online



Coloring book

https://onehopejapan.stores.jp/?category_id=6311b20825c9062627e7f49a

Evangelism booklets

https://onehopejapan.stores.jp/?category_id=60c17ecffadad4273da10f2f



BibleProject resources

<https://bibleproject.com/Japanese>

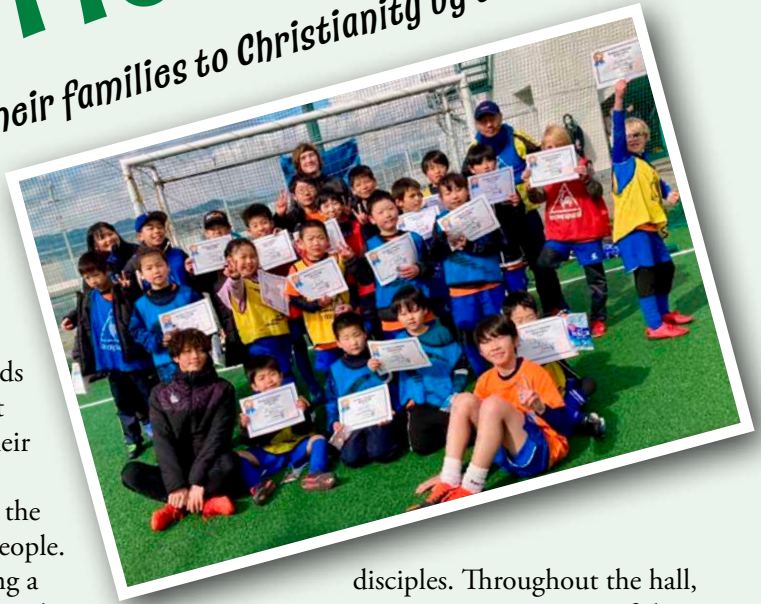
Expanding reach through shared assets

We felt we had done everything we could with the Bible App for Kids until we found that other people had lots of other ideas. In response to some requests, we decided to give away all our Bible App for Kids images and videos (over a thousand files!). Now anyone

God's love on the soccer field

By Rachel Hughes

Introducing kids and their families to Christianity by caring coaching



“Oh yeah, we really did get very close to the original!” one dad, who was somewhat suspicious of Christianity, exclaimed as he helped his team write out the page of the Bible they had just pieced together.

We were in the middle of a half-day workshop titled *What is the Bible*, with an unexpected group of around 70 people—stylish mums, stinky kids in soccer uniforms, older and younger brothers and sisters, bikie dads and nerdy dads, the trendy university-student assistant coach, and us, the foreigners—all brought together by Seahorse Soccer.

Coach Masa and his wife, Chie, have been running this evangelistic soccer club since September 2010. We've been taking our boys since our second week in Japan, back in February 2012. Masa not only shares Bible time with the kids during classes, but through his attitude and actions and the stated values of the club, he demonstrates the love of God to every student and their family members. Over the years, they have built a culture of acceptance and trust. Kids know that Masa is interested in them personally. Parents know Masa and Chie are

people of integrity who can be trusted to build up their kids in ways that impact them far beyond their soccer skills.

Sport brings out the best and worst in people. If a student is having a bad day, struggling with anger, disappointment, jealousy, or insecurity, Masa will notice and spend time chatting personally with that child on the sidelines. In stark contrast to the teams on other fields and Japanese culture in general, Masa encourages kids to speak words of appreciation and encouragement to each other (and never harsh words). Past students drop in randomly to join practice, assured of a warm welcome. It's clear that this culture reflects the love of Masa and Chie's God. Long before these kids understand the details of the gospel, they see God's character of acceptance and loving discipline being demonstrated.

So when Masa and Chie invite us to bring a longer Bible message at the end of the year, Christmas, or at summer camp, everyone is ready and willing to listen. Even the most anti-religious, church-despising, cult-fearing parents are open to hear what it is that makes Masa and Chie care so much for their kids.

At this Bible workshop during one summer camp, it was that suspicious dad who realised that the Bible is a collection of historical documents, not just made-up stories written by brainwashed

disciples. Throughout the hall, groups were re-creating a page of the Bible. One group had gathered pieces from a bag of rubbish; another group had found their pieces buried in a corner of the yard outside; another group's pieces were floating around inside the building. Each team were carefully assembling the pieces they could find and writing out their own estimation of the original text. After collaborating with just one other team, most groups had an almost 100% match with the original text. We pointed out that since there were multiple copies here in the room, even without the original, someone would notice if anyone had made a mistake or tried to change the text somehow. “So how many copies of the Bible texts do they have?” the dad asked. He was visibly shocked by our answer (24,000¹). This revelation must have made an impact: his son still comes to soccer!

Through this soccer club for kids, whole families who would never otherwise encounter the love of Christ or hear the gospel message are experiencing and being taught of God's love for them. **JH**

1. This website gives an updated explanation of the 24,000 number (other sites say 5,366): Sean McDowell, “What is the most recent manuscript count for the New Testament?”, Sean McDowell Blog, <https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/what-is-the-most-recent-manuscript-count-for-the-new-testament> (March 13, 2018).

Photos submitted by author



Reminders and encouragement

Reflections on the Kansai Christian Women's Conference

By Bethany Cerbus

The Kansai Christian Women's Conference (KCWC) is an annual event that seeks to encourage, support, and nurture Christian English-speaking sisters who live in the greater Kansai area. This year, around 70 women, a handful of babies, and a few supportive men gathered at the Mustard Seed Christian Church building in Osaka on March 4 to sing praises to the Lord, study his Word, pray, and encourage each other. Michelle Jackson shared from the book of Exodus about the transformed lives of Moses and the new nation of Israel through the mighty power of the Lord.

The women who attend the KCWC are from all over the world. Just from the people I met personally, I counted women from five different continents. Many of the women are in Japan because they believe they have been called by the Lord to serve him here. It was humbling to consider the collective miles, years, and tears traveled by all of us to arrive at this specific location. For my own personal story, to arrive in the Kansai region took over 12 years of prayer. And yet I still have nagging doubts about being in Japan. I often have thoughts like "I don't really want to be here. I cannot communicate effectively. I only speak like a simple child. I have made yet another awkward social blunder. How can I do anything when I have no idea what is actually going on?" Even if I don't say them out loud, I speak them loudly in my heart. I feel so inadequate.

God's calling despite our shortcomings

Among the many insightful things that Michelle Jackson drew our attention to at the KCWC conference—one that spoke directly to this issue—came in the first session. As the Lord is calling Moses to go and lead his people up from slavery in Egypt, Moses insists on his insufficiency and meekly replies, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else" (Ex. 4:13 NIV). As this verse was read out loud, the whole room chuckled. Each one of us has felt this in our hearts and cried, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else." When the Lord called Moses, he was fully aware of Moses's shortcomings and sins. God is the *most* aware. When we become consumed with our own self-image and shortcomings, we must shift our focus back on the Lord and his great power. Perhaps the task at hand is only to empty the church trash can again, lead a small group in Japanese, or change another soiled diaper, but we have all

felt the limitations of our strength, our talent, our willingness, our language ability, or our patience. God calls us in our weakness to his work.

Moses wasn't equipped to lead Israel to freedom, and God knew this. But Moses was never supposed to lead Israel on his own or in his own strength. The Lord was the one who was to lead Israel to freedom! And the Lord has no shortcomings or lack of ability. He is the central character in his glorious story. We serve with God in his power. He is the one working and moving.



Focusing on God's strength, not mine

During the workshop session, we broke into small groups to share together and pray for each other. I began my introduction with "Hi, my name is Bethany, and I am not a missionary." It was an introduction brimming with doubt in myself and a full disclaimer to ease my shame over my inadequacies. My workshop partner stopped me and asked, "Why are you in Japan?" My answer? To share the good news of the gospel and to labor in Japan to build the church of Christ! To love God and to love my neighbor.

Again the Lord reminded me, this is *his* story, not mine. The solution is simple in principle. Each time my focus turns to myself and what I can or cannot do, I redirect my eyes to Christ and his great strength. I rest in his loving-kindness and trust that he is working. **JH**

Bethany Cerbus (USA) has lived in Japan for over eight years. She and her family enjoy being active members at their local church in the Kansai area.

The 7th Japan Congress on Evangelism

Christian Shimbun, October 1, 2023 and December 24/31, 2023 *Translated by Atsuko Tateishi*

The 7th Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE7), one of the largest evangelical gatherings in Japan, was held September 19–22 at the Nagaragawa Convention Center in Gifu City, Gifu Prefecture. JCE7 was hosted by its own steering committee in affiliation with the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA).

Following the event's theme of "Beginning from the End: Working Together in the Mission of the Church," each of the three plenary sessions featured a sermon and a panel discussion in the morning, followed by a number of breakout sessions called Action Group Times (AGTs) in the afternoon and evening. There are 14 ongoing JCE Projects, each of which hosted an AGT.

The congress was held in hybrid format, attended both in person and online. Time was allotted for small groups throughout the congress to promote active participation. The congress host made sure that everyone making an appearance on stage during the plenary sessions was under 50 years old in order to prioritize the experiences of the younger generation. JEA's Mission Research Division also included their official event guidebook, *JCE7 Evange-*

lism Guide 2023, which was published by Word of Life Press Ministries.

During the final session of the congress, attendees recited the Tokai Declaration: our prayer "Beginning from the End." The declaration is a call for greater mission cooperation beyond positions, denominations, regions, and cultures.

Among the major issues discussed at the congress were generation gaps, the Japanese diaspora overseas, and the needs of foreigners living in Japan. Case studies were presented regarding a merger of two churches across denominations, and a cooperative missional exercise developed by the United Church of Christ in Japan. Many groups and denominations participating in JCE7 noted shrinking church membership, the decrease in the number of ministers, and general population aging as some of the common issues facing churches.

JCE7 also welcomed guests from overseas, including the general secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the leadership of the Korea Evangelical Fellowship.

Multiple AGTs challenged participants to accept discomfort and to embrace people of other cultures. JCE began as unity under biblical faith and against nationalism, and these issues need to be addressed anew.

On the day before JCE7, the Tokai Festival was held in cooperation with local churches in the Tokai region. Several local music ministry groups performed together and hosted gatherings targeted at children and young people. The Salt & Light Network, a platform connecting local laypeople's expertise in the church, also met face-to-face for the first time at the event. Masanao Shibahashi, the mayor of Gifu City and also a Christian, made a speech on his view of faith in his career during the youth gathering.

On the evening of September 21, the Global Night program was broadcast with simultaneous translation into five languages: Portuguese, Nepalese, Spanish, Indonesian, and Korean. Members of foreign-language churches in Japan gathered together for singing, dancing, listening to the Word of God, and prayer.

Another post-congress event, the Global Japanese Christian Forum, met on the afternoon of September 22. The program featured a returnee Christian's testimony and details on a collaborative initiative between receiving churches in Japan and sending churches in Michigan, USA. It was sad to hear that of the Japanese who become Christians overseas, 70% to 80% do not continue in the faith when they return to Japan. ■



(top) The Tokai Festival the day before JCE7 was organized jointly by JCE7 and a group of local churches. Multiple online regional pre-congress events were also held.

(left) Everyone onstage during the plenary sessions was under 50. On the Sunday after JCE7, 64 local churches joined online for the joint Tokai worship service.

Making church uncomfortable is our strategy: a pastor's challenge in rural Aomori Prefecture

Christian Shimbum, January 28, 2024

Translated by Grace Koshino

"Are you sure you want to come?" was the question Pastor Hattori was asked multiple times before he took his pastoral role at Aomori Evangelical Church. The church is situated in an area that has heavy snow during the winter. It's not an easy place to handle for someone with little experience with snow.



Pastor Shigekei Hattori

The population of Aomori City is in decline, and so is the number of churches. Young people and children are scarce. It is also known for *itako*¹ and as the place where Jesus's grave lies.² In this place where spiritual warfare is evident, the church has still managed to survive. How?

"When missionaries come, they often teach English classes to keep people connected," shared Pastor Hattori. "But this can lead to people leaving when the missionary leaves. At this church, the baton was passed on to a Japanese pastor early on, and the first pastor gave his sermons in the Tsugaru dialect."³

Hattori believes that hearing the sermons in their own dialect is what kept people connected to the church.

The church has a 70-year history. Most of the members know each other, making it a comfortable atmosphere for the believers. But Hattori had doubts. When you get comfortable with where you are, you become reluctant to look outwards. Is there a heart for ministry when the church is unwelcoming to outsiders?

"First, I built a website to let people know about our church. Twice a month we had services aimed at non-believers. We made the sermons available online, too."

Some church members felt uneasy about this. "It didn't surprise me," says Hattori. "They were com-

fortable with how things were. But I wasn't doing anything that wasn't in the Bible. Nowhere in the Bible does it say we should aim for a homey church. Although fellowship and a homey atmosphere are good, if a 'homey church' makes outsiders feel left out, that would be a shame."

Hattori dedicated his first two years in Aomori to bringing about change in the believers' mindsets. He continued preaching on the matter with perseverance. Gradually, some began to understand his intention. Now, the leaders and believers work together to bring about change.

Recently, for the first time in a while, four junior high and high schoolers got baptized at the church. "A place that is comfortable for young people is not always comfortable for the elderly," said Hattori. "Some people felt uneasy with

the youth, while others were welcoming. It wasn't an easy process, but I believe that the Word gradually changed people's hearts."

Home Bible studies resumed over time. Bible studies in other facilities are due to start, too. The church lunch that had been cancelled due to COVID also resumed. We are reminded of the significance of eating together, just like Jesus did.

One thing that Hattori is finding problematic is the "weakening of sermons." He says, "In general, sermons are getting shorter. My sermons tend to be 50 minutes on average. At first, I received complaints. But when I include the application of the message into my sermons, this is how long it ends up being."

"One of my former mentors and a prominent theologian, Alistair McGrath, told me that I should make sermons that become a point of contact to the Christian world for those who are not believers. One day, I would like to be known as a pioneer of restoration so that when people look back, they will see what's happening as a turning point. That is why I urge people to consider the generations to come, and to fulfill our responsibilities."

There is one thing that Hattori wants to stress. "I feel like rural areas have been forgotten and left out nationally. I would like to see more people coming to rural areas. This is the earnest cry of a pastor." ■



1. A medium who speaks to the dead, traditionally a blind woman trained from a young age.
2. A gravesite related to an apocryphal story that Jesus's younger brother took his place on the cross while Jesus returned to Japan and lived in a village (now Shingō) until the age of 106.
3. A dialect in western Aomori.

Meeting and missing milestones during my first year in Japan

The costly journey of learning Japanese reveals God's design and purpose for language in ministry

On 14 February this year, I celebrated my first Japan-iversary. Time seems to do strange things in the first year of settling into a new country. It feels like the year has sped by in a flurry of verbal conjugations and kanji drills. But it also feels like I have been here for ages, like there is more than just a year separating where I am now from where I was when I first landed as a new missionary in Kyoto.

As I approached the one-year mark, I became more conscious of the life events and milestones that I was missing in Australia as I built a life and ministry in Japan. Since arriving here, some dear friends have added children to their families, children whose siblings are my godchildren but whom I won't meet until they are already toddlers. Recently, another dear friend got married. Although she generously organised a livestream to watch online, I really felt the cost of not being there in person, unable to give her a big hug and to celebrate as the occasion so deserved.

Meanwhile, in Kyoto, I have been fully occupied in learning as much as I can, becoming a part of my church community, and joining local KKGK gatherings when I'm able. Everyone at church and my teachers at language school have been incredibly patient with me as my communication skills slowly grow. They all acknowledge that Japanese is very hard to learn, and they kindly correct me when I say or write something strange. But sometimes in

the evenings, after a long day of trying to understand 50 percent of the conversation and express 30 percent of my thoughts coherently, my inner voice whispers, "Will they not run out of patience soon? Do they not expect more of someone who has been here for a year?" These doubts bite hard because of the fear that I am not making the cut and not meeting (normal?) milestones as I strive to learn the language.

When these fears arise, I remember how God is the author of every language and how he will use every language to build up, teach, and encourage the church. 1 Corinthians 14:10–12 reads,

There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. (ESV)

These verses highlight how intelligibility and accessibility is something the church should be concerned with, even if we have more spiritual-looking gifts at our disposal. Speaking in unknown tongues in worship of God has its place, but better yet is speaking intelligible words for the instruction and building up of the listener (1 Cor.

14:13–19). If this is the case, and I am praying for the ability to speak, evangelise, and teach intelligibly in Japanese, surely it will come to fruition in good time.

In the meantime, I am encouraged by the Apostle Paul's insistence on the role of mutually understandable language in building up the church: "Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). As someone who is closer to the five words than ten thousand in Japanese, I am thankful for the encouragement to use my limited words well because the passage tells me they can benefit others. **JH**

Elle Bryce is a Church Missionary Society missionary from Brisbane, Australia, who is settling in Kyoto. She hopes to work with KKGK (キリスト者学生会) to help reach young people in Japan.





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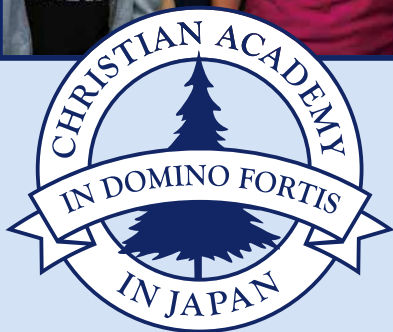
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Embrace AI, but don't jettison language learning

Despite AI promising to overcome the language barrier very soon, there are still reasons to study Japanese

For the first time ever in the history of civilization, AI (artificial intelligence) will all but eliminate the language barrier between the world's major languages. Already well underway, this disruptive advance will come to full fruition within a decade.

That's how I began a scenario describing how AI is likely to affect journalism in the near future. In other words, AI will seemingly reverse the effects of Babel—and it's already happening. My colleagues in Australia can use the online translation site DeepL ([deepl.com](https://www.deepl.com)) to read and compose emails in Japanese. ChatGPT (chat.openai.com) even allows them to write emails in an appropriate style for a business context and to include customary greetings and endings that English speakers wouldn't normally use.

That's just the beginning. I envision that within ten years, AI will be able to do simultaneous translation between any two major languages. The implications for missions will be huge. For example, short-term missionaries could step off a plane and start evangelizing and discipling in Japanese immediately. They could also participate fully in meetings held entirely in Japanese.

All this will spark a lot of soul-searching about the value of learning languages. Why bother spending years of hard work gaining fluency in Japanese if you can communicate straightaway? But while AI will be a great boon for communication in missions, I don't think it will do away with the need to learn languages.

People will still be needed

The main reason why language learning won't become redundant is that no matter how good AI becomes, there is something irreplaceable about conversing with someone who has made the effort to learn your language. I think Japanese people will become even more appreciative of anybody who puts in the time and hard work to learn a language as difficult as Japanese. There's something about speaking

to someone directly without any interfaces that makes it easier to open your heart to them.

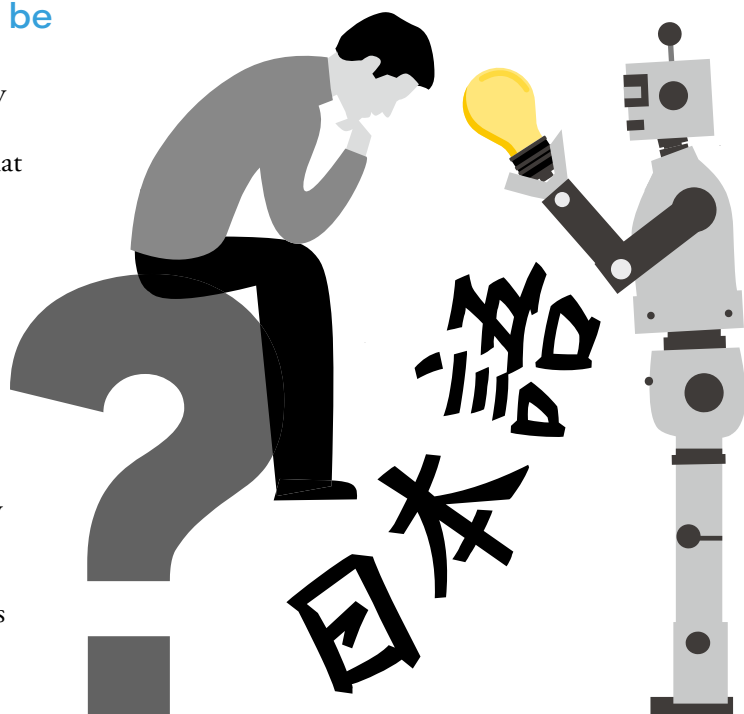
At the same time, AI won't necessarily be able to pick up and communicate cultural nuances, even if it will be good at interpreting and translating the language. In Japan's high-context culture, words don't always convey the full meaning of an interaction.

Making language learning easier

Learning and improving Japanese is almost certainly going to continue to be vital in mission. The good news is AI can already facilitate language learning and should help to accelerate it and reduce costs. Many language-learning apps such as Duolingo ([duolingo.com](https://www.duolingo.com)) are harnessing the power of AI. This allows the apps, for example, to identify a learner's weak points and provide exercises that will be most effective in addressing them. Sites such as QuillBot (quillbot.com) can correct the grammar and spelling of text written in various languages as well as summarize and paraphrase passages.

AI may soon also provide conversation partners to talk with. Up until now, you needed a person (preferably a native speaker) to practice conversation with. But there are AI bots in development that a language learner will be able to converse with. The bots are being developed to provide feedback on your conversation and suggest ways to improve, effectively becoming language teachers. This could allow you to gain confidence in speaking before talking to real people. Such services are just beginning to appear: some examples include TalkPal (app.talkpal.ai), Lango-talk (www.langotalk.org), Talkio AI (www.talkio.ai), and Hallo (<https://www.hallo.ai/>). So by all means get excited about the opportunities that AI may provide for missions, but don't stop trying to improve your Japanese and to learn more about the culture. **JH**

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.





TCKs and unresolved grief

Resources to help the complicated grief of TCKs

Everyone experiences grief in their lifetime. No one is immune. Grief can manifest itself in a variety of ways and cannot be predicted. Even long after the grief-inducing event, someone may experience alarming and unexpected expressions of sadness and mourning.

We should not be surprised that third culture kids (TCKs) experience grief just like everyone else. In fact, according to Pollock and Van Reken, by the end of adolescence, the average TCK has experienced more significant losses and separations than most people experience in a lifetime.¹ That pain can be very difficult for a young person to process.

It is often said that TCKs are resilient and will adapt to anything thrown at them. While there may be some truth to this, we would be wise not to ignore the difficulties that TCKs face while living in a foreign country. To do so may come at a great cost to the adult TCK.

Multiple levels of grief

What kinds of grief are we talking about here? For a TCK, there can be multiple levels of grief and pain. On the one hand, there is what might be called “obvious grief.” These are events that all people would experience as difficult and sad. Examples of obvious grief would be the loss of a loved one or the effects of a traumatic experience. Everyone understands the importance of acknowledging and processing this kind of grief.

However, many TCKs also experience “hidden grief,” grief that may not be immediately obvious to the adults and other important people in their lives. These hidden griefs usually affect the TCK during their formative years and accumulate over time. Examples of this kind of grief would include moving to a new country, learning a new language, frequent changing of schools or place of residence, or the never-ending need to say goodbye to friends (a huge issue due to the transient nature of the missionary community). Children living in a foreign country are also more likely to experience isolation, bullying, and loneliness.

All of these kinds of experiences may cause a TCK to feel a deep sense of grief and loss. If not fully dealt with, this unprocessed grief can lead to mental health issues in the college years and into adulthood.

Reasons behind unresolved grief

According to Pollock and Van Reken, there is no single reason why unresolved grief is a major and often unrecognized factor for countless TCKs.² But we can look at this as a challenge to missionary families and the greater missionary community to support the TCK’s processing of unresolved grief.

The reasons that grief often goes unresolved include fear of denying the good (always feeling the need to be positive about the missionary experience), inability to acknowledge losses, lack of permission to grieve, lack of time to process, and a lack of comfort (from others).³ These reasons complicate the healing and maturing process of a young person growing up among multiple cultures.

The danger of accumulated unresolved grief is what Lauren Wells calls “a grief tower,” a tower of emotional grief that can easily be toppled over in early adulthood. This results in a variety of mental health issues including denial, anger, depression, withdrawal, rebellion, vicarious grief, delayed grief, and anxiety.⁴

Resource recommendations

I’d like to recommend two books by Lauren Wells that will help TCKs to process grief as a family and into adulthood. Both books are short and easy to use.

Lauren Wells, *The Grief Tower* (Fort Mill, SC: Independently published, 2021).

The Grief Tower is for families to use together to take time annually to process the difficulties experienced that year. There are valuable activities and questions to help families work through both “obvious grief” and “hidden grief” together. This book can be used as a tool to help teach children how to process experiences and complicated feelings while living abroad.

Lauren Wells, *Unstacking Your Grief Tower* (Fort Mill, SC: Independently published, 2021).

Unstacking Your Grief Tower is another excellent resource by Lauren Wells for adult TCKs to process their unresolved grief. An adult TCK can work through the book alone, with a mentor, or in a small group of fellow TCKs.

Please note that these books can help to begin the process of dealing with unresolved grief in a healthy way, but is not a replacement for formal therapy, family therapy, and/or psychiatric intervention, which may be needed for further help and support if deeper issues are uncovered.

My hope is that you will find encouragement and support in helping your TCK process unresolved grief in a healthy way and lead them to content adult lives. **JH**

1. David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001), 166.

2. *Ibid.*, 166.

3. *Ibid.*, 167–176.

4. *Ibid.*, 176–181.

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

Weapons of mass distraction

“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4 NASB)

Have you ever been distracted when you try to pray? I think we all have at one time or other. At those times, what can we do? What should we do?

The problem

In his fictional book *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis has the senior demon, Screwtape, tell his nephew, the junior demon Wormwood, “You can weaken his prayers by diverting his attention.”¹ That’s it! All Satan has to do is keep us from concentrating our attention on God and His will for our lives.

You could say that in Satan’s arsenal are “weapons of mass distraction.”² This is a play on the term “weapons of mass destruction,” popularized by George H. W. Bush during the Gulf War in 1990. Satan does not have to defeat us in all-out war, per se. All he needs to do is keep us busy thinking about anything else so we don’t spend the time with God in prayer that we need.

Choosing right priorities

The Bible shows us many instances where people were called to choose the right thing to do. It is a matter of priorities. The story of Jesus’s visit to His friends Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42) is a good example. Martha was distracted by her preparations for entertaining Jesus. While hospitality is a good thing, Jesus said that “Mary has chosen the good part” (v. 42). Why? Because she had chosen spending time with Jesus over trying to serve Him.

There are two other situations I would like us to look at, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New. In Exodus 18, Moses was being harried by his position of being the sole mediator between God and the people. His father-in-law, Jethro, helped him see where his priorities lay.

In Acts 6, the apostles had come to an impasse when it came to complaints from the Greek-speaking Christians regarding their widows getting enough food. The Twelve had to come up with a plan that not only solved the problem but also enabled them to do what they felt was most important.

The solution

Just as Martha’s priority should have been the same as Mary’s—putting Jesus first—Moses and the apostles had to choose what was most important for them. We can learn from what they decided.

Moses’s father-in-law recommended three things. Moses’s priorities were to pray (“be the people’s representative before God,” Ex. 18:19), “teach them the statutes and the laws” (v. 20), and delegate authority to qualified men (v. 21). He did those things, and everyone was much better off because of it.

The apostles chose seven deacons (Acts 6:3, 5) because “it is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables” (v. 2). Instead, their priority was to “devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (v. 4). When first things are put first, everything else falls into place.

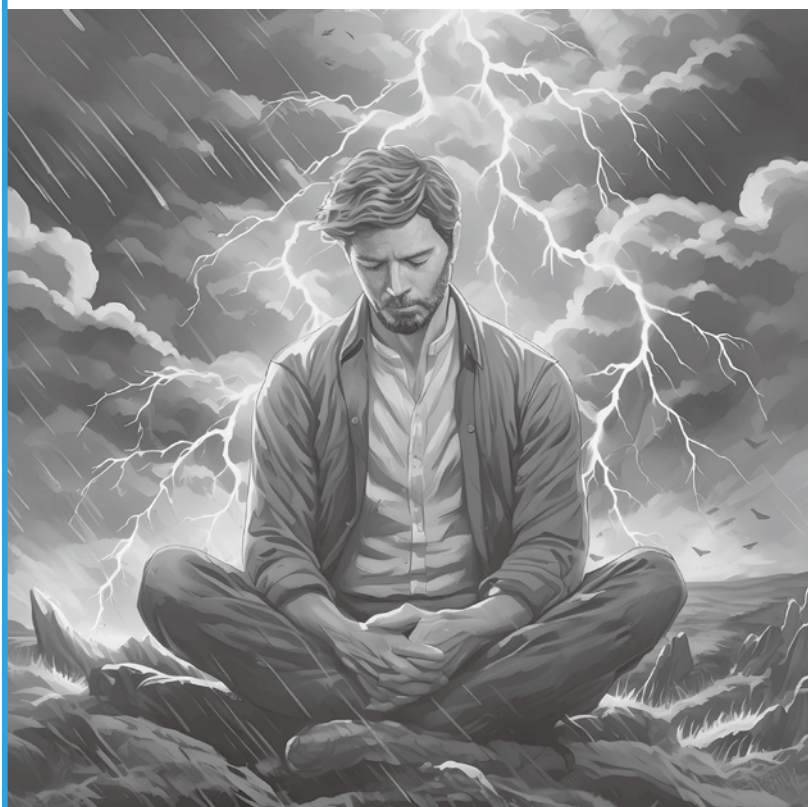
It’s our turn now

What does this mean for us? As we see with Moses and the apostles, we have responsibilities that we must fulfill. That does not mean we have to do everything by ourselves. If our schedule is so full that we can’t take time to pray, then something is wrong. Are there things we can delegate to others? There might even be things better left to others (though we might not want to admit it). Though serving tables is honorable, as ministers of the Word, our first priority should be to pray. **JH**

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1975), 29.

2. Daniel Henderson, *Defying Gravity* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 59.

Illustration generated by Adobe Firefly (AI)



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

Finding stories

We've all been there: a situation where someone is telling a story that somehow misses the mark, and you wonder why they chose to tell it at that moment. Maybe it happened that morning and they had to blurt it out to someone, or perhaps they were just filling an awkward silence.

When we are writing, we have more time to think about what to include, so we shouldn't include stories that aren't relevant to the purpose of the piece we're writing. So how do we find good stories, and how do we use them to make our point?

Almost all inspirational stories come down to three basic story plots: challenge, connection, and creativity.¹

Basic story plots

The challenge plot is an underdog or rags-to-riches story. It's when someone's sheer willpower overcomes daunting obstacles. David and Goliath is a classic challenge plot. Many Christian testimonies fall into this category, though of course they aren't "triumph of will" but rather "triumph of the Holy Spirit."

The connection plot is about relationships with other people. It's a story about people who overcome a gap (e.g., racial, class, ethnic, demographic). A biblical example is the Good Samaritan story.

The creativity plot is when someone makes a mental breakthrough or tackles a problem in a creative way. Jesus did miracles to solve many problems the people around him couldn't fix. The story about Mary asking Jesus to solve the wine shortage at the wedding feast is a creativity plot.

Keeping these three basic story plots in mind will help us find stories we can tell that will engage our readers' attention.

An example

Let's consider writing about a family gathering I participated in on Christmas Day last year in Australia. I could describe the food, the table decorations, even list the various things we did through the day. But I would grab your attention better if I talked about the connection between my young adult sons and their cousin's two preschool-aged sons (whom they'd never met before). Visualise my strong sons "flying" these young boys around the room on beanbags. The little boys couldn't get enough of it (a connection plot).

Our gathering included people from ages 3 to 74 with diverse backgrounds, incomes, and beliefs. I could tell you about the creative game my sister-in-law used to engage everyone in present-giving and receiving after Christmas dinner (this is also a connection plot but with elements of the creativity plot). If I were writing about our Christmas in Australia, either of these snapshots would provide



more interesting reading than a list of foods we ate, although a northern hemisphere audience might be entertained by our summer Christmas menu (the unexpected element that is also good in a story)!

What is a story?

A story, at the basic level, is when something is done by someone (or more than one character) at a certain time and place and usually for some reason. It can be about something that has happened or something that might happen.

There are four main features to look out for if you are seeking to identify a story, which are the same features to include in your telling of it:

- **Time marker:** This is something that gives you a sense of when this happened, for example, a year, a season, a day (last Tuesday), or even "when I last saw my mum."
- **Place marker:** Stories will usually give you some location marker, which can be as concrete as "in my kitchen" or less concrete as "on our way to a conference in Nagoya."
- **Characters:** People do stuff in stories. It helps your reader if characters have names, even if they are pseudonyms to preserve anonymity in a prayer letter.
- **Events:** This is a series of connected things that happen in stories, either over a short time or a much longer period. A good story often has something surprising or unexpected happen.

So in the example above, you will note there is a

- time marker: Christmas Day;
- place marker: Australia;
- characters: my sons, their cousin's sons, my sister-in-law, and various other relatives; and
- events: interactive play, a game, eating.

Make a point

A story needs a point and one that fits with your purpose. I recently heard a sermon by an elderly pastor that had a couple of good stories in it that he failed to connect to the rest of the sermon. Afterwards, I was left wondering why he told the stories.

Collect stories, but also keep focused on what your core idea is: What do you want to communicate? If you have been noticing the stories around you (even the ones you read), you'll have stories to draw on when you are writing. Connect your core idea to one or more story and go from there. **JH**

1. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (London UK: Arrow Books, 2008), 226–231.

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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