



Faith
Hope
Love

A photograph of two women in conversation. One woman, with long brown hair, is wearing a white cardigan over a blue and white floral dress. The other woman, seen from the back, has shoulder-length brown hair and is wearing a red sleeveless top. They are standing in front of a light-colored wall with the words 'Faith', 'Hope', and 'Love' written in cursive. The overall scene is brightly lit and appears to be an indoor setting.

Listening to Japanese Christians

ミヨシの

SDFOODs

Sustainable Delicious Foods

おいしさ、ながもち。

まだ食べられるのに捨てられている食品を減らしたい。

ミヨシ油脂は、「食感」と「日持ち」の両面で賞味期限・消費期限の延長に寄与する製品を「SDFOODs (Sustainable Delicious Foods / エスディーフーズ)」と位置づけました。おいしさを長持ちさせて、食品ロスの削減を目指します。

ミヨシ油脂株式会社 〒124-8510 東京都葛飾区堀切4-66-1 TEL 03-3603-7023 www.miyoshi-yushi.co.jp



An elegant cracker for those special occasions

YAMAZAKI BISCUITS Co.,LTD.

Encouraging, inspiring, and equipping the members of the JEMA community

Forward

- 4 Happenings
- 5 From the Editor

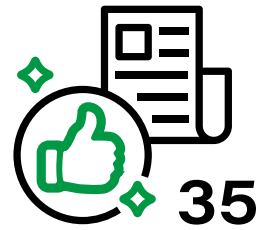


General Articles

- 23 Talking about my joy
by David McIntyre
- 24 The hidden struggle
by Janet Dallman
- 25 A life transformed
by Erin Irvine

Feature Articles

- 6 12 things every missionary to Japan should know
by Susan Smith
- 8 Finding the right words
by Jon Robison
- 10 Journeying with Japanese churches in evangelism
by Fuji Liu
- 12 The difficulties of being a Christian in Japanese society
by John Edwards
- 14 A dream, delays, and a book
by Stephanie Waters
- 16 Six months later, help is still needed
by Chie Yokota
- 18 Seeking a life that shines like a pearl
by Kari Miyano
- 20 Working together to reconnect churches with the community
by John Edwards, David McIntyre, Atsuko Tateishi



Regulars

- 26 News
- 28 Spotlight on JEMA ^{NEW}
What's the benefit of JEMA?
by Nathan Snow
- 30 Focus on Prayer
Practicing kanji while prayer walking
by Ken Reddington
- 32 Member Care
Retirement realities
by Alan Steier
- 33 Language & Culture
YouTube: an educational treasure trove
by Simon Pleasants
- 34 Off the Bookshelf
by Don Schaeffer
- 35 Good Writing
Check your facts
by Wendy Marshall

*Please note that event details are subject to change.
Please check with JEMA or organizers for confirmation.*

Every other month



JEMA Online Prayer Gathering

The last Tuesday of each odd-numbered month:
July 30, Sept. 24, Nov. 26, etc.

Includes breakout rooms based on language

To register, scan this QR code or go to:
<https://forms.gle/3Q1G8nAVCc8oo2y27>

October

WIM Kanto Fall Day of Prayer Plus

October 8, 2024

Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo

JEMA One-Day Spiritual Retreat

October 26, 2024

Higo-Hosokawa Garden, Tokyo



November

WIM Kansai Autumn Day of Prayer

November 11, 2024

Mukonosu Megumi Church, Hyogo-ken

WIM Tohoku Day of Prayer

November 18th, 2024

Shiogama Seisho Baptist Church, Miyagi-ken



January

WIM Kanto Winter Day of Prayer

January 16, 2025; Ochanomizu Christian Center



February

JEMA Connect

February 17-19, 2025; Ochanomizu Christian Center

March

WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 3, 2025; Location TBD

WIM Kanto Spring Retreat

March 12-14, 2025

Nikko Olive no Sato, Tochigi-ken



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

jema.org

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



Volume 75 No. 4
Autumn 2024

© 2024 Please do not copy any article, photo, poem, or report unless permission is granted. Contact Managing Editor.

Japan Harvest Staff

Executive Editor: Simon Pleasants
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
News Editors: Peter Swan, Ken Reddington
Art Director: Karen Ellrick
Advertising Director: Ai Nightingale
Fact Checkers: Sara Wolsey, Jocelyn Williams, Hallur Mortensen
Proofreader: Ken Reddington
Production Team Leader: Wendy Marshall

Printer: Printpac

JEMA Leadership Team

President: Nathan Snow
Vice President: Simon Pleasants
Treasurer: Emerita Sakai
Secretary: David Scott
Ministries Facilitator: Chad Huddleston
Communications Facilitator: vacant
Membership Facilitator: Nathan Snow
Members-at-Large: Brett Rayl, Steve Manders, Jon Robison

JEMA Administrative Assistants (part-time):

Atsuko Tateishi, Mayumi Penner, Michiru Pleasants, Ai Nightingale

Submissions

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

Writer's guidelines are available at: japanharvest.org/submissions

Submission Deadlines

Winter issue: August 31
Spring issue: November 30
Summer issue: February 28
Autumn issue: May 31

Price overseas is \$30.00 (USD) per year.

Price in Japan is ¥2,800 per year.

Single copy is ¥750.

Postal Transfer: Account #: 00130-4-180466

Name: JEMA

Moving?

Contact the JEMA office so we can update our files!

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

Japan Harvest is the official, quarterly publication of the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association (JEMA). Individual articles or advertisements express the viewpoints of the contributors and not necessarily those of JEMA or the contributor's mission.

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



Cultural humility

One of my joys during my year of home assignment has been showing people the *Beneath the Surface* prayer guide that I helped edit. Earlier this year, *Japan Harvest* published an article about that booklet. The other two editors wrote about how the Japanese edition came about: “We were not sure that something written primarily by missionaries would be useful in local Japanese churches. But Japanese believers continued to ask about a Japanese version, and . . . we started a few months of prayerful consultation.”¹

It’s easy in missions to develop an attitude of superiority and assume that because we send missionaries to a country, we are the experts. I’ve enjoyed sharing this publishing process story because it shows Christians in Australia that missionaries are outsiders, not experts. We should not assume we know what the Japanese church wants or needs; instead, we should cultivate an attitude of humility.

The phrase “cultural humility” was coined by health professionals 25 years ago, and its importance is gradually being recognised in multicultural Western societies like Australia and the US.

The University of Oregon gives several definitions on its website, including “Cultural humility involves an ongoing process of self-exploration and self-critique combined with a willingness to learn from others. It means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values.”²

On the website *A Life Overseas*, Amy Medina wrote an article called “When Missionaries Think They Know Everything.” It’s a sobering read. She states, “If we’re really honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we really do think we know what’s best. Our way of doing things is really the most effective. *Basically, I am better than you.* Or at the very least, my culture is better than yours.”³

Of course, we are exhorted in the Bible to be humble. Moses is praised for his humility, and Jesus described himself as humble and exhorted us to be the same. James wrote: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (3:13 NIV).

Roberta Adair, a missionary with A3 in Miyagi Prefecture provides a good reminder in an article where she addressed her younger self: “Don’t go with a pointing finger and answers; please go with curiosity and a desire to see the image of God in those you seek to love.”⁴

Most missionaries find it difficult to get a good grasp of Japanese language and culture, making it tempting to not listen closely to our hosts. But we must not succumb to that. We need to work together to overcome the barriers holding us apart, to work together in our weakness finding ways to listen to Japanese Christians. Our fluent bilingual brothers and sisters can be of great help to those of us who struggle in this area.

JEMA, as an organisation, has a place in this too. This issue brings Japanese voices to you in English. JEMA also has a long-standing partnership with JEA (Japan Evangelical Association); that means that the JEMA President is on the JEA board and JEMA has observers on various JEA committees.

Let’s be better listeners and grow in humility as we work as guests in Japan for Christ.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

1. Lorna Ferguson and Sarah Chang, “Answering God’s call to pray for Japan,” *Japan Harvest* (Spring 2024), 24.
2. “What is Cultural Humility? The Basics,” University of Oregon, Division of Equality and Inclusion, <https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/what-cultural-humility-basics> (accessed June 11, 2024).
3. Amy Medina, “When Missionaries Think They Know Everything,” *A Life Overseas*, <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/when-missionaries-think-they-know-everything> (accessed June 11, 2024).
4. Roberta Adair, “Dear younger self, what’s your motivation for mission?” *A Life Overseas*, <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/dear-younger-self-whats-your-motivation-for-missions> (accessed June 11, 2024).

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Winter 2025: Mental Health

Spring 2025: The Missionary Life Cycle
(proposals due by October 31)

Summer 2025: Missiology: Theory and
Practice (proposals due by January 31)

Autumn 2025: Rural Japan (proposals due
by April 30)

12 things every missionary

By Susan Smith

Wisdom, advice, and encouragement drawn from my experience

Though ministry in my home country felt comfortable and made sense to me, I didn't realize that my prior experience wouldn't easily translate over to ministry in Japan. What are some common snags missionaries run into? What misunderstandings might have been avoided? Reaching Japanese people with the gospel takes wisdom and understanding. I wish I'd known the following 12 things when I first started.

1. Ask multiple times

It could be an invitation to attend a church event, visit your home, or simply go out for coffee. As new missionaries, my husband and I would ask once, maybe twice, but when the answer remained "no" or there was hesitation, we figured they weren't interested and quit asking. One Japanese man told us, "Keep asking. I will turn you down several times." We wondered, "Wouldn't that be too pushy?" He replied, "Push me! Japanese people want to be pushed!"

2. Keep the first step low

A Japanese friend taught us that some places are harder for people to enter than others. Entering a Christian church for the first time is a very big step, whereas entering a new café would be a much smaller one. How can we make initial steps easier? Instead of

meeting at a church, maybe we could meet outside or at a public meeting place. My husband and I ran a coffee shop for several years and found it was a perfect way to invite people into our space while keeping that first step small.

3. Beware of letting Japan's culture limit your witness

We come to Japan as learners, desiring to know the culture and operate as much as possible within its guidelines. There's the temptation to want to act more Japanese. But over time, I noticed that I allowed the culture to shackle my witness. I used to be more ready to speak to a stranger, but after observing how Japanese people stay in their own circles, I let their custom curb my way of reaching out, which also whittled away my interactions with new people. Though we're encouraged to avoid being that proverbial nail that sticks out, sharing the gospel definitely makes you a nail that sticks out! How much can we adapt to Japan's culture without muting the voice of the Savior?

4. Realize that Japanese people aren't in a spiritual vacuum

Most Japanese people have very little background in matters of the Bible and concepts of Christianity. It can seem like an uphill climb when we witness to

them, and sometimes I give up before I even start, thinking, "They'll never believe this." I figured they had nothing to work with. Yet God reminds me that every human being has all of creation as evidence that God exists. Humans also have the law of God written on their hearts, giving them an innate sense of right and wrong (Rom. 1–2). Because the basic ideas of sin, Jesus, and the cross are not common to the Japanese, a chronological overview of the Bible can lead up to God's provision of a Savior in a way that brings clarity to the big picture of the gospel.

5. Explain the concept of sin

The Japanese word for "sin" is the same one used for "crime." Many Japanese (and Americans!) would say, "I've never committed a crime." Others have said, "I used to sin as a child, but I don't anymore." Be ready to give some examples of the kinds of things sin encompasses—lying, speaking evil of another, hating someone, seeking revenge, and bullying. Visual images can be helpful, too, like the bull's eye illustration: hitting the center equals sinless perfection; anything outside of that is sin.

6. Emphasize the concept of shame

This is so opposite of how I view the world! As an American, I grew up clearly knowing my own guilt from

to Japan should know

my sin. There was a rule, and I broke it; therefore, I am a sinner and deserve to be punished. But I'm learning that many Eastern people aren't as impacted by guilt as they are by shame. When Japanese people shame someone, it's a grievous thing. For example, the shame of having a son in prison may cause a parent to move away from his or her hometown and break off all friendships. How can we explain how we shame our Lord and Savior by sinning against him and rejecting him?

7. Understand that Jesus didn't die for the "mask"

Finding a way to the heart of a Japanese friend is quite the challenge. My Japanese friends can put on a good front, projecting a life of happiness, comfort, and smooth sailing. I'm good at this, too! But God tells us that without Christ, we have no hope in this life or the next. How can we draw close enough to probe into heart needs, easing past the walls that separate us from the true person?

8. Be careful when asking a Japanese person if they want to accept Christ

Japanese people tend to discuss important things circuitously. By asking too directly, we don't allow them to save face. They understand the answer you're hoping for and don't want to disappoint you or cause you to lose face. Because they are quick to want to please you and keep a relationship with

you, Japanese are likely to verbalize assent without real heart change, leading to false conversions.

9. Use Scripture

Sometimes we struggle to know how to put the concepts of the gospel into the Japanese language in a way that makes sense to them. One Japanese friend tells of the time she was ready to accept Christ at a camp, but the missionary who took her aside could barely speak Japanese. Instead of saying much, the missionary pointed out certain verses in her bilingual Bible, having my friend read them for herself in perfect Japanese. My friend got the message and was gloriously saved! The Word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12).

10. Value the Japanese Christians around you

The absolute need for Christian fellowship, encouragement, and accountability cannot be overemphasized. Sometimes we missionaries feel we can be encouraged only by other missionaries. But Japanese Christians are part of the body of Christ, too. We can study the Bible and pray together, we can value and welcome their input into our spiritual lives, and we can learn from them. How do they share the gospel effectively? What is God teaching them?

11. Be encouraged—even a dim bulb emits some light

I often feel like a failure as a missionary. But then I remember that a little

light is better than no light at all. Even if no one accepts Christ, at least some have heard the truth. I remind myself that if I were not here, they would've had even less of a chance of meeting a Christian or hearing the gospel.

12. Undergird everything with love

As we prepared to come to Japan, a pastor answered our plea for advice this way: "Loving people goes a long way." People can tell if they are sincerely valued, not just looked at as a project or duty. Enjoying people doesn't come naturally to some of us, but we can all learn to love them in some way. One Japanese man (Mr. R.) who'd had an unfavorable run-in with a missionary was intrigued by my husband's method of evangelizing. Everywhere the two of them went together, Mr. R. introduced Norman as "a missionary and Bible teacher who doesn't always talk about his religion." Then they usually started talking about spiritual things!

We missionaries have much to learn when we enter the challenging mission field of Japan. May we continue to learn how to lovingly and effectively transfer God's message to the Japanese people. **JH**

Susan Smith (USA) is on temporary home assignment to care for her elderly mother. She and her husband, Norman, have served 20 years in Japan, serving the last 16 years in Kumamoto with ABWE.



Finding the right words

Three pairs of theological truths representing differences in Western and Japanese thoughts on the divine

By Jon Robison

A neighborhood friend once said to me, “Oh, you’re a Christian? I think Christianity is nice, but I’m Japanese, so I can’t become a Christian.” This sentiment encouraged me to search for a more Japanese expression of Christianity.

As I read the works of Japanese Christian thinkers, I noticed there were truths about God that could be paired. On one side, there would be something that made sense in my Western framework that I would naturally talk about when sharing my faith. On the other side, there would be a truth that made sense about God to a Japanese person, something that I hadn’t thought to talk about when evangelizing. I’d like to share three of those pairs: experience and knowledge, suffering and glory, and immanence and otherness. Before continuing, I want to emphasize that all six concepts speak truth about God. It’s just that for a Japanese person, three of them appear to be more interesting than the others.

Experience and knowledge

The first contrast is between the preference in Western thought to rationally argue the truths about God against the Japanese preference for seeing God in our day-to-day experiences. This contrast can be illustrated by the titles of Christian books. *Cold Case Christianity* by J. Warner Wallace and *The Reason for God* by Timothy Keller are two popular apologetics titles published in the West. *Be Smaller Than Flowers* (花よりも小さく) by Tomihiro Hoshino and *Bloom Where You Are Planted* (おかれた場所で咲きなさい) by Kazuko Watanabe are two Japanese titles about living the Christian life.

From a Japanese perspective, Westerners are too reliant on reason when it comes to matters of faith. Masao

Takenaka, a professor of theology at Doshisha University, wrote of Shozo Tanaka, a social reformer who lived in a small village. “Shozo accepted and affirmed the cyclical rhythm of the four seasons as God’s gift. For him the whole created cosmos was part of the inexhaustible treasure-house of God.”¹

Takenaka also notes Tanaka’s appreciation for neighbor. He quotes Tanaka, saying, “I was so stupid to search for God without paying attention to our neighbours who are so near to me. This is my mistake. For God is working among us and he is not necessarily far away.”² Takenaka’s appreciation for seeing God in nature and neighbor is a major theme in *God Is Rice*.

Takeo Doi, a psychiatrist and Catholic Christian, recorded his priest’s thoughts on how much more interested Japanese people were in ethics and aesthetics rather than abstract concepts:

When we talked abstractly and logically the peasants looked sleepy, but when we touched on ethics and aesthetics, their faces lit up. I realized that Japanese people deeply appreciate the raw virtues and aesthetics of things, rather than logical matters. From then on, this knowledge helped me in all my activities.³

The Japanese connection of spirituality and nature is a constant theme in Takenaka’s *God Is Rice* and *When the Bamboo Bends: Christ and Culture in Japan*. A section of the book by Mitsuo Fukuda, *Developing a Contextualized Church as a Bridge to Christianity in Japan*, is dedicated to creating a church aesthetic that utilizes the five senses to engage the heart toward spirituality.

This also means that Japanese people tend to be less impressed by religious debate than Westerners. Takenaka writes, “Whenever two or three West-

ern theologians are gathered together, there is argumentation about God. . . . they debate about God saying, ‘I argue.’” Instead, Takenaka suggests that we can know God by letting ourselves be surprised by God: “In the Bible we have many surprising acknowledgments: ‘Ha-hah! In this way, God is working in our world, in a way I did not know.’”⁴

Suffering and glory

God’s glory is a biblical truth. But I’m convinced it’s not the best way to start talking about God in Japan. Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori’s premise in *Theology of the Pain of God* was that God’s most important attribute was his pain, the pain that he willingly took on to redeem people who had sinned. This concept is more meaningful for Japanese people than for Westerners, for whom God’s invincibility is impressive. When we speak of God’s perfection, we start to bore people because in Japan, an untouchable power is uninteresting. Endurance of suffering, on the other hand, is more impressive. According to Kitamori:

The depth of a truly Japanese man may be determined by his understanding of this *tsurasa* [deep suffering]. According to the Japanese way of thinking, a man of depth, a man of understanding and intelligence, is one who understands *tsurasa*.⁵

Watching a few samurai movies can tell us that enduring pain and suffering is seen as heroic in Japanese pop culture. So while proclaiming the glory of our great God is both biblical and culturally meaningful to Westerners, Japanese people may have more esteem for someone perceived to have skin in the game. Reemphasizing God’s suffering over the glory that Western-

ers may emphasize can be a corrective to mission that may seem arrogant or imperialist.

Kosuke Koyama explores this in his book *No Handle on the Cross*. Koyama explains that when we handle things, we wield them with confidence and authority. Briefcases have handles. Lunch boxes full of high protein meals have handles. But the cross, which we are instructed to take up, does not have a handle. It is unwieldy, difficult to walk with, and eventually, you are supposed to be killed on it. So, Koyama asks, why do Christians so often go about kingdom building by carrying a briefcase instead of a cross?⁶ Koyama, a student of Kitamori's and one of the first Protestant missionaries sent from Japan after World War II, taught seminary courses in Thailand and had a front-row seat to interactions between Thai Buddhists and Western missionaries. He saw the danger of mixing mission with imperialism in his chapter titled "Guns and Ointment" in *Water Buffalo Theology*. Koyama saw firsthand how a triumphalist approach could be seen as competitive or condescending.

Koyama writes that a more appropriate attitude for missionaries might be called the Crucified Mind, which he contrasts with the Crusader Mind. He gives the following anecdote to introduce the concept:

One day some years ago I met a missionary couple from the West at Bangkok Airport. They had just arrived. They expressed a view that Thai Buddhism is a manifestation of

demons. How simple! Thirty million people in the Buddhist tradition of 700 years were brushed aside in one second.⁷

This Crusader Mind "bulldozes people and history without appreciation of their complexities." In contrast, the Crucified Mind sees people; it sees a neighbor who is a Buddhist rather than just Buddhism. It is a mind that sees a person and loves that person because a mind that looks at a person and sees an obstacle or an enemy fails to love God (1 John 4:20).⁸

Koyama recounts in *Mount Fuji to Mount Sinai* the conversion of his grandfather, one of the earliest Japanese Protestants in history:

My paternal grandfather became a Christian after he listened, in Tokyo, to a certain British gentleman, Mr. Herbert George Brand . . . The gospel of Christ which my grandfather heard was presented in broken Japanese with a heavy English accent. What a moment of inspiration to hear the gospel in a broken language! One of the few things I still remember from my grandfather about his conversion to Christianity from Buddhism was that he was impressed by this man who was able to say

that Jesus Christ is Lord without ever making derogatory comments upon Japanese culture or Buddhism. "This made me to follow Christ!" he told me.⁹

An approach that foregoes polemics is likely to be seen as embodying the self-denial that Japanese people expect to find in authentic religious experience.

Immanence and otherness

The third aspect of God that resonates more with Japanese people is the way God is close to us—his immanence over his otherness or holiness. Kitamori said in *Theology of the Pain of God* that God's pain was required so that he could draw close to humanity.

Kitamori used to illustrate this point in classes by wrapping a silk handkerchief around a handful of razor-sharp augers.¹⁰ Kitamori wrote, "What is salvation? Salvation is the message that our God enfolds our broken reality. A God who embraces us completely—this is God our Savior. Is there a more astonishing miracle in the world than that God embraces our broken reality?"¹¹ Immanuel, God with us, is



probably the best sounding news in the entire Christian faith for Japanese people. Koyama writes in *Water Buffalo Theology* that “The God who involves Godself in the history of the salvation process of dead-alive – lost-found is the God who says, ‘Your problem is my problem.’”¹² God commits himself.

Koyama, Kitamori, and Takenaka agree on the implication that the person who seeks to make Christ known can best do so by being present in the lives of the people they are evangelizing.¹³ While Western Christianity talks about heaven, holiness, and additional “other-oriented” goals, Japanese people are much more focused on their own setting. Takenaka calls this the *furusato* (old village or hometown) mentality.¹⁴ On my podcast, Pastor Kentaro Matsuda shared with me how “God with us” is so much more interesting to regular Japanese people than “you can go to heaven.”¹⁵ The Japanese are interested by how religion affects them right here, right now. In another

episode, this Japanese pastor who had been ministering in Japan for over fifty years gave his opinion that the most important part of our message is “God wants to be with you.”¹⁶

Experience and knowledge, suffering and glory, and immanence and otherness are three pairs of theological truths that represent differences in Western and Japanese thoughts on the divine. There are more. However, I am confident that, if I can follow my own advice and use more of the theological vocabulary that resonates with Japanese people, my presentation of the gospel will be better heard. **JH**

1. Masao Takenaka, *God is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 56.
2. *Ibid.*, 60.
3. Doi Takeo, 土居 健郎, 信仰と「甘え」増補版, [Faith and Dependence, Expanded Edition] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1992), 120. Translated by deepl.com.
4. Takenaka, *God Is Rice*, 8–9.
5. Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 5th revised ed. (Tokyo: Shinkyō Shuppansha, 1958; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 135.

6. Kosuke Koyama, *No Handle on the Cross: An Asian Meditation on the Crucified Mind* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 1–8.
7. Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 25th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 153.
8. *Ibid.*, 159.
9. Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji to Mount Sinai: A Critique of Idols* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 15–16.
10. Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 84.
11. Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 20.
12. Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 155.
13. Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 155; Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 55; Takenaka, *God Is Rice*, 90.
14. Takenaka, *God Is Rice*, 22–23.
15. Jon Robison, Recording of an interview with Pastor Kentaro Matsuda. JCATS 11 “Focus on Heaven or Earth?: Japanese evangelism and felt needs.” (June 1, 2023) <https://youtu.be/pWXX-bLuEuMI> (0:00-15:10min).
16. Jon Robison, retelling of an interview with a Japanese pastor. J-CATS podcast “Wisdom for missionaries from a 50 year veteran Japanese pastor” <https://youtu.be/wHdlak0O5cU> (8:55-10:25min).

Jon Robison, along with his wife, Maki, is a JEMS missionary partnering with J-Venture in Tokyo. He hosts the JCATS (Japanese Contextual and Theological Studies) Podcast and YouTube channel, where he investigates Japanese Christianity.

Journeying with Japanese churches in evangelism

By Fuji Liu

Missionaries need to learn about Japanese churches and how to walk with them

Missionaries can act as catalysts in Japanese churches to encourage evangelism as they support and work alongside them. For that to happen, it is important to be patient and willing to learn from their Japanese brothers and sisters.

This is because evangelism is hard in Japan. Although the gospel has been preached in Japan since 1549, starting with the missionary efforts of St. Francis Xavier, Japanese churches are still small and numerically few. At the same time, there may be church members who don't see evangelism as something they need to do. They may regard it as the work of a missionary. So a gentle challenge about evangelism may be

needed to encourage each member to follow the Great Commission and make disciples of all nations. Everyone has a role to play and something to contribute to the work of evangelism.

Listening is important

In order for evangelism to be culturally effective, it is essential that missionaries spend time listening to Japanese Christians share their understanding of and suggestions for evangelism. They can learn about Japanese culture and how to communicate in a way that will touch the heart of a Japanese person. At the same time, missionaries and Japanese Christians



can gain mutual understanding and serve each other in prayer to advance the kingdom of God.

For those who are doing evangelism work in Japan, either as an independent/affiliated missionary or directly working for a Japanese church, it's important to prepare with prayer. Assess and identify the understanding of evangelism in the Japanese church you're journeying with, ask what kind of help they need, and be patient and celebrate every little success.

Prayer and preparation

For a missionary who plans to come alongside a Japanese church, prayer is crucial, both for themselves and the church they hope to work with. Learning a new language to serve the local people and journey with a Japanese church is not an easy task. It may take many years to succeed. It is important to pray for long-term commitment and be dedicated to serving in Japan. During the preparation time, the prospective missionary could ask the Japanese church they plan to work with for prayer points and perhaps share their own prayer needs so they can serve each other in mutual prayer.

Even when a missionary and church are ready to start working together, patience is needed. When Japanese churches make plans, they do it at their own pace and time. They like to spend a lot of time to understand, discuss, and evaluate everything related in

detail before committing to a plan. To plan carefully is not wrong, but it does require patience from those who are not used to it. It can take several years for mutual understanding to grow. It is an opportunity for a missionary to wait in patience.

A deeper understanding

It's important to spend time with the Japanese church to identify their understanding of evangelism by asking and observing what they know about evangelism, how they feel about it, what kinds of problems they are facing, and what changes might help to reach the Japanese heart. Japanese Christians have their own understanding about appropriate evangelism methods in the Japanese context, and effective evangelism methods in other cultures cannot simply be reused in Japan. One-size-fits-all evangelism methods sometimes cause more damage than blessing.

Japanese Christians need to be willing to share their understanding about evangelism and to offer suggestions for changing evangelism methods to be more culturally appropriate. If local Christians can help the missionary gain more understanding of the culture and Japanese learning style, both can grow in understanding evangelism in the Japanese context. That may lead to an easily understandable, multipliable, and culturally appropriate evangelism method or plan.

Type of ministry

Having established a foundation of prayer together and a deeper understanding of Japan, missionaries and churches can

consider what ministry might meet the evangelism needs of the church.

The missionary could ask questions to define the need: What do you sense God is doing in your area? If you could make changes in your church, what would they be? Why do you want to change? What is the need behind these ideas? What kind of help do you need? How can we serve you and your outreach in this community?

Once the true need is defined and understood, the missionary and church could spend time together praying and talking until a common understanding is reached. Taking time for this process will help to develop a good long-term relationship of collaboration in ministry.

Patience and celebration for every little success

The Great Commission is a long journey. Each and every step of moving forward toward the goal should be celebrated. On the missionary's side, little steps such as making a friend with a nonbeliever or taking the chance to get involved in a local activity and work with locals, all the way up to being able to use the Japanese language to preach and share the gospel in Japanese, are all things worth celebrating.

In the Japanese church, each step forward should also be celebrated, such as being willing to pray in the prayer meeting for unbelieving friends, having the courage to talk to family and friends about their faith, and inviting nonbelievers to a church event.

Conclusion

Japan is hard ground, but God still does amazing things. To fulfill the Great Commission well, Japanese churches and missionaries need to pray together, talk, work together, and learn from each other. That will deepen their understanding of evangelism so that they can advance the kingdom of God. **JH**

Fuji Liu is a missionary from China who has been working with the International Christian Baptist Church since 2018. He majors in personal evangelism and journeying with Japanese churches together in missions.



The difficulties of being a Christian in Japanese society

By John Edwards

A group of Japanese Christians came together to discuss the issues they face living as followers of Jesus

“What are some challenges you face being a Christian in Japan?” I asked. We had gathered nine Japanese Christian friends together, eight women and one man, to talk about the issues so that we could be better informed. This group of believers living in rural Japan raised several issues, such as choosing between church and community events on Sundays, and growing up as a Christian.

It soon became clear through the conversations that what they desired was a forum to share their difficulties with each other, just as we were doing at that moment. What they did not want were cookie-cutter solutions on how to deal with the cultural challenges of being Japanese Christians living in their own culture. They needed to be personally heard. And they also desired support. One woman said to a pastor’s wife in our group, “When my family is sick and facing death, I want to be able to call you and your husband.”

Listening and taking into account the emotional element of the situation of Japanese believers—including pastors—is essential for missionaries to be truly helpful to the Japanese church.

The choice between community and church

The first issue mentioned in our discussion was Sunday worship. Sunday is often the day of community events in Japan. How often my wife and I have had to apologize in advance or simply did not show up for cleaning days, training days, or other community events. Even school-related events are sometimes held on Sundays. One woman shared how difficult it was for her to drive by the fields on Sunday mornings while her neighbors were working there. She wondered if there

was some way she could have handled it better. Would it have been better if she could have persuaded her unbelieving husband to accompany her and her children to church?

I have seen this issue managed in various ways in Japanese churches. One approach is to honor the Lord and show up diligently to worship services on Sunday mornings as an example to other believers and to unbelievers. A second way is to have worship services at a time other than Sunday morning. And a third option is to encourage believers not to attend Sunday morning worship when there is a community event happening so that they can demonstrate their care of the community and in that way be a witness.

Relationship with shrines and temples

A person’s relationship with the local Shinto shrine and Buddhist temple was another significant issue. In our town, there is an annual summer festival. The first day is very much connected to Shinto rituals as the mobile shrine is carried around town in an elaborate wagon. The second day of the festival features the local *Hanagasa Odori* (flower hat dance), which is largely connected to the construction of the local manmade lake. Before the festival, volunteers go to all the households asking for contributions for the festival. New to the town, one woman nervously explained to the collectors she was a Christian and did not want to contribute to the shrine, but she was willing to give toward the dance parade. The collectors understood and assured her they would honor her request. She gave half of what most people give.

Related to this, another woman observed that it was difficult to deter-

mine what was acceptable or not for a Christian and still be a good member of society. Another participant pointed out that even Japanese who are not Christians have different levels of belief in Shintoism and Buddhism, and yet many help on cleaning days and give toward upkeep of the grounds in their community including around shrines and temples.

Identifying as a Christian

Using the phrase “because I’m a Christian” was sometimes stressful and yet necessary for the participants. One older woman expressed how she found it better *not* to share that information right at the beginning of a conversation, as it would come across very strongly as “I am not one of you.” She shares it only when a specific activity is against her Christian convictions. This woman generally found her neighbors and family to be more understanding when she shared this way. For example,



for a Buddhist funeral, rather than refusing to attend at all, it was better for her to explain which parts of the funeral she could not participate in because of her faith.

Dealing with death

This leads to the most difficult issue that our friends wrestle with: how to deal with death in Japanese culture. One woman in her seventies shared that she still can't summon up the courage to discuss these things with her husband, who she prays will become a Christian. If she were to die first, she desires a Christian funeral, but her husband, being uncomfortable and unfamiliar with Christian traditions, would probably do a Buddhist funeral. On the other hand, if he were to die first, he would want a Buddhist funeral, as would most of her relatives. One widow shared that as soon as her unbelieving husband died unexpectedly, the local Buddhist priest was at her house to discuss funeral plans. For her it was difficult. Her husband wasn't opposed to aspects of a Christian funeral, but he was on the local Buddhist temple board.

As the group continued to talk, they spent a great deal of time discussing the difficulties of breaking away from the Buddhist temple where the family grave is registered. Not only are there huge family issues to deal with, but there are also large financial expenses involved.



Some talked about doing this sooner rather than simply handing down the problems to the younger generations.

Growing up Christian

The challenges were not confined to the end of life, as there are difficulties for children in Christian families as they grow up. For instance, fitting in is such an important part of school life, and children, especially from middle school, are constantly comparing themselves to others. When you are different, you always feel like you are making mistakes. One woman shared that her coping mechanism was to never have close friends. In that way, she could be comfortable with being different. Another woman commented that in junior high, she was able to live “against the flow” because she clearly understood the biblical way she ought to be living. It was tiring, but at the same time it was freeing. She added that there were family and regional differences about how to live among other Christians and among the general Japanese population.

Creating community

To help unbelievers become more comfortable among Christians, the group discussed how it was good to have non-religious events that offered a taste of Christianity and let believers and unbelievers work together. In recent months, a woman in our church started a Japanese sign language class. Initially, it was for people in the church, as there are Deaf believers in the community with whom we were interacting more and more. A Deaf couple came to assist in the instructing. Through word of mouth, unchurched people began coming to the classes, and the unchurched had such a good time that they asked if they could invite their friends. The class is almost half unbelievers. We laugh together, work together, and sprinkle in Bible vocabulary (signs) and practices.

The Deaf believer who was a part of our discussion group reminded us that he became a Christian because of many, many months of fun and food at a Christian missionary couple's home. Without knowing any sign language themselves, this missionary couple

saw the need for fellowship among the Deaf, so they opened their home regularly for hours of games, eating, and “talking.” In learning sign language, these missionaries were able to learn how to more clearly communicate the gospel message. It was a slow process for our Deaf friend to be introduced to the gospel message and then to finally start to understand it and then to believe it. His desire to know more came from the community created by Christians.

Listening and learning

Hearing from this group of Japanese believers, I deeply felt their tension of wanting to be good family members and local citizens while at the same time wanting to follow Christ Jesus wholeheartedly. Until now, I have usually asked other missionaries how to help Japanese believers navigate through these issues. However, I have found this community of Japanese believers from multiple churches and a seasoned pastor and his wife; they don't have all the answers yet but are not afraid of the questions. Just having the privilege of listening in on the discussions concerning various themes from Scripture has informed and encouraged both my mind and heart. I was reminded that listening is the first step in caring for Japanese believers. In fact, listening first is an essential step that we all too often forget when we focus on our solidly held convictions formed in the environment of our own home cultures. I need to rethink these convictions with a solid foundation in God's Word but also with a deeper understanding of how different convictions might be formed in a significantly different culture. In other words, I need to listen to understand rather than listen to solve. I need to trust the Spirit of God to work in the hearts of Japanese believers as they wrestle alone and together with God's Word and how to apply it to their lives. **JH**

John Edwards, along 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.

A dream, delays, and a book

By Stephanie Waters

How God used various circumstances to inspire a project of sharing Japanese testimonies

In early 2023, after ten long years of waiting, we finally had a trip planned to visit Japan! It wasn't the long-term stay we'd been dreaming of, but we hoped God would make some connections that would open the door for us to return on a long-term work visa. Just before we took our trip, I received a phone call from my mother saying she'd had a dream we wouldn't go to Japan long term until we completed a book with 100 testimonies. It seemed so random and specific, and, honestly, we weren't sure if we should believe her, but if it was a dream

from God, we wanted to be praying about it.

Delays

After two long but beautiful months in the land we've so longed to make our home, we returned to the States a bit disappointed that no door had been immediately opened. Then we found out we were pregnant with another baby! We were excited but also felt that staying in the States for a while would be wise since I had struggled deeply with postpartum depression after our daughter Hannah was born. We didn't

want to jump into a new language, culture, and place if we were going to face that challenge again. At the same time, my husband was offered a construction/carpentry job, which was the dream work he'd been hoping to do in Japan. All of these delays started to add up in my mind as confirmations of my mother's dream, and I began considering it more deeply.

Seeing the need

Two things came to mind as I thought about what this book could mean for ministering to the Japanese,



Tomo Miyano

Osaka, Japan

Bio: Tomo is married and has three children and one grandchild. He is a college professor and a member of New Life Christ Church. His interests include traveling, reading, walking, and playing tennis.

From stiff-necked to joy-filled

I grew up without an awareness of God, and I always thought about things in a pessimistic way. I thought to myself, "In this world, successful people are those who go to prestigious universities, get good jobs, and make a lot of money, but eventually we all die around 70 to 80, right? After all, life is utterly meaningless."

After failing the college entrance exam, I was convinced that my life was virtually over. Because I wanted to escape from reality, I decided to study in the US. During my study abroad, many Christians invited me to church and Bible study, prayed for me, and told me about salvation through Jesus, but I was stiff-necked and had no desire to accept Jesus.

On my first visit to a Japanese church after returning to Japan, the pastor advised me to read the Gospel of John, and I did.

Three months later, I found myself crying hard during the Sunday morning service. I could see the image of Jesus Christ clearly in my mind. I knew that He died for me. For the first time

in my life, I understood the meaning of Jesus. I was so joyful that I immediately said to the pastor after the service, "Today I've realized that Jesus is my Savior and Redeemer, so please let me be baptized today." Surprisingly, he baptized me that evening.

Right after that, I began to share the gospel of Jesus with my family and friends. A few years later, my parents, grandmother, and younger brother were all saved by the Lord Jesus.

In Japan, many pastors, missionaries, and believers are fond of saying, "It is so difficult to evangelize the Japanese." On the contrary, I always optimistically say, "Nothing is impossible with Jesus, who saved a wretch like me. Evangelism to the Japanese is easy."

things we've learned over the years and have heard from missionaries in Japan. First, Japanese believers often have a difficult time sharing their faith with others due to fear of sticking out and being ostracized,¹ and second, Japanese who are not believers often think that being a Christian means giving up being Japanese or that belief in the God of the Bible is more of a Western thing.² As I pondered these things, I began to see the need for this book. It could serve as a tool to encourage people that being Japanese and being Christian are not incompatible—that God is truly the God of all nations, peoples, and tongues—and to embolden Japanese Christians to share their testimonies. So, regardless of whether my mother's dream was from God or

not, I could see the potential for this book to both plant seeds for the gospel and inspire believers to share how God has worked in their lives.

The book's beginning

The testimonies with this article are representative of what the book will look like in terms of content. May you be blessed by these beautiful stories of God's handiwork in the lives of two Japanese brothers! They are a beautiful start to this little book-writing journey God has us on. However, this is just the beginning, and we need more testimonies! If a Japanese brother or sister you know has a story to share, please reach out at japanesetestimonybook@gmail.com. An online submission form will then be sent to collect the testi-

mony and other important information for the book. Please pray for this work God has started to be brought to completion and to bring many Japanese to Christ! **JH**

1. Brent Kooi, "Why Are the Japanese so Resistant to the Gospel?" *Mission to the World*, <https://www.mtw.org/stories/details/why-are-the-japanese-so-resistant-to-the-gospel> (March 24, 2014).
2. Kelly Malone, "Doing Evangelical Theology with the Japanese," *Mission Nexus*, <https://missionexus.org/doing-evangelical-theology-with-the-japanese/> (April 1, 2009).

Illustration by Jackie Peveto

Stephanie Waters, along with her growing family, currently lives in northeast Texas, USA, as they navigate the transition phase of becoming missionaries in Japan. They hope to become tentmakers and students in the Nagoya area one day.



Hiroshi Horai

Okayama, Japan

Bio: Hiroshi is 68 and lives in Tamano City, Japan, with his wife, and they attend Tamano Seiyaku Kirisuto Kyōkai. They have one son and two grandchildren. He does the bookkeeping for a construction company, and he enjoys cars, making very complicated wooden models, and watching the Giants baseball team (on the rare occasions they win).

God helped me

When I was in my late thirties, I was working at a secular company that had a very high level of stress and long work hours. At the same time, at home, our young son was having recurring high fevers. We lived in a very rural area of Japan in which there were no pediatricians. Often, we had to take our seriously ill son in the middle of the night

to a large hospital an hour and a half by car from our house.

Because of these things, I was mentally and physically exhausted. I lost both my appetite and all sense of taste. Eventually I became unable to sleep. Of course, I went to see several different doctors—all of whom said there was nothing wrong with me physically and gave me no guidance about where to go for help.

Meanwhile, the doctors at the large hospital decided that our five-year-old son was going to need a tonsillectomy. We went to the hospital to prepare for his surgery, and my wife said to me, "Honey, why don't you try going to a psychiatrist? They have some at this hospital."

I was shocked. I was a committed Christian. Christians don't get psychiatric problems—at least that is what I had always thought. But I was desperate, so I made an appointment. What

a surprise it was when I spoke with the psychiatrist and he understood all my symptoms! And how amazing it was when I took the medicine he gave me. It was like a miracle. My thinking became instantly brighter, driving out the overwhelming darkness that I had lived with for so long. I knew that God had answered my prayers. Our loving Heavenly Father had led me to professionals who could help me.

That was 30 years ago, before there was even a medical term for depression in Japan. People then didn't talk about what is now a pandemic in this land. I am writing this to encourage anyone out there who may feel like I did all those years ago: "I'm a committed Christian. Christians don't get depression." Yes, we do—and God can help us. He made both the mind and the body. He can help us with any problem we have, and often His help is given through well-trained professionals.

Six months later, help is still needed

By Chie Yokota

An update on the new year's earthquake on the Noto Peninsula

In June, my husband and I went to Noto Town in Ishikawa Prefecture to run a community event for children and families affected by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake. While we were there we interviewed a disaster relief nurse, Yumiko Yamanaka, about the situation six months after the disaster. Below is a translation of the interview.

Meet Yumiko Yamanaka

Yumiko Yamanaka is a registered nurse and specialist in disaster relief. She now coordinates relief work in Noto Town on the peninsula of the same name where the earthquake happened on New Year's Day. Yumiko was greatly influenced by the major disasters that she lived through, which prompted her to train as a nurse and get involved in relief work.

When she was in high school, Yumiko heard and believed in the gospel through an American missionary, Mary Ellen Gudeman. As she describes it, her heart received the Bible message like a dry sponge soaking up water.

She lived through the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, which hit her hometown of Amagasaki.

Thankfully her family survived, and for months afterwards, Yumiko and her brother volunteered at an elementary school shelter in Kobe, doing relief work to support evacuees.

In 2005, a JR West train derailed and crashed through an apartment block in Amagasaki. Yumiko was so affected by the accident that she decided to become a nurse even though she was over 40 years old. She was still a nursing student when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred in 2011. She was filled with a desire to run to the area, but she decided to stay and finish her nursing studies. After graduating, she worked in the intensive care unit for premature babies at a Christian hospital. During this time, she became aware of the need to care for parents and children who had anxiety after they were discharged from the hospital.

When the Kumamoto earthquakes struck in 2016, Yumiko left her job to help at a friend's maternity hospital as a disaster relief nurse. But she never forgot her concern for parents and children after they left institutional care, realising that many needed ongoing care because of mental health issues

and behavioural challenges such as Asperger's and ADHD.

So from Kumamoto, Yumiko started a non-profit organisation called TetMet (てとめつと), meaning the hands (手 te) and eyes (目 me) of the health care specialist (a play on the first kanji for nursing 看護). This network seeks to provide support to parents and children affected by disasters, particularly specialized care for children with developmental difficulties as well as children and families in need of physical help. This nationwide network is made up not only of nurses but also people from various skill backgrounds. It is an organisation to provide necessary, targeted support in disaster areas to those who need it, both in the immediate aftermath and in the long term.

What is your job now?

This year, after the Noto earthquake, I came here to help in the relief work and continued growing the TetMet network. Once here, I met members of the Japan Overseas Cooperative Association (JOCA), and now I am working for them as a manager. My job is to assist the town hall staff in providing relief for citizens. Right now, I help oversee the temporary housing and provide community support (there are 8 locations with 441 temporary houses). We are also working on improving the environment of the evacuation shelters.

I have a team of volunteers, and our work is to serve as a contact point for people currently living in temporary housing to communicate any problems they may be having in their daily lives. So we liaise between them and the town office.

What's the state of things at the moment?

Noto Town is smaller than Suzu City and Wajima City, so it is easier to move around, and connections have



been restored for electricity and gas. But in many places, water has not been reconnected yet, side streets from roads to individual houses have not yet been fixed, and sewerage is still not working. Many people are elderly and live alone, so they are unable to help themselves or each other. Therefore, support from outside the town is necessary. But there is not much media coverage, and so little support comes from the outside. The cleanup and rebuilding work is very slow.

Because JOCA has been active here since the disaster struck, we have been able to build trust with both the townsfolk and local authorities. The people in the town hall can rely on us to work well, and we support the town hall so that they can operate well.

What kind of help do you provide?

We are in the position of being directly involved with the residents, listening to their problems and responding to them. We play with children, do health exercises with elderly people, hold tea parties, and help look out for the residents. We visit the people in temporary housing to see how they are doing and encourage them. There is great need for support for mental health as people continue to live in very difficult and isolating situations, now for several months. JOCA also helps people move out of condemned houses into temporary houses or go back to get things out of houses that people can no longer live in.

How can people help?

Everyone here feels a bit forgotten and are weary. It would be a great encouragement to send a thank-you to those who have been working here for a long time; the people who are caring also need to be taken care of. The town hall staff are also victims of the earthquake, but they have not had a break since the disaster. Many of their houses were damaged, and they continue to live without basic services. The JOCA staff and volunteers have been serving since January. If we could care for



them, they would be able to continue caring for the people.

Your church or mission could show love and support by something as simple as sending a box of individually wrapped snacks. Eating while talking helps to create a relaxed atmosphere and makes it easier to share in conversation, so snacks would be helpful.

Also, if you'd like to come and help, you don't need any special skills. The kind of encouragement that people need is simply what most Christians do each time they meet together—just be able to ask an elderly person, “How are you today?” You could also run a kids club, play music, or cook for a group of volunteers or older people who have eaten mostly bento since January.

How can Christians/the church witness in this kind of situation?

JOCA is not a Christian organization, so we don't do events with a gospel message or hand out tracts. But I believe that showing love to others as a Christian goes a long way to helping them become interested in the God who loves us. If people come to help, there are many personal opportunities to share our motivation for caring when people ask, “Why are you caring for us in this way?” We can reply, “Because my God cares for me, and he cares for you too!”

What can Japan Harvest readers pray for?

Please continue to lift your hands in prayer. We need people to spread the message about the current situation here. Although the media has forgotten and people tend to think that the Noto Peninsula disaster is over, I want everyone to know that this is not true.

Please pray there would continue to be people willing to come to Noto to support the disaster relief operations.

Pray that the necessary support will be delivered in a timely manner to where it is needed. Pray for the people, wisdom, and opportunities to be in place.

Pray for the physical and mental support of staff who are in the area for long periods of time. The people in the town hall are exhausted. There has been no place to escape for them. Please help them to be protected both mentally and physically. **JH**

If you, your church, or other Christian group would like to volunteer in Noto or send a package to Yumiko, please contact Chie at: seahorsesoccer@yahoo.co.jp

For further information, please go to the [とどめつと Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/saigaikanngo) page at: <https://www.facebook.com/saigaikanngo>

Photos submitted by author

Chie Yokota, along with her husband, Masa, runs the Seahorse Soccer International club in Amagasaki, which seeks to show Jesus's love to kids and their families through sport.



Seeking a life

Ayako Morioka, partnering with Kaori Kimimori, helps Christian women live out a mission built on their relationship with God

By Kari Miyano

When Ayako Morioka was preparing to return to Japan from overseas, she participated in a coaching course for Christian women called “The Significant Woman.” She decided to bring it to Japan after it helped her discover what God wanted her to do at a major turning point in her life and because she felt that many other women would also benefit.

I met Ayako in what I have to describe as a God encounter at the Women in Ministry (WIM) retreat in Tochigi Prefecture in March. (I am so grateful for how JEMA exists to build up the body of Christ and sponsor retreats like this.) I was a little tired on the first day and decided I would lie down on my bed and rest a bit, even if that meant I might be a few minutes late for dinner. I knew that there would only be a few places left if I arrived late, so I was going to have to sit wherever there was an open chair.

When I entered the dining room, there was only one space left, in front of two Japanese women, Ayako and Momoko. I wanted them to feel

comfortable and welcomed at this retreat held all in English. We went on to have all our meals together, and by the third and last day of the retreat, I found out that they were developing a course from overseas to empower Japanese women. Because I was so glad to hear about this, I decided to interview Ayako about The Significant Woman course.

Kari: What is The Significant Woman course?

Ayako: It is a life coaching program designed for Christian women based on the truths in God’s Word. It aims to help Christian women discover their uniqueness and realize who God created us to be. It teaches us how to deeply embrace our relationship and intimacy with God, through which we receive our purpose and direction in life. Women will be led to discover and create their own personal mission statement and be empowered to live it out. They will also be trained in practical skills such as prioritizing time, setting boundaries, proactively making decisions, and dealing with obstacles.

The contents fall under six principles summarized with the acronym PEARLS:

P: Pursue your uniqueness

E: Embrace the source

A: Activate your mission

R: Refocus your life

L: Live intentionally

S: Sustain for life

Through the steps of the course, women are encouraged to look back over their life experiences, reflect deeper, and understand more about themselves as they prepare for their future.

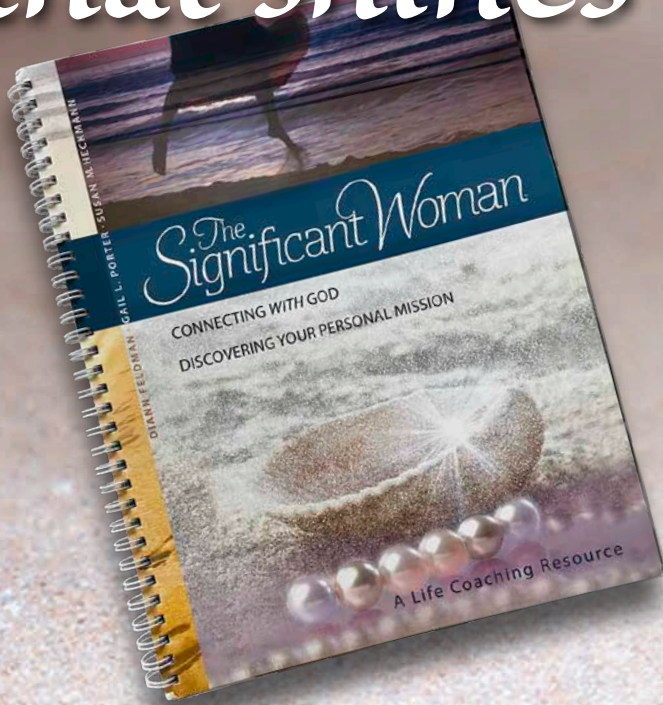
Participants learn together in a small group setting (either on Zoom or in person) of usually 5 to 12 women. This allows them to share life stories, testimonies, and discoveries. In this way, learning takes place in a highly relational environment and includes peer coaching within the group.

Kari: How have you seen God’s hand on this project?

Ayako: I think that launching the course during Covid was God’s divine plan. Women were stuck at home and longing for more out of life.

The course had been introduced to Japan by Campus Crusade for Christ in 2011. By 2020, the material had been

that shines like a pearl



translated into Japanese and was being shared within small circles of women. In 2021, we realized that there was a growing interest from women who had heard about the course by word of mouth. I was convinced that printing colored and attractive workbooks instead of using photocopies would make the course accessible to more women and would help things multiply. Once a snowball starts rolling, it will grow big and fast, and that is what we saw happen!

We are in the process of going over the Japanese to make it natural and easy to understand. Translating English into natural Japanese words and phrases without losing the essence of the original text and contextualizing things into Japanese culture is *not* an easy task. Even finalizing the translation for the name of the program from *The Significant Woman* to 真珠のように輝く人生を求めて (*Seeking a Life that Shines Like a Pearl*) took us several months.

Kari: How did you get introduced to *The Significant Woman*?

Ayako: I had decided to return to Japan from Singapore after living there for nine years, and I had just a glimpse of what I felt God was calling me to do in Japan. As I progressed through

The Significant Woman, things became clear, and I knew what God was calling me to do. This personal experience made me realize that there are countless women who will benefit from this program.

Kari: How can a woman find out how to join a group in Japan?

Ayako: Please email pearls.japan@gmail.com

Right now, we are not offering the program at regular intervals. We plan to start new groups as we get enough applicants. We see if any trained facilitators are available to lead a group, and if so, we schedule and hold an introductory session so that women who are considering the program can hear more about it, including the purpose, schedule, and what commitment is required. After the introductory session, we start a group when there are enough members. The program usually runs for 10 sessions weekly, biweekly, or monthly, followed by a celebration at the end.

Kari: Are there any plans to make a counterpart program like this available for men?

Ayako: The Significance Project by CRU (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) provides life coaching programs for men as well, *Man of Impact*. There are also courses for pre-believers that are in a user-friendly format and include evangelistic messages.

We are focused on completing and publishing *The Significant Woman* in Japanese by the end of March 2025. If God allows, we would like to continue working on *Man of Impact*.

Kari: How has the course been used in other contexts?

Ayako: CRU has used the material in other countries with final year students at university. It is excellent preparation for them as they prepare to graduate and enter the workforce.

In some countries, the evangelistic versions, *Soaring* (for women) and *Quest* (for men), have been used to reach out to people in the business world. One woman worked together with a human resource executive to offer it to all the women in her company. One man has used it with executives in the US. He found that many men realized that they did not have a compelling life mission. They said their life mission was to make money and realized that that was not meaningful. They began to search for deeper meaning, and many have come to Christ. I hope that this material can be used in this way in Japan also.

Final thoughts from the author

This course has already been translated into Chinese, Korean, and Spanish, as well as several European and middle Eastern languages. It's great to learn that it is going to be available in Japanese soon.

After reading my own copy of *The Significant Woman*, I am really looking forward to joining a group soon. Please have a look at the website (thesignificantwoman.com) and then recommend this course to any women you know who would benefit. Together, we can raise up an army of women in Japan who know they are loved and significant so they can make a huge impact in this country. **JH**

Book photo by Ayako Morioka

Kari Miyano (USA) lives in Osaka and is delighted in her identity as a child of God. She partners with Moms in Prayer International. Kari enjoys traveling and meeting all kinds of people.

Working together to reconnect churches with the community

By John Edwards, David McIntyre, Atsuko Tateishi

Japanese pastors share their thoughts on how missionaries can contribute to ministry in Japan

Responding to emailed questions, six Japanese pastors reflected on how missionaries can continue to contribute to gospel work in Japan.

Their ages and experiences vary, and so do their answers. A common theme was the stress on encouraging missionaries to be willing to work with local churches and pastors and to learn from them. As missionaries do that listening, they can work on culturally appropriate and biblically faithful ways to reconnect churches to the community.

The pastors also said there were many opportunities for missionaries to use their different gifts to serve in Japan and approach non-Christian Japanese people in a way that many Japanese Christians find difficult.

How would Japanese Christians like missionaries to be part of gospel work in Japan?

The pastors said that much of Japan is unreached, and that means there is a wide range of work missionaries can do, particularly with a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to connect with the community.

“This work [of reaching Japan] won’t be possible for just Japanese people or Japanese churches to do,” said Pastor Yokota. “So we’re going to need the cooperation of missionaries and mission organisations.” Pastor Yokota also said that he would like to see missionaries use the gifts they have, whether that’s entertaining, teaching, or playing music. Pastor Ariga concurred, saying,

“I think all sorts of missionaries could work in Japan.”

At the same time, the main task is clear, according to Pastor Chito. “There is a vision: make disciples,” he said. “So come join the church in that effort.”

Almost all the pastors talked in some way about missionaries working with or partnering with Japanese churches. Ultimately, an attitude of seeking to cooperate and learn will allow Japanese churches and missionaries to work together for the gospel in Japan. Pastor Kanemoto also pointed out, “The cooperation will change over time, but I think there are some really healthy relationships being established at the moment.”

Ariga Kiichi (Paul)

Ambassador for Asian Access



Chito Fumikazu

Crossroad Nishinomiya, Hyogo



Iida Katsuya

J-House, Osaka



Pastor Sakamoto expressed a need for churches to better connect with the broader Japanese community. “The biggest problem with the church is that Christians have drifted away from the social body.” He added, “Normal people don’t go to church. So I want to see people who can work with Japanese Christians to break down the walls between churches and the community.” Pastor Iida said that in one sense, missionaries should aim to do what all Christians are doing—look around and seek to reach the few people near them. “We talk about ‘Each one reach one,’” Pastor Iida said. “The way to revival in Japan is for us to evangelize one person at a time. If they ask why you’ve come from America, then share that and go from there.”

What the details of evangelism look like is likely to depend on the church, the pastor, and the missionaries involved. So according to Pastor Chito, it’s important that missionaries are willing to learn, particularly from pastors and older missionaries. “This can be hard if you’ve already been trained, but you need to be willing,” he concluded.

How do you think missionaries contribute to strengthening the church and to evangelism?

On one hand, different giftings and skills lead missionaries to help churches in different ways. “Depending on the missionary, what they can do will vary, so I think it is good that they serve in a

way that is appropriate for them,” Pastor Yokota noted.

But all the pastors emphasized that building relationships is most important.

Pastor Sakamoto pointed to the opportunity foreign missionaries have to speak to almost anyone in Japan. “Japanese people are unlikely to speak to someone on the street who they don’t know. But many people are happy if a foreigner speaks to them and will even try to respond in English. This is a special ability that a visitor has.” Pastor Iida shared his own experience of visiting university campuses with his wife in the early days of planting a church and feeling the age gap with the students. He said taking an overseas mission team opened up many opportunities.

Pastor Ariga commented that the effectiveness of a missionary comes out of the relationship-building that can happen in a church. Pastor Kanemoto pointed to the faithfulness and commitment that past missionaries had shown, which was a huge encouragement to him. “Missionaries had a passion for mission and walked faithfully with the Lord in the place they served and had a positive influence on Japanese pastors and Christians.”

Are there mistakes in the past that you think missionaries should avoid?

The failure to get to know the culture before making judgements about how local Christians should respond

to religious customs, failure to communicate, and pride were some of the common answers.

Pastor Sakamoto pointed to some unintended consequences of well-intentioned missionaries. “Missionaries taught Japanese people that you mustn’t attend Buddhist events.” Many Japanese people who became Christians interpreted this to mean that they had to leave the social group they had grown up in. Pastor Iida noted that this was an important issue that was ongoing. If a new Christian in Japan stops attending local or family religious events, there is a perception that they have just cut themselves off from the community. He said, “When their parents go to the family grave, I think they can help clean the grave and be there with their family and pray for their family at that time.” Pastor Iida concluded, “It’s really important to maintain the relationships that people have for the sake of mission in Japan.”

This points to the difficulty and necessity for missionaries to adequately understand the culture so that they can know at what point a cultural practice is idolatrous, which also underscores the importance of communicating with Japanese partners.

“I think communication is really important,” said Pastor Yokota. “I feel some missionaries do undervalue the local Japanese church while others seek to fit in with Japanese culture too much, smothering their gifts and

Kanemoto Satoru

Ōizumi Budō no ki Kyōkai, Tokyo



Sakamoto Kenichi

Shion Kirisuto Kyōkai, Yamagata



Yokota Pouro (Paul)

Aburayama Shalom Kyōkai, Fukuoka



character.” Within that context, communication is vital so that missionaries, pastors, and churches talk about the new perspective a missionary can bring and how it might be applied.

Pride and the perception that missionaries are looking or talking down to Japanese people, even inadvertently, were mentioned as issues all missionaries should be aware of.

“Not becoming proud is important, whether you are a pastor or a missionary,” Pastor Kanemoto said. A separate but related issue is that of control.

Pastor Ariga mentioned that there were examples from the past when missionaries controlled an evangelism budget from overseas and ended up ruling over a church. Pastor Kanemoto also mentioned that the way missionaries have been taught to communicate the gospel—as teachers instructing students—can have the effect of coming across as proud. This goes back to the earlier point about being culturally aware, except this time, it is to be aware of the missionary’s own culture.

“Leaving aside whether something is wrong or not, it is important for missionaries to be aware of the cultural forces that shape us,” Pastor Kanemoto said. Pastor Chito agrees that missionaries need to be aware that they are also formed by the culture they grew up in, and those things may not be appropriate for Japan. “Not everything Western is wrong, but you need to be prepared to reexamine mission through the book of Acts,” he said. He added that Japan is not a place to bring pet projects and it is also a place where you need to be resilient.

What advice might you give prospective missionaries (church planters or ministry workers) to Japan? What about current missionaries?

The pastors wanted potential missionaries to Japan to be faithful in serving where they are now, investing particularly in relational ministry and persevering in language learning.

Pastor Chito said it’s important for prospective missionaries to be doing the things in their home country that they hope to do in Japan. “If you

want to be a church planter, have you been part of a church planting team in Ohio [for instance]?” He wants to ask prospective missionaries whether they are faithful in their churches or have multiplied their small group. Pastor Iida wants people to examine their motivation for coming to Japan. “Are you coming because things didn’t go so well in your own country or you just like anime?” he said. “If you’re not evangelising or discipling in your own country, then you’re going to find it hard in Japan.”

He also challenged potential missionaries to maintain realistic expectations, given that results do not come as quickly as in some other mission locations. He pointed to Jeremiah, who for many years faithfully called on Israel to repent even though nobody did.

For existing missionaries, Pastor Chito said, “Don’t think programs. Think relationships. How many coffees, meals, etc. have you had with

It’s really important to maintain the relationships that people have for the sake of mission in Japan.

people?” Pastor Sakamoto agreed with the importance of relationships, saying that missionaries should spend time with Japanese Christians to encourage them, week in and week out. You can “encourage the Christians as you drink coffee with them and serve in church with them.”

Pastor Iida added that it was important to be specific when thinking about evangelism. “Think in details. Pray in details,” he said. “Pray for Tanaka-san and Yamamoto-san and how they might change and what you need to do to help them change.”

Pastor Kanemoto had observed missionaries giving thanks for things they had learnt in Japan, and those same missionaries tended to have friendships with Japanese people of different backgrounds. “If we are able to be friends with those who have different values to us, I wonder if that also means that we

are walking well as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,” he said.

Pastor Yokota pointed to the disaster relief ministries as an area where Japanese Christians and missionaries had been able to cooperate well. “My hope is that the same sort of cooperation can take place in the field that we call mission.”

In all of this, missionaries really need to learn Japanese as well as they can so that their efforts bear fruit. “I know that missionaries can really struggle with language learning. But if you can’t speak Japanese, you won’t be able to open the door to Japanese people’s hearts,” Pastor Sakamoto said.

Have you been encouraged by a missionary? If so, in what way?

Almost all the pastors had personal connections with missionaries who were part of their Christian formation.

“I myself believed because a Swedish missionary brought the gospel.

They led me to become a pastor. I was able to plant a church with missionaries, and they helped me grow so that I could fight alongside them,” Pastor Ariga recalled. “I am so thankful.” Pastor Kanemoto was baptised as an infant by a missionary and then encouraged to grow by several others. He said, “I’m here today because of the guidance I received from many missionaries.”

Pastor Yokota remembers how one of his teachers at seminary was a missionary who took time to fellowship with him. “The personal fellowship that happened when they opened their house to me is something that I want Japanese people to imitate more because it really shows Christian love,” said Pastor Yokota. “That I was able to see it and experience it was a really big thing for me.”

Pastor Sakamoto continues to benefit from the help of missionaries and feels like the load he carries is significantly lightened. “They understand my heart’s burdens. They pray for me, work alongside me, and appreciate me,” he said. “At times, they remind me that I need to rest. I would be really glad if I could help the missionaries in the same way.” **JH**

Talking about my joy

Feeling and expressing the joy of Christ—not just telling people about it

By David McIntyre

In our small group recently, my minister said, “You talk a lot about joy.” He was right. I have become a lot more aware of joy since joining Crossroad Church about 18 months ago.

Our senior minister is putting Jesus’s command to make disciples at the core of what we do and talk about as a church. Our identity as children of God is foundational and includes the many privileges we receive as his children. The big application for me personally has been to allow the joy I have as a child of God to inform my attitude and my behaviour towards others. This article, I hope, will be the first of a four-part series looking at our lives as disciples of Christ, something I’ve had the privilege of thinking about over the last year and a half.

Being at Crossroad made me realise the lack of connection between my motivation as a missionary and the joy I had in Christ. Don’t get me wrong—I did have joy about what Jesus had done for me, but that didn’t necessarily inform how I acted towards others.

I knew that joy was important and that church should be a place where people could experience joy—giving and receiving it—for instance, the kids at Sunday School. But when it came to discussing that at a leaders’ meeting, I myself wasn’t particularly joyful. Instead, I tended to get impatient, frustrated, and speak strongly for why Sunday School should be more fun! My behaviour towards others revealed the gap between the joy I understood in my head and the joy I felt in my heart. I was not demonstrating it in my actions.

In my case, what often motivated me was my desire to do a good job for God as a missionary. I was responding, in principle, to all God had done for me but not revelling in it for myself. That meant I knew about joy but didn’t necessarily show it or talk about the joy I felt. I was trying to teach how to follow Christ while lacking the attitude of one who follows him.

Modelling Christ

One thing I’ve been taught a lot at Crossroad is that much of discipleship is about modelling; we model the attitudes and actions that flow from a transformed heart to those around us. As Paul says, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 NIV). My previous problem was that I was saying that we wanted Sunday School to be fun so kids could experience the joy of Christ while people couldn’t see that in me.

The change occurred after I started attending Crossroad and saw a group of people who were committed

to following Christ and were motivated to do that by the joy they had in him. I learnt joy as it was modelled to me, and that convinced me (again, perhaps) of the importance of joy for our walk as disciples and for those of us serving as missionaries. Small wonder then that Jesus prayed that his disciples would have “the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13). Jesus certainly knew that joy would both motivate and sustain his disciples.

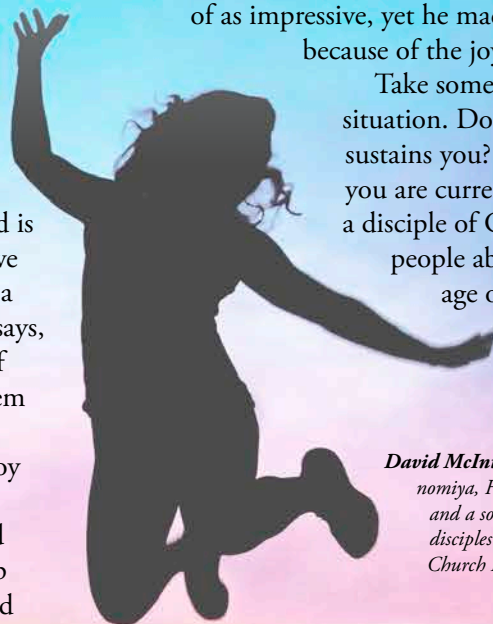
Where does our joy come from?

Jesus has saved us from judgement, and we are not just freed prisoners but children of God, with all the privileges that go with that. God is our father who loves it when we come to him in prayer, read his Word, and fellowship with our brothers and sisters. He loves every effort, big or small, that we make in serving others and bringing them closer to a relationship with him. In fact, every part of the gospel, the good news of Christ, is a source of joy for those of us who are now in Christ. It is really important that my joy is rooted in what Christ has done for me and my new status as God’s child because life as a Christian in Japan can be hard or frustrating or slow.

As I was thinking about joy, I remembered a *Japan Harvest* article from last year about Dennis Foster and the impact he had as an African American missionary for over 25 years (*Japan Harvest* Summer 2023). What stood out to me was that people in Obanazawa in Yamagata remembered how Dennis quickly made friends because he was always smiling. This was even though life in Obanazawa was initially difficult for him, particularly as a foreigner and a black man. Here was someone who did work that wouldn’t be thought of as impressive, yet he made a lasting impact for Christ because of the joy he had in Christ.

Take some time to consider your own situation. Do you know what motivation sustains you? What are the primary reasons you are currently here in Japan? Why are you a disciple of Christ? Why do you want to tell people about the Lord Jesus and encourage others to do the same? Is it time to rediscover joy? **JH**

David McIntyre is an Australian missionary based in Nishinomiya, Hyogo. He and his wife, Beck, have two daughters and a son. They learn lots about being and making disciples for Christ as they attend Crossroad Church Nishinomiya.



The hidden struggle

Dealing with a significant personal transition

By Janet Dallman

Visualise yourself lying awake until 3:00 a.m. day after day and then waking up feeling like a train wreck. Imagine the embarrassment of forgotten appointments. Consider experiencing hot flushes (flashes) 10, 20, or 30 times a day—especially in Japan’s hot summers. Imagine feeling joint pain when exercising or riding your bicycle. How would you cope with a low mood, irritability, or the reality that you won’t have more—or any—children? Welcome to many women’s experience of menopause.

Menopause is the stage when a woman has had no period for 12 months. But we need to start further back with perimenopause, or the transition to menopause. This often begins when a woman is in her forties but can be as early as her thirties or later in her fifties. Menopause can include the symptoms mentioned above, along with the following: night sweats, headaches, weight gain, heart palpitations, dry eye, panic attacks, anxiety, intimacy difficulties, and more. These health issues can affect women physically, emotionally, relationally, and in their ministry. Fortunately, not every woman has every symptom (some have none), but most experience some.

But why write about this here? Consider that menopause affects half the world’s population directly and the other half indirectly! It will shape the experience of more than half of missionary personnel. (Missionary women outnumber men 2:1 in some areas.¹) Therefore, this topic is important not just for women but also for husbands and families, teammates, and mission organizations.

Thankfully, menopause is more talked about than it used to be. For example, the UK government published a paper called “Menopause and the Workplace” in 2022.² In 2021, the Gospel Coalition (Australia) posted an article entitled, “What does menopause tell us about God and ourselves?”³ There’s even a World Menopause Day (18th October). But how much consideration has this issue received in the mission community at a personal or organisational level? What are some ways we can address the issue?

By God’s grace, I suggest we meet this transition in a similar way to other life transitions.

Truths to remember:

- **Change is normal.** Seasons change; human beings change. God designed it that way.
- **Change brings uncertainty.** Human beings often find comfort in what they know.
- **Jesus never changes.** “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.” (Heb. 13:8 NIV)
- **Jesus is ever-present.** “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)
- **God’s in charge.** “In all things God works for the good of those who love him.” (Rom. 8:28)

Tips for women:

- **Take responsibility.** Be proactive; educate yourself about menopause and speak with a medical professional about any symptoms. Share your struggles, as appropriate, with your husband, colleague(s), or team.
- **Practice self-care and self-compassion.** You may not be able to do as much as you used to; you might feel overwhelmed. Allow time and space to care for yourself through exercise, diet, a healthy sleep routine, time to relax, time to be with others, and a vibrant devotional life.
- **Practice spiritual reflection.** Reflect on this transition through prayer and/or journaling. Ask God to help you, to make you a blessing, and to receive his gifts to you. Confess your sin as you need to.
- **Leave space to be sad.** Change and transition involve grief. Acknowledge your sadness and allow yourself to grieve.
- **Practice gratitude.** What treasure can you find in this transition? You could keep a thankfulness journal and share it with those around you.
- **Connect with people.** Don’t go it alone! Make time with those who love you, talk with older women, and if you need more help, ask!

Tips for colleagues/organisations:

- Educate yourself about menopause and how it affects women.
- Listen and show empathy/understanding towards your wife, colleague(s), or team member(s).
- Encourage your wife or colleague(s) in their care for themselves. For example, you might want to join them in an exercise routine or diet (but don’t force them into it!).
- Pray for your wife or colleague(s) in this challenging and long-lasting transition.
- Be flexible about time off, starting late, finishing early, workload, etc.
- Be patient and forgiving as needed.
- May God give each of us grace to age gracefully and to help our colleagues do the same. **JH**



Resources

Lou Cowan, *Keeping Your Cool in the Heat of the Night: A Survival Guide to the Menopause* (Robin House Books, 2013).

Erin Davis, "A Christian Woman's Guide to Menopause (Full Interview with Danna Demetre)," YouTube video, 17:07, <https://youtu.be/xnQ5FRLWNic> (June 9, 2023).

Paul David Tripp, *Lost In The Middle: Midlife and The Grace of God* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004).

Barb Best, "Menopause and Hope Deferred," *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/menopause-hope-deferred> (October 14, 2019).

1. Marti Wade, "More Women in Missions: Four Reasons Why," *Pioneers*, <https://pioneers.org/article/more-women-in-missions-four-reasons-why> (March 19, 2021).
2. "Menopause and the Workplace: How to enable fulfilling working lives: government response," Department for Work and Pensions, policy paper, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-and-the-workplace-how-to-enable-fulfilling-working-lives-government-response/menopause-and-the-workplace-how-to-enable-fulfilling-working-lives-government-response> (July 18, 2022).
3. Ruth Baker, "What Does Menopause Tell Us about God and about Ourselves?" *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-does-menopause-tell-us-about-god-and-about-ourselves> (August 6, 2021).

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

A life transformed

Kanto Women in Ministry spring retreat

By Erin Irvine

As a first-time attendee of a Women in Ministry (WIM) event, I wasn't sure what to expect at the spring retreat. I had attended women's conferences in my home country before, but as a new missionary here in Japan, this was my first. What would it be like? Who would be there? Would it be refreshing, or would my introverted self come away exhausted from all the interactions and sessions? I am thankful that this WIM retreat answered my questions positively.

There were 55 women who had been in Japan ranging from 1 month up to some 40 years, and they represented a wide variety of life and ministry experiences and testimonies. All had come together for two nights of fellowship around God's Word, to pray and to sing, as well as to enjoy time to rest and reflect.

We feasted on God's Word together as we walked through Exodus and God's journey with Moses from Midian through the wilderness. We meditated on God's character, God's ability, and our transformed identities in Christ, and we were encouraged to keep trusting through the joys and humbling realities of ministry life. We were taught to embrace our

weaknesses, release everything to God, and move forward in his strength with our hearts at rest.

Sometimes it can be easy to feel the weight of doing life and ministry in Japan. But being able to listen to solid Bible teaching, reflect, and pray together after the sessions was encouraging. Listening to and sharing testimonies was inspiring. Singing songs of praise together in English was uplifting. Enjoying a hike to a local gorge (with some impromptu hymn singing) was refreshing. Above all, we could sense the presence of the Lord as we gathered to seek him.

I came away from the retreat with fresh encouragement and new connections and friendships within the missionary community. Even though I had not met many of the other women before, there was a refreshing openness in sharing the things the Lord was walking us through so that we could encourage and pray with one another. It was a special time of fellowship. I now understand why many seasoned missionaries make the annual retreat a regular part of their life of ministry in Japan!

For the next WIM retreat, won't you take the time to join with other women serving in Japan? It's time to be still so that we can move forward resting in him, freshly encouraged for the next stage of our journey with him. **JH**

Photos submitted by author and Debbie Griffin

Erin Irvine came to Japan from Australia in 2022 and is currently serving as an Associate with OMF International. She is involved in ministry with Japanese returnees and lives in Tokyo.



A simple yet important message: Japan Baptist Convention's Takanabe Church, Takanabe, Miyazaki

Christian Shimbun, March 24, 2024 Translated by Grace Koshino

The town of Takanabe is situated in central Miyazaki Prefecture, right on the coast. The population of the town is slowly decreasing, and it currently has fewer than 20,000 residents. It is, however, surrounded by natural beauty and is known both as a place where loggerhead turtles lay their eggs and for its oysters. In recent years, it has also become a hot spot for surfers. Despite being a small town, it has three churches: a United Church of Christ church, a Catholic church, and the Takanabe Church run by the Japan Baptist Convention.

Takanabe Church was first established in 1977 as a preaching point for Japan Baptist Koyu Christ Church. Ichirō Kodama is the church's third pastor. Prior to this, he worked at Kitakyushu Christ Church for six years after graduating from Tokyo Baptist Theological Seminary. While working at Kitakyushu Christ Church, he was taking care of his mother, who needed nursing care. It took him four hours to travel by car each way from Kitakyushu to Takanabe, where his mother lived. This continued for three years.

"Going back and forth was very tiring," Kodama recalls. "At the time, Takanabe Church had been without a pastor for eight years after the former pastor left due to old age. Since it was closer to my mother's home, I volunteered to work there." In 2018, Kodama became the church's pastor.

Kodama grew up in Miyazaki, a place with a strong Buddhist influence. "I felt that there must be something in this world that does not constantly change. I read many books. I didn't think that Buddhism was the answer to my questions, as it is man-made. One day, my wife encouraged me to read the



The youngest church member: the 73-year-old pastor

Takanabe Church is attended by Kodama and Chizuko, two ladies aged 90 and 85, and sometimes the Kodamas' son. The elderly ladies are very energetic and always take care of the

Bible. When I read that God created the world, I believed that it was indeed possible for God to do that. This is what led me to becoming a Christian."

Kodama started going to church with his wife, Chizuko, and they were baptized together.

Until the age of 55, he worked for a building materials manufacturer. He then decided to go to seminary to understand the Bible better from a theological perspective. While studying there, the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred.

Kodama had lived in Sendai previously when he had been transferred there for business, and this time he decided to go there as a volunteer. "When I saw how bare Ishinomaki¹ had become, I cried out to God and asked, 'Why did you do this?' His answer was 'Things need to be restored step-by-step in this place where everything has been taken away.' I understood that all I could do was to stand firmly on the Scriptures I had studied."

Kodama feels that it was during this time that he was given true faith. He realized that it is a pastor's role to make the Bible understandable to people, and he decided to become a pastor himself.

flower arrangements. Once a month, the members gather and decide the monthly duties of the church. Chizuko plays the ocarina, the 90-year-old lady plays the organ, and Kodama plays the guitar.

"Our relationship is stronger than that of friends or between a parent and a child. It is a relationship that goes beyond family," says Kodama. "We need each other. Therefore, we also help each other."

Kodama always includes the cross and Jesus's resurrection in his sermons. He also mentions the ascension of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit. "Even if I miss other details, I make sure I preach these things."

"It would be ideal if we had many people attending the church service, but for now, these are the regular members. Once a month, a friend who is also a piano teacher helps by playing the piano for us. It's nice to see people come once in a while, and it's also nice when we have newcomers." Kodama always prays that newcomers and young people will visit the church.

The main difficulties faced by the church are the declining birthrate and aging population. It can be worrying to think about the church's future in

West News

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

an area where there are so few people of working age. But whenever Kodama faces a problem, he is reminded to go back to the basics, preaching the gospel so it can be understood easily. That is his mission.

On weekdays, Kodama works a part-time job. He prepares his sermons during the evening when he has time.

"I am currently 73 years old and the youngest member of the church. Putting up Christmas lights and anything that requires physical labor is my job," says Kodama. "If there were one or two more to help out, that would be ideal. I would like to discuss the Bible with such people. It would be great to exchange opinions with them."

Takanabe Church will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary in three years' time. Kodama has asked the Lord to give him the strength to make it to that occasion. ■

1. Ishinomaki, situated in Miyagi Prefecture, was struck hard by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

"To be a member of the church which warmly welcomed me." A Ukrainian refugee is baptized

Christian Shimbun, April 7, 2024

Translated by Tomoko Kato

As the war between Russia and Ukraine passed the two-year mark, the baptism of a Ukrainian woman seeking refuge took place at a church in Yokohama.

Katerina Furutova, a refugee from Odessa, was baptized at Hongōdai Kirisuto Kyōkai (Japan Evangelical Church Association, JECA) on March 17.

Pastor Keishi Ikeda asked Katerina before baptizing her, "Do you believe that there is only one true living God who is Creator of heaven and earth? Do you believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is your Savior?"

She answered confidently in Japanese, "*Hai shinjimasu* (Yes, I believe)."

Pastor Ikeda declared, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," as Katerina went down into the water. As the ceremony finished, there was enthusiastic applause as a sign of blessing from those who attended.

Katerina escaped to Japan with the help of Hunger Zero, an organization supporting Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Then in Japan, OASIS, a foundation set up by Hongōdai Church, has been supporting her in various ways. The foundation became her guarantor, helped her with visa and financial

support applications and supported her language learning. She attended worship services at Hongōdai Church, where she was warmly welcomed and was even introduced to a part-time job at a steak house. As all of that was happening, she declared, "I want to be baptized."

"At the beginning, she was insecure and asked us to take her to a psychiatrist," said Hiroshi Tsukii (advisory pastor, Hongōdai Church). "She often froze while eating in a restaurant or even at home, as if she were remembering horrifying experiences. However, her fear seems to have lessened from being surrounded by loving people. She says she feels peaceful when she's with people from church, as they are like her family."

Katerina, whose grandmother was also Christian, was baptized as an infant. "My grandma used to tell me what God is like and what He could do. Whenever I had a hard time, I prayed to God." Her favorite piece of Scripture is "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (Ps. 46:1–2, NIV).

"I wanted to respond to the grace of God who prepared Hongōdai Church for me and wanted to be baptized so that I could become a member of this church that welcomed me so warmly. I am thankful that I am surrounded by such kind people here in this church." ■



What's the benefit of JEMA?

Each member of JEMA brings something that increases the effectiveness of the organization

In very recent years, we have seen a sizable increase in JEMA membership—mission members, associate members, and endorsed ministries. I'm often asked by those inquiring about membership privileges, "What is the benefit for us/me in joining JEMA?" My answer is "The value you receive is the sum total of what you and each member bring to the table to share."

Each person, mission, or ministry that chooses to join increases the wisdom and experience bank of the JEMA community and adds to the synergy and momentum of the spreading of the gospel among such a large unreached people group. We need your iron to sharpen ours (Prov. 27:17), and I sincerely believe your iron will be sharpened by the skills, insights, creativity, wisdom, passion, and common burden of your fellow members as well (1 Thess. 5:11–24).

Access to resources and community

Large majorities of our members can be found in the various nuclei of the metropolitan areas of Japan and consequently reap the benefits of small communities of missionaries that provide fellowship, encouragement, and interdependency. However, there are many who are more removed from these areas where higher concentrations of JEMA members are. In general, there is a degree of independence and determination that keeps those in more isolated areas going, but a word of encouragement and access to a network of relationships and beneficial resources can sometimes mean the difference between thriving in ministry or struggling. I know this from experience and realize the importance of those who see this and appreciate it.

Being intentional about connection

We want to be ever intentional about each member of JEMA feeling they are a valued member of the mission community here. One of our initiatives over the last two

to three years is to be more intentional about establishing stronger connections with all of our members, wherever they are working. Representatives of the JEMA Leadership Team have been trying to hold regional gatherings of missionaries (JEMA members and nonmembers alike) who would like to come together for a half-day of networking. In this gathering, we reintroduce what JEMA is today as benefits have significantly increased over the last few years. Many of our longtime members aren't even aware of the numerous resources and opportunities available to them. For others who are just learning of the existence of JEMA, this serves as a great introduction to the JEMA network. In this same gathering, we also strive to hear about and understand the ministries you are involved in, realizing that you each have valuable insights and experience that benefit many others in this 1,200-member-strong community of Protestant missionaries. We give updates on the types of endorsed ministries in the JEMA network, access to member care, prayer networks, ministries to missionary women, and missiological resources, including an added benefit of access to larger ministry and missiological networks that JEMA partners with, at no extra cost to our members. We also want to hear what creative ideas you have or needs you might see where JEMA can serve you better!

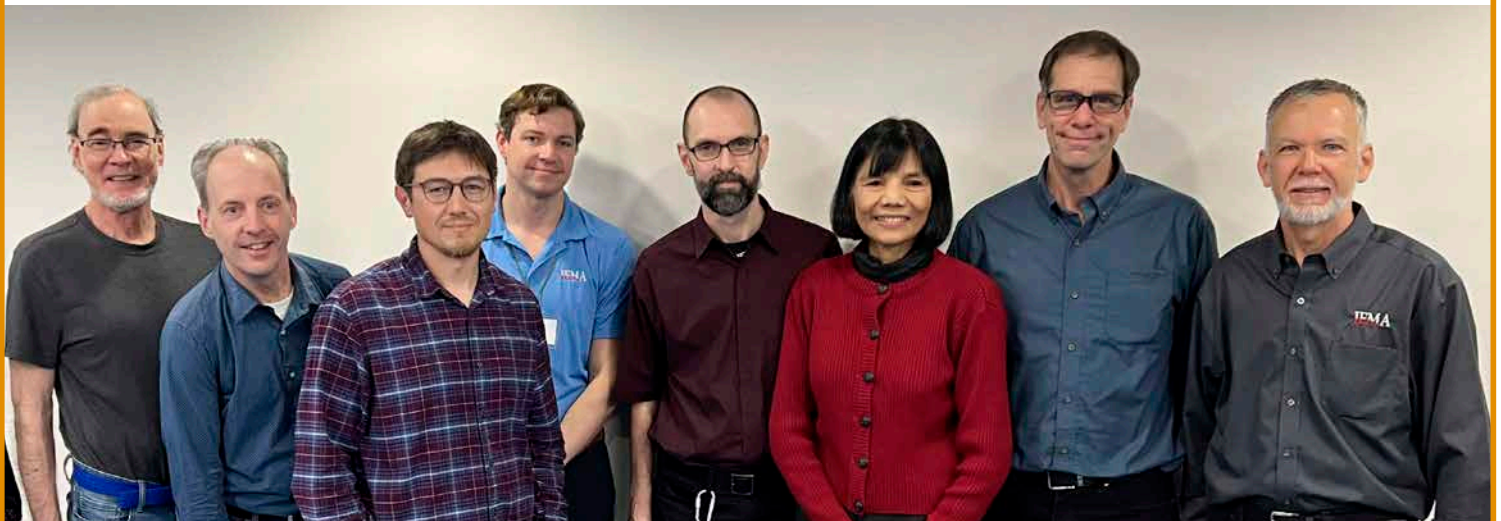
For those interested in when the next JEMA gathering will be in your area, please reach out to president@jema.org.

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11 NIV).

Blessings,
Nathan Snow **JH**

Photo of the JEMA Leadership Team submitted by author

Nathan Snow has been serving in Japan with JFWBM for 32 years as a church planter and pastor. He has been JEMA president for eight years. He is married to Linda, and they have seven children, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren.



WOMEN IN MINISTRY
Equip~Empower~Encourage
WIM

KANTO

Fall Day of Prayer Plus

October 8, 2024,
Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo

Winter Day of Prayer

January 16, 2025
Ochanomizu Christian Centre, Tokyo

KANSAI

2024 Events

Information will be on the JEMA website
wimkansai@gmail.com

Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 3, 2025, Venue TBD

TOHOKO

Near Sendai 2024

Information will be on the JEMA website

WIM Spring Retreat

March 12-14 2025, Olive no Sato

2024 Leadership Team

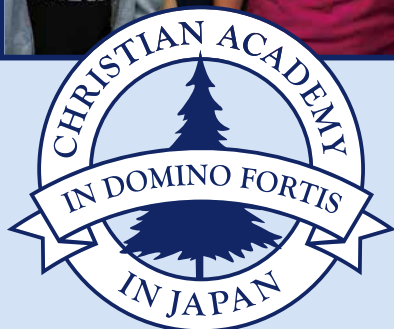


Check Facebook and the JEMA website for information about upcoming events and email your questions to: jema.wim7@gmail.com

Find us on Facebook



Supporting missionary families today. Preparing the next generation of missionaries for tomorrow.



Equipping students to serve Japan and the world for Christ



Phone: 042-471-0022

Practicing kanji while prayer walking

Japanese names and their kanji can prompt us to pray for people we haven't even met

I often distribute tracts and announcements in our neighborhood, a residential area called Tennō New Town. As I do that, I also pray for each family into whose mailbox I put the tract. Perhaps you have your own way of prayer walking through an area, but I use the name of the family to trigger a special prayer for them, as almost every house in Japan has a nameplate at the gate or the door. This is how it works.

Easy

It doesn't matter how much Japanese you know—there is always some way to pray for people using their name. I pray the most general prayer when there is no name on either gate or door. Since I live in Tennō New Town, I use that. The name Tennō means “king of heaven,” so I pray that God would be the King of Heaven to them and lead them to Him.

For beginners who can only read the rōmaji, you can come up with ideas of how to pray for the people whose names you can read. For instance, Kumon sounds a little like “come on,” so you can pray that that the people who work at this business will *come on* and find Christ. For the name 大野 often written Ohno, you can pray they are led from an *Oh no!* experience to an *Oh yes!* experience with God through Jesus Christ.

For people with “take” in their name, I pray that they will *take* Christ into their hearts. Be creative with the names. Even if you don't know the real meanings, you can pray. Of course, most names will be written in Japanese characters, so by learning more of the language, you can be more specific in how you pray. Try it. Make it a fun thing. As you do, you will find the time you spend passing out

tracts will go by more quickly, *and* you will be praying for your neighbors.

Intermediate

For those who have begun to read kanji, you can start out simply. For instance, anything with a 田 (*ta* or *da*, meaning “rice field”) can lead you to pray that the word of the cross (十) will be in their mouths (口). In fact, the first president of McDonald's Japan was Den (田) Fujita. His Christian parents named him 田 because no matter what job he tried, he could always put the word of the cross in his mouth!

丘, 岡, or 山 all mean “hill” or “mountain.” Pray for the residents of that house to be led to the Hill of Calvary or to God's holy mountain. Often at Christmas, I will pray that folks with 村 (*mura*, village) in their name would come to find the Christ of the village of Bethlehem.

Any names with 木 (tree), 林 (woods), or 森 (forest) prompt me to pray that the cross of Calvary would be a reality in their lives. Especially with 森, there are three trees with one main tree at the top, which represents the scene of the crucifixion of Christ to me. Not only do I pray for that family, but I start praising God for sending His Son to die for me and for all these people I am praying for.

Characters 元 or 本 (both read *moto*) mean the “base of something.” So if their name is 山本 or 山元, I pray that they would be brought to the foot of the mountain of God and find Him to be all they need. The kanji 本 not only means “book,” but it also can mean “the reality of something.” I often pray that the people will find the true reality of God at work in their lives. The possibilities for how to pray are only limited by our imagination.





Store display of samples: Can you think of prayer points for some of them?

Advanced

As you learn more kanji, your prayers can become more specific. You can also work more with combinations of meanings. For example, for Watanabe (渡辺), I pray that these people will “cross over” to where God is—the first kanji means “to cross” (渡る *wataru*) and the second (辺) implies the general area of something.

Another example is Satō (佐藤). For this the simplest thing is to take the sound only, which is like the word for sugar. I pray that the Word of God will be sweet in their mouths and that they will come to Him and be satisfied. Another thing you can do is take the parts of the kanji and try to create meanings to use in your prayers. The left side of 佐 means “man” and the right side means “left,” so you can pray that they will not be left behind but will rely on the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, to save them. The top of 藤 is the character for grass, but it is actually two crosses (the old kanji actually was just that), so you can pray the message of the cross for the people. On the lower left is the kanji for moon (月), so you can pray that they will reflect the light of God as the moon reflects the sun. The lower right portion of the kanji is like the kanji 泰 (*tai*), which means “peace,” “tranquility,” and “stability,” so you can pray that they will find peace in God.

The second kanji in Satō (藤) is common in a few other names too. It means “wisteria,” so you can pray that they will be a beautiful flower in God’s garden. Wisteria is also a vine, and vines are sometimes used to tie things together, so you can pray that God will release them from being tied down by Satan.

Any name with 川 or 河 (*kawa*, river) in it can be used to pray that the “river of God” will flow over them and lead them to Himself. Names using 柳 (*yanagi*, willow) also

make me think of trees planted by the streams of living water (as in Psalm 1).

Names with 崎 or 岬 (both read *saki*) mean a geographical “cape.” Since a cape is the “end of the road,” you can pray that they will come to God at the end of their search. When I come to names that use 北 (*kita*, north), I think of the song lyrics “is Mt. Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King,” so I pray that they will be led to Him. Names with 中 (*naka*, center/within) get me to pray that God will be in their lives. The name Tanaka (田中) is just right for praying that the cross would be central to their lives!

With names that use 野 or 原 (both mean “field” or “plain”), I break out in singing “a higher plane than I have found, Lord, plant my (and their) feet on higher ground.” The kanji 原 is also used to mean the “original” of something, so you can pray that they will find God to be the source of all they need. When I come to the name Itō (either 伊藤 or 伊東), I ask God to show them how much He loves them (愛しい *itoshii*, beloved). You can do that with other names, too—use words that have the same sound.

This is just a sampling of the way I prayer walk in our town, given that Japanese has thousands of kanji in countless combinations. Happy praying! May you find greater enjoyment in passing out tracts and announcements and in praying specifically for the area where God has called you. **JH**

1. 藤田田, Japanese Wikipedia, <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/藤田田> (accessed September 9, 2024).

Photos by Karen Ellrick

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.

Retirement realities

Planning and reflection can help smooth a difficult transition and encourage ongoing fruitfulness

Last year at our annual staff conference for Barnabas International, our longtime executive director and his wife stepped away from leadership and gracefully entered their retirement years. Another colleague couple from Barnabas International will be retiring from the organization at the end of the year. As I edge ever closer to the age of 70, I can't help but ponder what that next stage called retirement might look like in my life.

According to Ronald L. Koteskey, "Retirement can take many forms from a delightful, freeing experience to a traumatic, depressing one. A major factor in determining which it becomes is the planning one has done."¹ With a certain segment of missionaries in Japan facing retirement in the near future, it is vitally important to consider some realities. This is not only to make this transition as smooth as possible but to ensure we remain faithful to God as we go into retirement. Some may choose to remain in Japan, and some may return to their passport country, but all are encouraged to consider these simple suggestions. Much could be said about this topic, and there are numerous resources to consult, but I would like to highlight three basic realities.

Practical realities

Often the first thing older missionaries think about is where will they live. Whether remaining on the field or returning to their passport country, a missionary may have questions like: "In what area of the country will I live?" "Should I locate close to relatives (siblings, one of the children)?" "Do I buy a house or rent?" "What about a retirement community?"

A related concern is financial viability, whether or not they will have enough financial resources to meet their needs. In today's world, inflation continues to take a toll on future planning. I remember speaking with two retiring couples in Japan. One couple had all their financial arrangements made and were ready to return confidently to their passport country. The other couple had never talked to a financial planner to discuss what resources they might need to retire. It was a more stressful time for them as they considered retirement.

Something retiring missionaries may not consider is relationships. If a missionary returns to their passport country, finding friends and building relationships may be the most difficult task they encounter. Their values may be quite different than most of the people their age. They may have changed so much over the years that they don't feel as if they fit anywhere, even among those who may have been their closest friends from the past.

Emotional realities

While people are quite comfortable talking about their practical needs when it comes to retirement, a much more difficult reality relates to one's emotions. For many years, missionaries have given themselves to the work to which they felt God had called them. Their identity was built upon what they had been doing on the mission field. Now it comes time to leave that work and enter a new phase of life. They may experience a loss of role, a loss of significance, a loss of importance. If they are not a missionary, then who are they? Is there a place for them in their home culture, and can they do something meaningful during the rest of their lives? Is it even OK to enjoy this time of life without feeling guilty? Of course if a missionary plans to remain in Japan during their latter years, the change will be slower, but it is still important for all older missionaries to process these questions.

Leaving something one has done for an entire career is a loss. Leadership positions will be turned over to someone else. Will they give themselves permission to grieve this loss? Close relationships have been built with other missionaries and with local believers, and they will be missed. Cultural practices appreciated and enjoyed will also be missed and seen as a loss. Therefore, it is essential they have someone to talk with (to debrief) so that they can off-load and talk about their experiences: "A safe person who will value your thoughts and feelings about the whole range of your experience. They don't have to understand missions or life on the field; they just have to be willing to listen, empathize, and listen. (And yes, I said that on purpose.)"² Emotional realities are just as important as practical realities.

Spiritual realities

Celebrate faithfulness, not accomplishments. The apostle Paul was a great missionary, but he did not focus on his accomplishments so much as on God's faithfulness and his own commitment to follow God to the very end.³ In a world that focuses more on productivity than character, it is easy to get caught up in looking back on years of service with regret. God was at work when you progressed through your missionary career, and God will continue to be at work long after you are gone. Elizabeth and Jonathan Trotter remind us, "There is a tremendous power in making room for the paradoxical truths that there was good and there was bad and there is God."⁴ So celebrate what God did *in* you more than what he did *through* you because he was *with* you.



Even if a person returns to their passport country and rests from their labor, there may be an interest in further ministry. Refuse to force that upon yourself, but be ready if the Lord should stir something in you. You are greatly gifted and have much to offer in mentoring, missions expertise, prayer, teaching, etc. Remember that Psalm 92:12–14 can apply to you: “The righteous thrive like a palm tree and grow like a cedar tree in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they thrive in the courts of our God. *They will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green*” (CSB, emphasis mine). **JH**

1. Ronald L. Koteskey, “What Missionaries Ought to Know About Retirement,” *Missionarycare.com*, <https://missionarycare.com/pdfs/Missionaries-Retirement.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2024).
2. Elizabeth and Jonathan Trotter, “Leaving (and Arriving) Well,” in *Serving Well: Help for the Wannabe, Newbie, or Weary Cross-cultural Christian Worker* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2019), 379–380.
3. See 2 Timothy 4:7.
4. Trotter, *Serving Well*, 380.

Alan Steier (DMin) served as a pastor in the US for 22 years after time in Japan as a missionary. He and his wife, Judy, have been with Barnabas International since 2012. They are part of the JEMA Member Care Ministry.

Language &
Culture

YouTube: an educational treasure trove

From ikebana to improving listening comprehension, there are myriads of videos to help you learn

For learning culture

Many people express concern that young Japanese people spend so much time on their smartphones and computers that traditional cultural practices such as the tea ceremony, ikebana, bonsai, calligraphy, Japanese music, martial arts, and archery are dying a slow death. But technology is a two-edged sword, and it can be a powerful resource for sustaining these practices. In particular, the online video platform YouTube has an amazing repository of videos on all these practices and many more besides.

Have you ever contemplated learning how to put on a kimono, play the koto, take up kendo, or cook *karaage* but didn't know where to start? While it's no substitute for learning in person, a great first step is to do a search on YouTube. Content is available in both English and Japanese (most videos allow the option of auto-generated subtitles) and ranges from basic introductory videos to highly advanced ones; you will probably feel overwhelmed by the number of videos. When searching for broad categories, I find it helps to search for channels (as opposed to individual videos) and then look for ones that have a lot of subscribers.

So give it a shot and explore a new hobby today! And when you feel it's time to graduate to an in-person class, you will feel much more informed and confident than if you had joined as a complete beginner. Obviously, it's possible to go further with some hobbies just using videos than with others.

For learning language

YouTube is also an incredible resource for language learning. There are many YouTube channels that provide free Japanese lessons (e.g., Japanese Pod 101, Easy Japa-



nese, and Daily Japanese with Naoko). Whatever your level and learning preferences, you will find something that will help you improve your Japanese. Some channels offer additional benefits such as extra content, transcripts, and PDFs for a fee, but there is so much free high-quality content out there that I've never been tempted to pay for anything.

Some paid platforms such as Lingopie offer YouTube-like videos with features for language learning such as clicking on words in the subtitles to see their meaning, vocabulary lists, and games for remembering vocabulary. They generally offer a free trial, so you can try them and see if what they offer is worth it. Again, it's hard to beat the free content available on YouTube.

In addition to dedicated language-learning channels, there is also a veritable smorgasbord of engaging content in Japanese, including vlogs, interviews, anime, travel programs, and special-interest programs. It is a great way to improve your listening comprehension while watching entertaining content. Listening to Japanese songs (including worship songs by groups such as Ruah Worship and 4.5 Music) is an enjoyable way to study Japanese. You can usually choose to have subtitles in English or Japanese, and you can slow the playback speed of videos to 0.75 or half speed. If you subscribe to YouTube (¥1,280 per month after a free one-month trial), you can watch videos without ads and download videos so you can view them when you're not connected to the internet.

Again, explore what's available and incorporate the best of what you find in your language-learning program. **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.

Humility: The Joy of Self-Forgetfulness

Gavin Ortlund (Crossway, 2023)
102 pp.

More than anything else, missionaries need to love and be humble. Ortlund, who runs the popular YouTube channel *Truth Unites*, defines humility as “self-forgetfulness leading to joy” (p. xxvi). In Part 1, Ortlund shows how we can cultivate personal humility. His chapter on ten practices to kill pride is full of specific and practical advice on growing in humility.

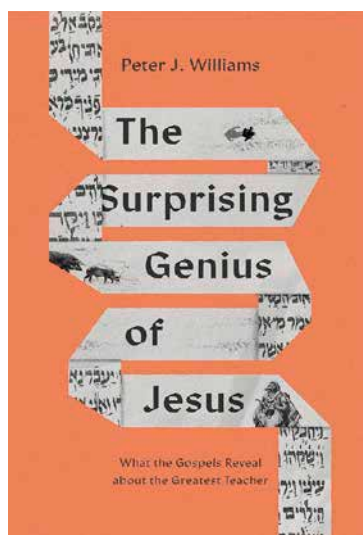
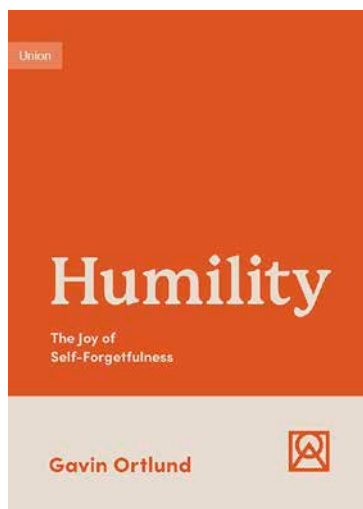
Part 2 looks at cultivating humility in church life. Humility in leadership means creating a culture of freedom, and he looks at five strategies to do this. Ortlund says that “if you are in a position of authority, you will become either a servant or a bully. Your authority will be experienced by others as either freedom or oppression, depending on whether it is marked by humility” (p. 46). Humility among peers is overcoming envy and competition. The final chapter looks at humility towards leaders and what submission really means. Each chapter ends with discussion questions. The epilogue shows the importance of humility in social media engagement. Throughout the book, Ortlund demonstrates how humility is a life-giving virtue that brings joy. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

The Surprising Genius of Jesus: What the Gospels Reveal about the Greatest Teacher

Peter J. Williams (Crossway, 2023)
130 pp.

Williams, principal of Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, wants readers to have renewed awe at the depth of Jesus’s words and for everyone to see his genius. Much of the book is about the longest story Jesus told, the story of two sons in Luke 15:11–32. Williams shows how this brilliant story reflects the mind of a genius. He looks at those who heard the story, especially the Pharisees and scribes, and then at the layers of deeper meaning in the story and how it all connects with the Old Testament. He connects the story



with Genesis and explores the echoes of Genesis found in Luke 15. In chapter 3, Williams looks at more stories Jesus told and how they were inspired by the Old Testament. Williams ends the book showing that Jesus is much more than a storyteller. “If the storyteller Jesus Christ is God himself, who made the world, invented language, oversaw history, and then became human to tell us about God and to rescue us from our alienation to him, then his wisdom and genius make sense. And if he is that smart and if he also loved us enough to die to save us, the only sensible thing to do is to accept him unreservedly as our teacher, guide, and Savior” (p. 113). This short book is full of wisdom and deep insight. A book you will not want to put down! **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Before You Share Your Faith: Five Ways to be Evangelism Ready

Matt Smethurst (10Publishing, 2022)
126 pp.

Every missionary should read this little book, which is full of wisdom about how to share Christ. In fact, it will help every believer tell the good news. There are five ways to be ready: grasp the gospel, check your context, love the lost, face your fear, and start to speak. What drove Paul to be flexible, to adapt, and to sacrifice (1 Cor. 9) was his passion to see lost people brought to Christ. Smethurst reminds us that “life’s two greatest privileges are to speak to God on behalf of others, and to speak to others on behalf of God” (p. 74). The appendix has 12 verses for fighting fear. Smethurst has a helpful list of recommended resources for cultural apologetics and evangelism. I would love to see this book translated into Japanese and read by all believers. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

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

Check your facts

The term “fake news” has been around a long time, but it is a phrase that particularly has been highlighted through US politics in the last decade. This phrase has a wide definition, embracing things like satire and comedy, as well as propaganda and conspiracy theories. It can be very damaging and have disastrous consequences. Various organisations have been set up for the purpose of checking the facts of social media and other news stories. One group



called RMIT Fact Lab prioritises checking “content that has the potential to harm people’s health, safety, and financial well-being, as well as content that undermines democratic processes, such as inaccurate information about voting in elections and referendums.”¹

Have you considered that checking your own facts when you write and publish is also important? You may not be undermining democracy or harming people’s health, but still we must, as Christians, take accuracy seriously. Many times in the Bible, we are exhorted to live truthful lives. Alas, even with the best of intentions, we can convey false information and mislead or hurt people if we fail to double-check our facts.

Japan Harvest fact-checking

With all these things in mind, we spend time at *Japan Harvest* checking facts. We check all sorts of things—the publishing details and page numbers of quoted sources, email and website addresses, and names of institutions. We confirm historical facts and the details of Japanese customs. The accuracy of quotes and which Bible translation an author has quoted from are also things that we look at. Numbers and names that aren’t accurate are identified and corrected.

You may think: These are not world-altering facts; why are you so pedantic? There are several reasons. First, when we print inaccurate information, readers can be annoyed, for example, if a website address doesn’t lead to where it should. Authors can also be upset. Being sloppy in what we print also reflects on the magazine and JEMA: it makes it look like we don’t care about truth. Checking our facts is a matter of integrity. So we work hard to ensure all our content is accurate and truthful.

Confidence of readers

Have you ever listened to a speech or sermon that had obvious inaccuracies? It’s distracting and can mean you lose confidence that the speaker is telling the truth.

The same thing can happen with readers. If they pick up that you’ve inaccurately referenced or quoted a Bible

passage, they begin to question other things that you’ve written. They start to doubt you and may lose interest in continuing to read. On the other hand, if they trust you and find your writing compelling, they might even recommend your work to others.

I have chosen not to continue reading a book (a big deal for this reading addict) when I didn’t feel the author had checked their facts. One novel I didn’t finish was set in Tokyo. The description of the city didn’t sound like the Tokyo I knew. The main characters had been suddenly relocated from the US to Japan by their government, and the descriptions of what they did and how they did it just didn’t sound consistent with what I knew about an international lifestyle.

As an example, on the first page, the main character makes this observation about her view outside the window on the approach to Narita International Airport: “the ground, a jumbled, dingy, brown, relieved here and there by patches of green.” It made me wonder if the author had ever flown into Tokyo before, as 20 minutes out from Narita, you’re either over the ocean or Japan’s green mountains.

I persevered for a while but lost interest in the book as the inaccuracies continued.

Conclusion

Why is fact-checking important? As a Christian, I am committed to truth-telling, and I don’t want anything I write or publish to cause readers to stumble or to hurt someone

I have written about. But as an author, I also want to be worthy of the trust that readers put in me. I don’t want to distract them from what I’ve carefully written, nor do I want them to question my integrity. As an editor, I want the same thing for the authors I work with. I want this publication to be trustworthy and the authors we publish to be respected.

When you write something and submit it to be published or publish it yourself by sending it off to prayer supporters or share it online, take time to check your facts before you send it. **JH**

1. “How We Work,” RMIT University, <https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/schools-colleges/media-and-communication/industry/factlab/methodology> (accessed July 18, 2024).

Images: <https://thenounproject.com/term/detecting/3331499> and <https://thenounproject.com/icon/fact-3331495> (modified)

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.





Good Day, Good Bread.

YAMAZAKI BAKING CO., LTD.
3-10-1 Iwamoto-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 101-8585



www.yamazakipan.co.jp