



Mental Health



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Please check with JEMA or organizers for confirmation.*

Every other month



JEMA Online Prayer Gathering

The last Tuesday of each odd-numbered month:
January 28, March 25, May 27, etc.
Includes breakout rooms based on language
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January

WIM Kanto Winter Day of Prayer

January 16, 2025; Ochanomizu Christian Center



February

JEMA Connect

February 17–19, 2025; Ochanomizu Christian Center

March

WIM Kansai Christian Women's Conference

March 3, 2025; Mustard Seed Christian Church, Osaka

WIM Kanto Spring Retreat

March 12–14, 2025
Nikko Olive no Sato, Tochigi-ken



April

JEMA Still Waters Spiritual Retreat

April 21–24, 2025
Yamanaka Chalet, Yamanashi-ken



May

Okutama Prayer Summit

May 13–16, 2025
Okutama Bible Chalet, Tokyo



Prayer Summit for Western Japan

May 19–21, 2025
Nosegawa Bible Camp, Hyogo-ken

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

jema.org

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



Volume 76 No. 1
Winter 2025

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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!
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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.

Mental health

This topic is close to many people's hearts—that is clear from the number of article proposals that we received. It's also close to my heart. But I'm cautious when I write about it because the biggest mental illness stories in my life have come through our children. The stories are theirs but also ours because some of their struggles have affected our family for many years.

Mental illness is a difficult topic to talk about. A couple of years ago, I wrote on my personal blog about my struggles as a parent (in our family, neurodivergence and mental illness are intertwined). I received much positive feedback from people who had been afraid to tell anyone their own story and were grateful I had shared a small portion of mine.¹ We parents want to protect our kids and ourselves, and I think when we're in ministry we are tempted to present a perfect image to those around us. There are also extra pressures on those of us who serve outside our passport countries. For anyone in ministry, it can be hard to find the right balance between being faithful to God's call on our lives and taking good care of ourselves and our families. When we're dealing with mental illness (or neurodivergence) in ourselves or in our family, all of these factors can cause us to be—and feel—very isolated.

If you or your family are struggling, please seek help. None of the articles in this issue are meant to replace getting professional support. JEMA's member care resources page lists a number of places you can seek help in Japan and overseas, as well as online: <https://jema.org/resources/member-care/> But in addition to getting help, please find safe people who you can confide in; often those safe people are others who have experienced difficulties in their own lives. We need each other.

How *Japan Harvest* functioned during my year away

For over 10 years, I have been very involved in almost all aspects of the *Japan Harvest* production. As the time drew near for my husband and me to take a 12-month home assignment in 2023, the ongoing production of *Japan Harvest* posed a big problem. I knew that it wasn't possible to stay so closely involved during that year away from Japan, but I didn't know how to fix the problem.

So I'm grateful for several individuals on our team who stepped up and took on more responsibilities while I was away. The whole team had to communicate more and be extra patient as team members learned new roles and figured out how to solve problems that I had handled previously. I'm so thankful for everyone on our *Japan Harvest* team and their commitment to serving the JEMA community by keeping the magazine going these last 12 months.

Now I'm back in Japan and at my editorial desk, but we're working as a team towards the longer-term goal of not having one person with too much responsibility or power over production of the magazine. Please pray for God's wisdom as we work on restructuring our process and team to achieve this goal.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor



The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Spring 2025: The Missionary Life Cycle

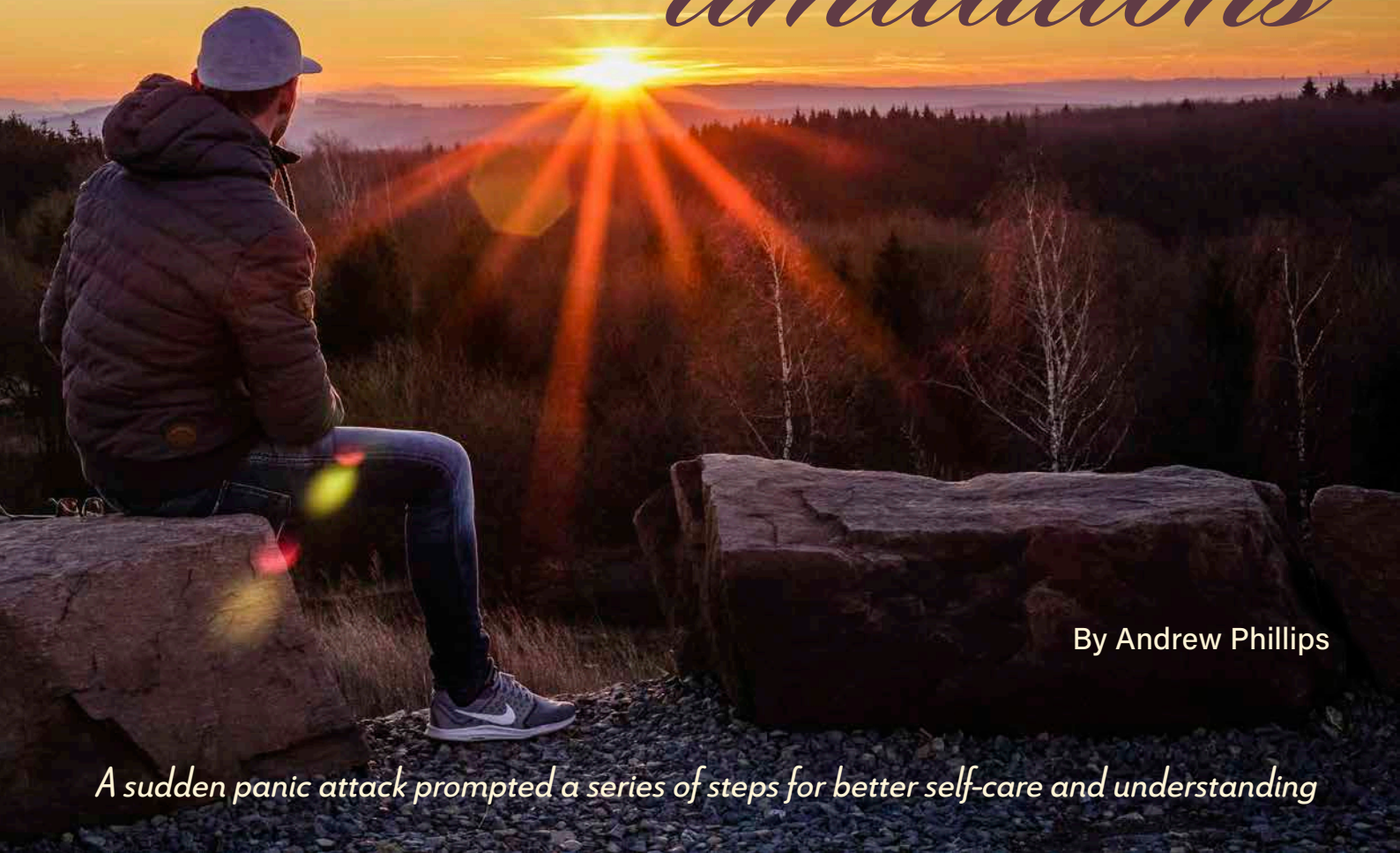
Summer 2025: Missiology: Theory and Practice
(proposals due by January 31)

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

Winter 2025: Multilingual Churches (proposals
due by July 31)

1. The blog post where I shared a little of our journey with mental illness:
<https://mmuser.blogspot.com/2022/10/the-truth-about-journeying-with-illness.html>

The *ministry* of *limitations*



By Andrew Phillips

A sudden panic attack prompted a series of steps for better self-care and understanding

When it comes to our physical and emotional well-being, we often ask, “How are you doing?” For the one who asks the question and the one who answers it, mental health does not often come to mind (no pun intended). Billy Graham preached that the mind is a battlefield and battles are waged there every day. We take hits and are dealt wounds. We experience mental highs and lows, strain and fatigue. And on the mission field here in Japan, the battle for the mind is fierce. It is intensified by a new language, new culture, new relationships, and new and varied roles. Sometimes, the ambiguity of our roles and responsibilities can lead to confusion, doubt, negative self-talk, and frustration. There is so much happening in the mind almost all the time. We listen, learn, process, respond,

schedule, plan, and wrestle with countless decisions. This can, and does, lead to mental exhaustion, which can bring about emotional, relational, and physical fatigue to us as holistic beings.

Pushed to the limit

On November 13, 2023, I was out seeing a film with friends. This happened to be on a Monday, my day off, but my mind was anything but at rest. I had been pushing hard with local ministry, full-time language learning, and regular involvement with our internship program, all while trying to settle into life in a culture and vocation that in many ways were still foreign to me. This required tons of mental energy, and mine was dangerously low.

As the film reached its climax, so did my mind. My heart started to beat

heavily, my hands tingled; panic took hold of me as I battled to stay conscious. Fear crept in as I thought, *If I pass out, I might not wake up.* As the lights in the theater came on, I turned to my friends and said, “I’m not okay.” Explaining my symptoms, my friend got his parents, who are doctors, on the phone. They told me to lay down on the floor and put my feet up on my backpack and taught me how to breathe. How did I get here? Where could I go from here?

Following this episode, this panic attack, I started going to doctors. I filled out a depression questionnaire and started on some anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications. I started meeting with Christian counselors who have experienced and are acquainted with cross-cultural stress, anxiety, depression,

and burnout. Other missionary friends courageously shared their own stories of mental health struggles. The journey toward mental health was underway. The shame, embarrassment, and feelings of being alone and misunderstood have been dissipating over time.

Embracing limitations

None of us are able to go 24/7. We need regular rest and times of refreshment. We all have limits. I think that embracing this is a struggle not uncommon to cross-cultural workers and those in a variety of ministry contexts. It certainly has been for me. If not from external sources, there is often within us a pressure to meet certain expectations. These flow from our own definitions of what is a good missionary, leader, teammate, or [fill in the blank]. How we define these roles is important because poor expectations can lead to a life without healthy boundaries or rhythms, which can lead to burnout and damage our longevity in the ministry context God has called us to. The heart of it might be an identity question: Is my value and worth based on what I do or produce? If I'm not working, am I still loved, valued, enough? Our core identity is that we are children of God, loved always, no matter what. We have been called to be part of God's work in the world, which does not rest on one person's shoulders. It will go on and move forward in our absence. So we are free to rest and have fun. To slow down and enjoy what God has given us. To pause, pray, play.

Sharing is caring

I often sense a lack of understanding when it comes to mental illness. I also think we all will experience some form of mental health challenge during our lives. Maybe the lack of empathy and understanding comes from the fact that such illness is not always easily identifiable. A person who comes into a room with crutches or a cast elicits an empathetic response rather quickly—"What happened? Are you okay?" are typical responses, even from total strangers. Our mental health is far more ambiguous, with few visible or audible clues. So if you are experiencing symptoms, it is very important to pull back the

curtain and share with someone. Tell a friend, a doctor, a mental health professional; uncover the wounds and weariness. Then understanding blossoms, and deeper bonds can be formed. This has been true in my relationships with teammates, church family, and not yet Christian friends.

Vulnerability is risky, but it is the pathway to receiving the care we long for and need to move forward in our journey. Through openness and sharing with others about our mental health, we can be encouraged and become great sources of encouragement to others. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17 NKJV). I pray that each person reading this would know that they are not alone. I pray that God would bring each of us a devoted friend who reminds us of our ever-present and loving Lord, a friend who will sit with us, listen, give us a hug, even though they may struggle to understand. I pray that we, too, would be such a friend.

Scripture and prayer can help

Since the above incident, I have had a number of anxiety attacks, panic attacks, and bouts of depression. Prayer and meditating on the truths of Scripture is another way that the Lord has brought me through episodes. The psalmist writes, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Ps. 34:18–19 ESV). I can honestly say that the Lord has brought me through and delivered me out of every single one through breathing techniques (four-square breathing), my five senses (what do I see, smell, taste, feel, hear), prayer, friends, talking to doctors and counselors, taking medication, and going on retreats. When the walls feel like they are closing in, God can and does use people, practices, and resources to take us from a place of feeling surrounded by enemies to a place of peace, rest, and relief.

"He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me" (Ps. 18:19 NIV). I have experienced this "being brought out" many times. Once, while I was

experiencing a strong panic attack in a Saizeriya restaurant, the Lord gave me a promise to hold onto: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flame will not set you ablaze" (Isa. 43:2 NIV). I have said breath prayers. Breathing in, I would say, "I give you my worries" and, breathing out, "for you care for me." Breathing in, I would say, "I won't be afraid" and, breathing out, "for you are with me."

Will this be my life forever?

I have certainly wrestled with this thought. I have asked God to take away this thorn in my flesh (see 2 Corinthians 12:7–10). He might, and he might not. Perhaps God desires to use me to comfort and care for others going through a similar battle. Maybe God wants to teach us about relying on him or to remind us of his sufficiency and our limitations. He is God, and we are not. As the Good Shepherd, perhaps he is leading you and me into life-giving rhythms and helpful expectations. Maybe the mental afflictions we experience are a gateway to healing for us and others. Maybe it is God's way of slowing us down as we are living life too fast, too hurried.

Being on my back and struggling for breath in a theater sure got my attention! God allowed me to reach my breaking point. My life has not been the same and in many ways for the better. He revealed my felt need and expectation to be in ministry-mode 24/7; he revealed how I was disobeying him in not keeping Sabbath by ceasing and resting. I have been learning what my restful activities are, like writing, meals and movies with friends, and going to the *onsen*. I pray God will give revelations like these to each of us. Though the journey continues to be difficult at times, I am seeing how God means it for our good. **JH**

Andrew Phillips has served with SEND International since 2022. He's been working in Obanzawa alongside John and Susan Edwards and Shion Christ Church making friends and introducing them to Christ through word and deed.

Cultural influences on mental health in Japan

By Gabriella Kashiwakura

Cultural aspects of Japanese society can psychologically affect individuals, but identity in Christ can bring freedom

The purpose of the gospel is to change lives throughout all nations and cultures. As missionaries, we need to understand aspects of the culture we are inserted into and present the Word of God as a solution, highlighting areas of the gospel that address a culture directly. Japanese society, as in many other Asian countries, has a culture based on shame and honor. There is a movement towards the preservation of the status quo—a collective harmony that must be maintained. Honor comes from maintaining a person's value in the community and from behaving according to their role in society. Shame means that an individual is seen as lowly by the community. It means inadequacy. Behavior that differs from what is expected may bring shame to an individual. The dilemma “What would others think about me?” influences all areas of their lives including their attitudes and complex life decisions.¹

Japan's culture is collectivist and is strongly group-oriented. An individual is seen as a piece of a collective machine. The idea of individuals being unique is almost replaced with the notion that every person has a place to fill within the society. All pieces need to be in the right place and functioning accordingly for the society to move forward. People maintain their honor, meaning their social value and status, by behaving in accordance with their position in society. These patterns of

expected behavior and roles are to be followed and respected.

Pleasing others or finding our identity in Christ?

In Japanese society, we see how a culture guided by shame and honor can affect its members psychologically. Because of this urgent concern to preserve one's reputation in view of what society expects, there is an increasing number of individuals with maladjusted behavior who feel misunderstood or are unable to express themselves.

We have been living in Japan for some time now, and I daily notice the behavior of Japanese people and how the culture influences their perception of the gospel. Our church celebrated five years in 2024, and as a church composed of mainly Japanese members, we have faced some dilemmas and challenges related to this culture.

We have met many people with psychological disorders in our church. Some have struggled to express themselves or have dealt with low self-esteem due to continuous pressure to meet people's expectations. Others have dealt with depression for years. Some members have suffered abuse in the past and, because of the lack of proper help, developed severe psychological disorders. In the beginning of their journey with us, some were ashamed to express themselves. But now, many of our members have wonderful testimonies of how they were freed from

problems of this magnitude. It is up to the church to welcome these people with a compassionate approach.

This strong consciousness of other people's opinions and expected behavior can produce a barrier that prevents many from truly exposing their opinions and being spontaneous. One member, after accepting Jesus, told us that she had a health problem that she had never had the courage to share with anyone before—not even her parents nor husband. She had spent years of her life suffering from a condition that no one around her knew about.

Another effect of shame-honor values is avoiding dissension. The effort in maintaining relational harmony produces an extreme notion of respecting collective peace. This principle can even affect the way a person gives their opinion or responds to an invitation. Often, it seems better not to give a direct answer to avoid offending others. Keeping apparent peace preserves connections. An invitation that could be turned down easily can more simply be ignored, to avoid conflict. In our church, we had cases in which a member, upon an invitation to serve in a church department, felt pressured. However, to avoid disappointment, this person preferred to be absent from the services instead of opening up.

Japanese Christians need to understand that, by receiving a new identity in Christ, they have freedom to behave in accordance with this new identity,

as sons and daughters of God. After accepting Jesus in our hearts, the Bible says that we become part of the family of God. Family brings us the idea of closeness and intimacy.

Where there is intimacy there is freedom. After accepting Jesus, we have our spiritual lives restored. We are made new. Our honor is restored, and there is no more shame before God. We do not need to be ashamed of who we are anymore, because we have become children of God. We can live free from bondage, from shame, and from fear when we truly understand our identity.

Are we cogs or members?

The Bible also calls the church the body of Christ, meaning that we are connected to each other. To some extent, Japanese understand this concept of connectivity, with each individual having a place in society—each person is not here just to express their individuality but to contribute to the society. However, there is also a great risk of each individual losing their individuality and being seen more as a cog of a greater machine.

Through the Word of God, we acquire the understanding that there is purpose in what we do as part of the body of Christ. We are not just living for the sake of living. We are children of the Father of lights, and our purpose is to shine the light of God that is in us. We are indeed part of something bigger, and we should contribute to the advance of the body of Christ. There is purpose in our lives and in our way of living. Our skills, abilities, and personalities are all part of this purpose. We should use them for the goal of fulfilling God's mission.

As Christians, we must teach our Japanese brothers and sisters about the existence of grace. It is grace that fills us. God is the only one capable

of filling us completely, in all areas of our lives. Grace also enables us to serve God with excellence and integrity of heart; therefore, we do not need to exhaust ourselves physically and psychologically trying to do our best. We do not need to be overly demanding of ourselves when we do not reach the level expected of us, nor do we need to place too much value on others' opinions. Of course, we should always aim to do our best for God, but we must always trust in his grace and not in our own strength. God is our ultimate source of strength.

A great way to reinforce this new grace-based relationship among church members is through creating a sense of belonging. The Japanese culture is group-oriented; therefore, a sense of belonging is valued within a group. As they understand that they belong to the church family, they feel more comfortable within the church environment. In our church in Tokyo, one of the ways we reinforce this sense of belonging is through moments of fellowship. After each Sunday service, we eat together and chat. This brings the idea of family—the understanding that when we are with family, we can feel at ease. Many of our evangelistic strategies are also focused on building relationships in order to break down barriers people may have with Christianity. This association of the church as a family and as a friendly environment helps everyone to feel free to express themselves and to feel welcomed. The sense of belonging brings safety. And through eating together and having fellowship, we can welcome people.

While advocating grace, I do not advocate a permissive approach—allowing people to behave as they please with the justification that God loves everyone anyway. We do need to rescue the lost and the dysfunctional,

understanding where they come from, with the mission of guiding them to a correct walk with Christ. First, people facing psychological disorders need compassion from us to free themselves from the strongholds and the bondage in which they find themselves. There are many challenges related to helping; however, they must be seen as who they are in Christ.

As the body of Christ, we are a family whose members support each other to advance together. In these five years of church, I have been confronted with reactions, questions, and behaviors that are often different from what I am used to in Brazil. However, as a church mostly comprised of Japanese people, I have learned not to look at this culture through Westernized (and sometimes judgmental) lenses. Together we are seeking to communicate the gospel effectively, a gospel that reaches each individual where they are. A gospel that places each of us in a heavenly family, restoring honor, bringing peace, and redefining the meaning of service and loyalty.

We have seen a genuine and supernatural transformation in the people who have passed through our church. This is the mission of a missionary: to look at a culture with a compassionate gaze as the Holy Spirit guides us to reveal the love of God to heal different peoples and nations. **JH**

1. A book on this topic to check is by Jayson Georges: *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures* (Timē Press, 2014).

Gabriella Kasbiwakura, along with her husband, is a Brazilian missionary. They pastor a church in Tokyo called Word of Life Church. They also teach and direct an online Japanese Bible school, called Word of Life Bible School.



2 conversations with experts

By Simon Pleasants

A child psychiatrist and a university professor give their thoughts on the state of mental health in Japan

Japan enjoys an excellent reputation in the realm of physical health. It boasts a world-class health system, low rates of obesity, and the second highest longevity in the world. But it has much a poorer image when it comes to mental health—a stressed, overworked workforce, a high suicide rate, and a high stigma associated with mental disorders.

A stark reflection of this discrepancy is that Japan is ranked first for physical health but second lowest (37 out of 38) for mental well-being in a UNICEF survey of child well-being (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/European Union (EU) countries).¹

But what is the actual state of mental health in Japan, and how does it compare with Western countries? To discover more, I talked with two friends who have an intimate knowledge of the subject.

Dr. Roseline Yong is an assistant professor in mental health at Akita University. She specializes in researching the mental health of children and adolescents, with a special focus on people with *hikikomori* (a term used when people withdraw from society and spend almost their entire time in isolation at home). Her interest in these people goes beyond merely academic—in her spare time, she runs a ministry for hikikomori that includes a drop-in centre.²

Dr. Takashi Inoue, a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist from Japan, graduated from the University of Tokyo. After completing his psychiatric residency in Tokyo and a visiting fellowship in Vancouver, Canada, he now practices as a psychiatrist in Calgary,

Canada. He personally feels a connection with people experiencing hikikomori, having gone through an extremely competitive educational system as a teenager and once needing to take some time off from medical school.

Comparing Japan and Canada

Takashi was quick to point out that despite Canada and Japan having very different cultures and health systems, there is a lot of overlap between common mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, neurodiversity, and eating disorders and how they are treated. “Having worked in both countries, I’m astonished by how many things we share in common, regardless of our ethnicity or cultural background

over-the-counter medicine as a means of coping with emotional distress.”

“In Canada, people suffering from substance-use disorder are usually viewed as individuals trying their best to escape emotional or physical pain. Support for them is based on the principles of harm reduction and decriminalization,” Takashi says. “In contrast, Japanese society has traditionally viewed such people as needing punishment rather than support, treatment, and, most importantly, connection. However, there is growing awareness of evidence-based approaches for supporting people with addictions.”

Another difference between the two countries is how young people respond to problems at school: Japanese students tend to isolate, whereas Canadians are more likely to spend time in social groups outside of school. “If young people in Canada struggle at school, they might hang out with their peers. And sometimes that can lead to homelessness,” Takashi says. “But in Japan, students with problems tend to quit going to school. And they don’t know where to go, so they might stay at home for an extended period.”

But in Japan, attitudes towards dropping out of school are changing. There is less stigma associated with it, and more alternatives to traditional schools are appearing.

Medicating prioritized over time

One point that Takashi and Roseline both raised was that psychiatrists in Japan tend to rely more heavily on medication for treating mental health conditions, which can lead to the problem of overprescription.



or social systems. In the end, we’re all humans,” he says.

However, one major difference between the two countries is substance abuse. Illicit drugs are much easier to access in Canada, and so many more people struggle with their abuse. Takashi says, “Illegal substances are strictly regulated in Japan, and so relatively few people struggle with them. However, there is a reported trend of misusing

Roseline explains, “Many people don’t seek psychiatric treatment or discontinue it because they don’t think it will help them. A lot of the time, they are just given a prescription—it’s a very medication-dependent approach. Hikikomori people can be misdiagnosed as schizophrenic due to the two conditions having overlapping symptoms. Challenges such as inadequate resources in the mental health-care system, limited communication regarding patients’ experiences, and a lack of awareness can obstruct accurate diagnoses. In Japan, however, obtaining a formal diagnosis is essential for accessing appropriate support and treatment options, which may include potential benefits from medications used for schizophrenia.”

Takashi views the shortage of trained therapists in Japan as another reason for a reliance on medication. “Both Canadian and Japanese guidelines recommend psychotherapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy or interpersonal therapy, as first-line treatment for mild depression,” says Takashi. “However, due to limited access to these therapies by appropriately trained professionals in Japan, many psychiatrists there are forced to rely heavily on medication.”

Takashi emphasizes that medication can often be helpful in many cases. “Doctors ought to provide the best treatment options depending on availability and patient preferences, and it is a blessing for us to have effective medications that can save many patients,” says Takashi. “That said, I hope that access to psychotherapy in Japan will improve in the near future. This requires more trained therapists, better funding, and further improvements to the public healthcare system.”

A pressurized society

Roseline thinks that the mental health of the Japanese population suffers from the high pressure of society coupled with a reluctance to openly talk about personal problems. “I think a huge number of people are under a lot of stress,” she says. “But because they feel that it’s their own responsibility and don’t want to trouble others, they hide it and don’t talk about it.”

She sees the Japanese working environment as a major contributor to stress. “Big companies and organizations with entrenched hierarchies, such as hospitals, are very rigid,” she notes. “It’s not really about whether you



perform well; you are evaluated by how well you follow your boss.”

She is especially critical of the transfer system within companies in which employees are periodically reassigned to different roles, usually without consultation or forewarning. “Every time when you are transferred, you have need to readjust, but that becomes harder with age,” she says. “I think everyone is very stressed, but there is no point in seeing a doctor because you probably just have to take a temporary break from work.”

On the positive side

But things aren’t all gloomy. A recurring theme throughout the discussion with Takashi was that Japan has made a lot of progress over the last couple of decades in terms of support for people with mental health issues. “I think there has been significant—even dramatic—improvement regarding mental health challenges in Japan,” Takashi says. “In particular, people seek help more easily compared to 10 or 20 years ago. There’s still a general hesitancy to meet psychiatrists or counselors because of the stigma, but I think it’s gradually improving.” But he also sees much room for further improvement. “I’m

concerned that young people in Japan struggle with a lack of positive self-affirmation compared to those overseas. I see so much room for the quality of relationships within families or communities to be strengthened. I believe this will add protection against mental health challenges.”

Roseline also thinks things are changing for the better. “I feel that attitudes to mental health are improving in Japan,” she says. “In particular, the internet is making it easier for people to access the information and help that they need.”

And as Christians, we can also be encouraged that we have opportunities to make an impact on these issues. Both Takashi and Roseline see Christians as uniquely placed to be agents for promoting mental health in Japan. Since Christians are a tiny minority in Japan, Takashi thinks they should be able to identify well with other minorities such as those suffering from mental health problems. “I think lots of people are suffering in Japan,” he says. “Being a Christian in Japan gives us a greater capacity to be humble, to be compassionate, and to be open. I feel we are really called to support people with mental health issues.”

Roseline sees healthy community as the key for promoting mental health. “I think that community-based activities, such as church events . . . can provide a supportive environment for individuals struggling with mental health issues.”

As Christians living in Japan, there is much we can do to promote mental health: developing practices that promote our own mental health, growing in our own awareness of mental health, and fostering safe communities where anyone is welcome. **JH**

1. Anna Gromada, Gwyther Rees, & Yekaterina Chzhen, “Worlds of Influence: Understanding What Shapes Child Well-being in Rich Countries,” *Innocenti Report Card 16*, <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/worlds-of-influence> (May 2020).
2. Simon Pleasants, “Hikikomori ministry in Tohoku,” *Japan Harvest* (Summer 2016), 26–27.

Photos submitted by author

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.

Mental health for survivors following a disaster

By Don Thomson

An aid worker's journey to understand trauma and mental health for disaster victims

My work in Japan changed dramatically on March 11, 2011, when the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku occurred. Operation Blessing's disaster relief expert had flown to Japan to initiate relief efforts. I initially assisted them as a volunteer but that turned into a full-time role leading their efforts in Tohoku. This work expanded to other areas and has continued for the past 13 years through an office in Sendai.

Addressing trauma

It wasn't until my involvement in disaster relief that I came to truly appreciate the impact of traumatic events on mental health. As we met those who had experienced significant trauma, we realized that merely addressing physical needs such as food and water was not enough. We had to understand the trauma, and implement programs that also provided psychosocial and spiritual support to address the grief and loss these people were experiencing. This journey has been a learning curve, helping not only others but also myself personally. I learned firsthand how secondary trauma, or compassion fatigue, could affect an aid worker due to constant exposure to trauma victims as well as what steps one needs to take to recover and protect oneself.

You are normal

One of the essential messages we learned to convey to survivors at shelters (*hinanjo*) and temporary housing (*kasetsu jūtaku*) was that the unusual symptoms many experienced—sleep-

lessness, hair loss, lack of appetite, and anxiety—are normal reactions to traumatic events. For those experiencing these symptoms, hearing “this is normal,” that there is nothing inherently wrong with them, can be reassuring. Their bodies are simply reacting to the trauma, a response supported by scientific literature. Engaging in human interaction, crafts, artwork, music, and community involvement can help alleviate these symptoms for many people. Recovery varies for each individual; some recover more easily than others. Previous traumas, such as childhood abuse or domestic violence, may exacerbate symptoms and those people require more time and expert care.



An ochakai held at a temporary housing compound in Tohoku

Seeing the blue sky

I remember Mrs. Miura, the wife of a fisherman from the Kesenuma area which was devastated by the tsunami. They lost their home, boats, and even the beauty salon she operated overlooking the harbor. We had provided her husband with a small fishing boat, one of 40 given to the local fishing community. She joined us for an *ochakai* (tea party) at a temporary housing facility where she learned about trauma and

self-care. I will never forget her words from 12 years ago when she said goodbye: “*Aozora ga miete kita*” (I can see the blue sky). This Japanese expression conveys a sense of relief or optimism akin to seeing clear skies after a storm. Since then, we have hosted many *ochakai* designed to provide trauma relief to those in temporary housing through arts, crafts, and cooking.

Trauma and children

Recently, eight months after the Noto earthquake of January 2024, we held a two-day event with Christian artists and entertainers for children at the temporary housing there. Later we were told that several children who had not eaten well since the earthquake were now eating properly. Many of our programs across Japan after a disaster provide opportunities for adults and children to engage in activities and discuss their experiences with our staff and volunteers. We have seen positive changes in children and their families through these efforts.

In Minamisōma, Fukushima, 25 km north of the damaged nuclear plant, we continue to hold events for children, all of whom were born after the disaster and had no direct experience of it. However, as the offspring of parents who endured the trauma of March 2011 and the ensuing nuclear disaster, they unknowingly grapple with the effects of trauma, living in homes filled with uncertainty and restlessness. It is well-documented that trauma can be passed down through generations.¹



A seminar with Dr. Mullen

Post-traumatic growth

One of the big lessons we also learned was the concept of post-traumatic growth, the understanding that trauma can spur someone on to psychological and spiritual growth.² Trauma does not have to be a dead-end experience but an opportunity to become stronger, improve relationships, discover new possibilities, grow spiritually, and develop an enhanced appreciation for life. A powerful metaphor we have shared in seminars along these lines is the traditional Japanese art of *kintsugi*, where broken pottery is repaired using lacquer mixed with powdered gold. This mends the brokenness in a way that makes the object unique and more beautiful than it was prior to being damaged.³

Trauma is an issue for all

Mental health is a concern not just for disaster survivors but for anyone, as life has challenges, and trauma is prevalent in work and relationships. Over the years, I have observed that it is also a significant issue for Bible-believing Christians in Japanese churches and even within the missionary community. Unfortunately, most pastors lack training in mental health, and there are few Christian psychiatrists or counselors in Japan who can provide perspectives on mental health beyond secular viewpoints. Recognizing the need for a balanced and expert Christian approach, we invited Dr. Grant Mullen, a Christian mental health physician who practiced for 25 years in Ontario, Canada, to conduct a series of semi-

nars in Japan on behalf of Operation Blessing. These seminars were based on his book *Emotionally Free—A Prescription for Healing Body, Soul, and Spirit*, which was translated into Japanese.⁴

A doctor's journey

Initially an anesthetist and general practitioner, Dr. Mullen was drawn to psychiatry after many of his patients sought help for emotional pain he was not trained to address. Several were Christians who were not being helped within their churches, feeling ashamed to discuss their struggles. Dr. Mullen realized many of these problems were due to chemical imbalances in the brain and could be effectively treated with appropriate medication.

When a female patient challenged Dr. Mullen in a gruff man's voice and was only silenced by rebuking in the name of Jesus, Dr. Mullen came to understand the role of the demonic in some cases and the mental anguish the enemy seeks to inflict. He also learned how the believer's authority, as outlined in scripture, could set people free from such influences.

Dr. Mullen then faced a personal crisis in his marriage. Taking a pill was not the solution, nor was it apparent that a demon was involved. After seeking Christian counseling addressing negative thought patterns and emotional wounds, they learned the importance of dealing with emotional baggage. Through these experiences,

Dr. Mullen developed his three-part approach to mental health, integrating medical, psychological, and spiritual methods that he teaches together with his wife, Kathy, around the world. He encourages anyone seeking emotional freedom to consider each of these three aspects—body, soul, and spirit—when dealing with mental or emotional struggles.

Resources to share

Wherever we've held these seminars in Japan we have received overwhelmingly positive responses, with many participants sharing that they have been personally helped and have gained tools to assist others around them. One of our goals is to help the Japanese church better understand mental health, enabling recovered church members to reach out and support others, both Christian and non-Christian. **JH**

Dr. Mullen's book *Emotionally Free (Kokoro no Kaiho 心の解放)* is available for purchase in English or Japanese on our website at:

<https://objapan.org/drgrantmullen> There are also links to seminars on our YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/operationblessing>, such as trauma relief sessions held in temporary housing and Dr. Mullen's Emotionally Free seminars in Japan, presented in both English and Japanese. Dr. Mullen's website can be found at drgrantmullen.com.



If you are interested in becoming involved in our programs as a volunteer or participating in a future seminar or have questions, please contact our mental health programs coordinator at keiko.takahashi@objapan.org in English or Japanese.

1. Mark Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle* (Viking, 2016).
2. Richard G. Tedeschi, Crystal L. Park, and Lawrence G. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth: Positive Changes in the Aftermath of Crisis* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998).
3. "About Kintsugi Hope," Kintsugi Hope, <https://kintsugihope.com/vision> (accessed October 22, 2024).
4. Essence Publishing, 2017

Photos submitted by author

Don Thomson, national director for Operation Blessing Japan, grew up in Japan and has served in Japan from 1983. He married Carol, another second-generation missionary, and they have three children who live and work in Tokyo.

Burnout prevention plan

None of us are immune to burnout, but certain actions and mindsets will help us recognize the warning signs and ultimately prevent it

By Steve Manders

It hit me out of nowhere while on my way to church one Sunday—a rare Sunday when I was not serving in any particular way. No obligations. No expectations other than the joy that comes with being able to worship and fellowship with other believers. As I sat on the subway, halfway through the journey, my heart began to race as a shadow of dread overcame me. I panicked and jumped off at the next stop. It would be a full twenty minutes before I resumed the journey. Something was wrong. Terribly wrong.

In hindsight, all the symptoms were there—physical and mental tiredness, inability to concentrate, lack of motivation, and the numbness that comes with feeling stuck but not knowing why. I should have seen it coming, but I was blind, blind because I never thought it would be me. In fact, I had built a reputation of it not ever being me. I took pride in my high work ethic and self-awareness, which I thought brought an understanding of my capacity and my limits. I foolishly believed that I was not at risk of burnout until it happened.

Fortunately for me, I would recover. I had support. I also had a plan.

Real communication

Recovery began with a single conversation, a conversation with a leader who was listening. Really listening. He sought real understanding of how I got to where I was and the ministry's responsibility in that. These kinds of conversations are difficult, and we often hesitate to have them due to shame and guilt. We do not want to appear weak; however, our greatest strength lies in the humility it takes to ask for help, to admit that we are not invincible.

But it isn't just about communication with a leader. It has to be more than that. It is understanding our support networks or lack of them. De-

pending on the nature of the ministries with which we have been entrusted, the missionary life can be lonely. Really lonely. But it doesn't have to be that way, not with the member care offered by our organisations and churches and family and friends standing beside us in prayer. We need real friends who speak truth into our lives, whether they be across the street or the world.

Appropriate rest

We are all aware that burnout is not just mental. It is also physical, emotional, and, in some cases, spiritual. We need to look after ourselves in each of these areas. Our lives require a sustainable rhythm and healthy resilience. Where this begins is understanding our body's needs, particularly when it comes to relaxation, rest, and refreshment.

Passion for ministry

What gets us out of bed in the morning? What excites us? Why does God have us here in this time and place? We must always keep our passion for ministry and our love for Japan and her people in the foreground. As a coach, one of the most common but crucial questions I ask is "What makes this important to you?" It's a question that speaks directly to the heart of why we are here, why we serve, and what our values and priorities are. It is vital that we answer this question and to do so with complete honesty.

Managing expectations

Once we understand our priorities and the values on which they are based, we are able to make appropriate decisions on what a healthy workload looks like for us. And it will look different for each of us. I am still the same person I was before burnout.

I still put in the hours, strive to give one hundred percent, and challenge myself, but I also know what that looks like for me and that it may look very different for someone else. This kind of self-awareness allows us to communicate clearly and with conviction what we are able and unable to do. It also enables us to listen well to our supervisors, especially when collaboration and mutual exchange are needed as we work and serve together to bear gospel fruit.

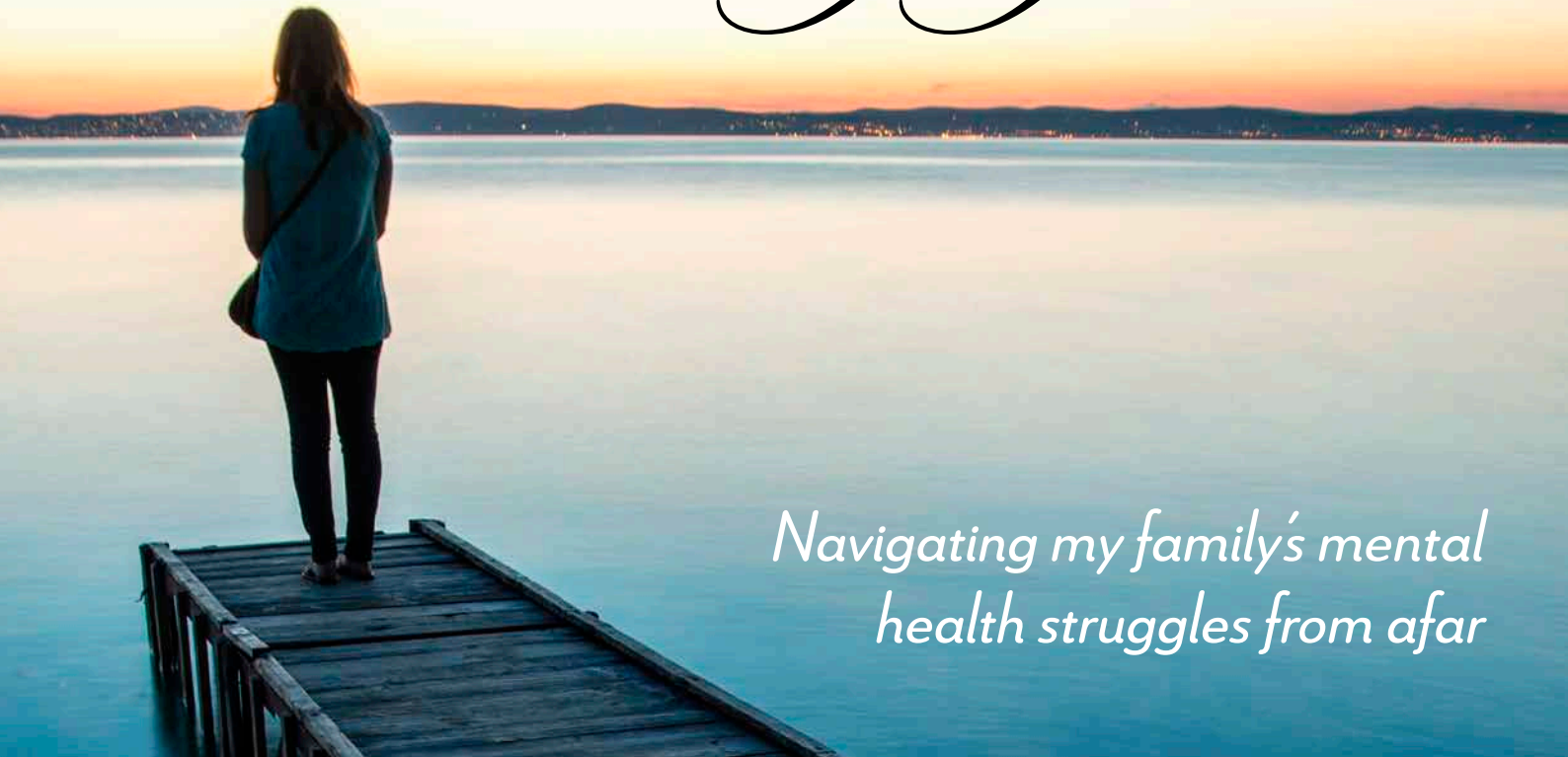
We all feel the importance and urgency of the task that is ours—taking the gospel to those who have not yet heard it, discipling those who have. It can feel overwhelming at times. But it doesn't need to be. God's Word instructs us to come to God as the provider of all that we need to do all that he asks. We will not be immune to burnout, but we certainly can do everything possible to steward our bodies and lives for God's glory in order to prevent it. **JH**

Steve Manders (Australia) arrived in Japan in December 2006. After many years of both church planting and church revitalisation, he currently serves as a ministry coach for OMF Japan.



Remote grief

By Michelle Grötz



Navigating my family's mental health struggles from afar

The news came in rapid succession. My mom would lose her job in two months. My dad's clinical depression, fairly well managed since his initial diagnosis in 2015, resurfaced with a vengeance. And then, on December 9, 2022, I received the final nail in the coffin: my brother had admitted himself to a mental hospital, only two days before the deadline for his bachelor's thesis. The diagnosis: bipolar disorder, which can be treated but not cured and comes with a high risk of self-harm and suicide.

It felt like a joke, like some plot-line from a movie. I had arrived in Japan nine months before and was doing full-time language study. I was not prepared for news like this, not that anybody ever is. But I couldn't run away. Thus began my journey of learning how to deal with serious mental health problems in my family while serving as a missionary abroad. And like a psych textbook case study, I spent the following months and years cycling through the five stages of grief.

Depression

Depression hit me immediately. Luckily, another missionary family lived in the same building, and I sat in my friend's arms, crying for I don't know how long. Of all the emotions warring in my mind, one kept coming to the forefront again and again: powerlessness. I was thousands of kilometers away from my family. I couldn't do anything. While logically I knew that I couldn't do anything to change the situation even if I was there with them, the fact I couldn't even give them a hug was crushing.

Bargaining

I didn't think I would be faced with the decision to return home during my first term, let alone my first year. But as heartbreaking as it was, I decided to take a leave of absence, at least until things calmed down. It was my way of bargaining. I was convinced something would change, get better, if I went home. Surprisingly, the wrench in that plan came from my family. My dad, who is not a Christian, said, "We

don't want you to come. Your place is in Japan now. God has sent you there. Yes, I do think you still have an obligation towards your family. But it just looks different now. Call us. Talk things through with us. Pray for us. That is helpful, even if it may not feel like it." So I stayed.

Anger

My anger has been chiefly directed inward in the form of guilt. Guilt—because I am far away and feel like I'm leaving my family to deal with this alone and because I feel relief about having some distance. Initially, there was guilt as I fell into the trap of self-importance and blamed myself; I viewed this as an attack of the enemy because I had the audacity to become a missionary. But yes, there is also anger at God occasionally, maybe not for letting all this happen but certainly for allowing a lot of it to go on for so long. My dad has now been struggling with this depressive episode for almost

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Christian, counsel yourself

By Christina
DeCiantis Davison

Tools for self-counseling and mental health self-care

In 2016, I took a course called “Introduction to Christian Counseling” at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. The professor began the course by telling us that in order to counsel others, we must first be able and willing to self-counsel. Christians cannot effectively counsel others from God’s Word without first having sufficient knowledge of the Word to apply it to our own lives.

Mental health care and resources for self-care are difficult to find in Japan, especially if English language resources are needed. When my family arrived in Tokyo ready for our first term in October 2019, we had no idea what challenges were ahead. By the summer of 2020, I found myself in need of all the resources I had at my disposal to care for my own mental health and my family’s. I was grateful for the ways God had already equipped me for this task, but I also prayed for more wisdom and tools. God answered those prayers, and our family has grown in spiritual and mental health over the past five years. Below are some principles I have learned and some useful tools that can help keep your mental health strong.

Be your own barometer

Ministry life is full of challenges, many of which involve a lack of clear dividing lines. When does work stop and life begin? What activities are work, and what are not? How do we define relationships and set healthy boundaries with ministry partners and those to whom we minister? Burn-out and other undesirable mental health outcomes are sadly common in ministry settings. No one is immune to things like overwork, being under-supported, or being emotionally drained. It’s necessary for us to keep an eye on our hearts and minds and notice the signs that we may be drifting into



unhealthy territory. For some people, it might be noticing that they get irritated or angry more frequently than usual. For others, it might be feeling constantly exhausted, having difficulty sleeping, or experiencing other physical symptoms. It could be feeling less interest or enthusiasm than usual for a favorite activity. Do you know yourself well enough to spot the signs that you are slipping toward trouble? Sometimes reading a list of signs and symptoms of reduced mental wellness can be illuminating. Knowing yourself also means allowing yourself to be known—do you have people close to you who may notice changes or warning signs that you could miss?

Abide

The single most important thing you can do for any endeavor, including your ministry goals or the maintenance of your mental health, is to abide in Christ through prayer and continual feasting on the Word of God. Whether we need wisdom, comfort, discernment, or direction, our Father speaks to us through his Scriptures. Just like eating healthy meals and drinking

enough water will help our physical health, tasting of God’s goodness will help us stay spiritually, emotionally, and mentally well. Though practicing a healthy lifestyle cannot totally prevent us from becoming unwell, we benefit overall from consistently choosing to seek that which is for our good. When I start to notice warning signs, the natural first step is to ask myself how I am abiding in Christ and to go to him for wisdom and clarity.

Fill your toolbox

Mental health care resources are available, and they are getting increasingly more accessible. When my family and I needed support for our mental health, I went on a hunt, exploring what was available. Now, I have a toolbox full of things that we can use on an ongoing basis or reach for when the need arises. I’m always on the lookout for things to add to my toolbox. Here are some of the most helpful I’ve found:

- YouTube mental health channels. I especially like *Therapy in a Nutshell*, run by certified marriage and family therapist Emma McAdam. She has videos on a wide range of topics and even offers whole courses that you can take for free on YouTube or for a reasonable cost on her website.
- Websites run by advocacy groups, universities, counseling centers, and government organizations can be treasured troves of short-form educational material. One of my favorites is Understood.org, which offers advice and support for parents of neurodivergent kids.
- Books, especially those written in recent years by Christian counselors, psychologists, and neuroscientists who examine brain development and behavior from a

Christian worldview offer wisdom and practical application.

- Mental health practices like journaling, grounding exercises, breathing exercises, and paying attention to my family's sleep hygiene (observing principles that promote a good night's sleep).
- Cultivating a loving community by nurturing friendships and seeking out mentors helps us build a support system that enables greater resilience.
- Various ministries and nonprofits offer free or low-cost training in how to care for your mental health and for those around you. Many such programs are held in-person

Mental Health First Aid is training the author highly recommends for learning about mental health challenges and how to help people. Access more information at mhfainternational.org.



and might require travel, but some are online. JEMA offers many member care resources.¹

Know when to ask for help

Resources like those above are not a substitute for professional mental health care. It's vital to know when and how to ask for help. You might ask your friend to help you clean and bandage a cut or apply aloe lotion to your sunburn, but you shouldn't ask them to set your broken leg or treat your pneumonia! Getting help can mean going to a counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist. These resources can be accessed through various means, such as a ministry like The Well International, TELL Lifeline, or your sending missions organization (if you have one). When in doubt, speak to a doctor about whether or not there is a need for professional help.

God created us to live an abundant life, but we live in the tension of "already but not yet." We are new creations taking part in the ongoing reconciliation of this fallen world. Jesus promised us that in this life we would have trouble, but he also told us to take heart because he has overcome the world! Our Lord has given us life-giving intimacy with him, loving Christian communities, and many self-care tools to grow in our emotional, mental, and spiritual health. Let's do our best to use what God has given to care for ourselves and each other as we seek to glorify and enjoy our great God. **JH**

1. JEMA's member care resources page lists a number of places you can seek help in Japan and overseas, as well as online: <https://jema.org/resources/member-care/>

Christina DeCiantis Davison is an MTW missionary from the US serving in Tokyo. She seeks to share Christ's love through music and to equip hymn writers and other artists to serve the Japanese church.

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two years with little improvement even though he is working hard to get better.

Denial

While I never outright denied anything that was happening, I realized my denial was desperately trying to see possible upsides to this situation. My mom soon found a new job that she loves, better paid than the one she had before. After his six-week stay at the hospital, my brother started to work at a home for disabled people, a job he enjoys so much that he went back to school to become a certified health-care professional for people with disabilities; I'm praying he can go through with that. And as for my dad, whom I would describe as a Christian-leaning agnostic, I have never seen him so open towards spiritual topics, asking me to pray, not just for, but with him. I tried everything to make sense of what was happening, and to find a higher purpose in it.

A good support network

A big help has been all the support I've received in Japan. I've openly talked about the situation, and the

number of people who have asked how I'm doing, sent encouraging messages, or just let me know they're praying for us is overwhelming. I could talk with mission leadership about the process and was able to get counseling from OMF Japan's on-the-field counselor. I could forward some of her advice to my mom, who, of course, has been bearing most of the load. I can't even begin to imagine what going through that would have been like without a good support network.

Towards acceptance

Since getting the news, we've slowly come to realize this was not just a challenging episode after which we can return to normalcy. This is the new normal for our family. My brother has an incurable mental disorder that will stay with him and this family for the rest of our lives. As I am writing this, my dad is still struggling through therapy, meds, and the search for a new job, and even if he goes into remission, the last two years have already changed him. And while I've mostly gotten used to the new normal, all my initial feelings are still there.

As humans, and maybe especially as Christians, we often want to see the purpose of the trials and tribulations we go through. While looking at the bright side is helpful, at the end of the day, I have to admit that I don't see the purpose in any of this. It's always been easy for me to agree with Paul when he calls for us to "rejoice in our afflictions" as long as I wasn't the afflicted one. I pray that, in the end, this experience will produce endurance, character, and hope. Maybe ten, twenty years down the line, I will see God's wisdom in all this, maybe not. All I can do is to accept my human limitations and try to trust his plan and purpose, be thankful for the little rays of sunlight, and bring my family before him. Admitting I am powerless is painful, but it is also necessary to remember my humanity and leave the healing of souls, minds, and lives with the Lord. **JH**

Michelle Grötz grew up in Germany where she worked at an organization doing parachurch youth ministry before coming to Japan with OMF in 2022. She is currently doing church ministry in Iwaki, Fukushima.

Past trauma, present pain

By Nathan Lim

Childhood trauma can impact us unexpectedly, but awareness can help us cope well

For months, I've had a pain in my elbow from a sports injury. When I visited a chiropractor, he did something unexpected. Instead of just examining my right arm, he also checked my left knee. He noticed how my foot was slightly angled when I walked into his office. Apparently, an old leg injury was exacerbating my new arm injury.

In the same way that seemingly unconnected body parts can impact each other, I've been discovering how old "injuries" from childhood can cause or exacerbate present-day conflicts. Specifically, past traumas can—and have—affected me as a missionary in Japan. Thankfully, though, I've found help and am able to continue serving God even if the trauma isn't fully healed.

PTSD: The unexpected diagnosis

In 2021, I was taking my usual two-month leave in Malaysia. Halfway through, I had insomnia, anxiety, and panic attacks. I didn't know why, but the thought of returning to Japan triggered those reactions.

A church friend recommended seeing a psychiatrist, and I discovered my anxiety was largely due to unresolved conflicts in Japan. To my surprise, the psychiatrist diagnosed me with not only burnout but also PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). I'd thought that PTSD was something only war veterans had!

On his recommendation, I took the prescribed medication, sought counseling, and rested in Malaysia for an extra four months. I also took a year off church ministry but continued other forms of ministry that were not taxing.

My counselors helped me uncover childhood traumas—called adverse childhood experiences (ACE)—which

led to the conflicts in Japan and my current emotional state.

It was uncomfortable and exhausting to journey through my past. But it needed to be done for the sake of healing. It's like what my chiropractor said: "Your right elbow is getting reinjured more because of your left knee. Though your knee was injured way back in college, it didn't fully heal; it feels fine normally, until you start to stretch it in certain ways. The injured knee makes you unconsciously overexert your arm instead of using that leg for momentum and thrust. So unless you also take care of your knee, you'll keep reinjuring your elbow."

What is PTSD, anyway?

Right arm, left leg. One seemingly unrelated injury was causing another. PTSD works like this too.

Things in the present can remind me of things of the past, causing disproportionate fear or anger. This happens because traumatic events damage the amygdala, a part of the brain that regulates fight-or-flight response (that is, our physiological reaction to stress).¹

For example, one of my parents was mentally ill and abusive. The dangers of the past (my parent) made me hyper-vigilant towards potential dangers in the present (other adults). Now, when I encounter people who seem difficult to reason with or act in an authoritarian, overbearing way, I may feel excessive fear or anger. Even if they are not actually unreasonable or overbearing, something about them that hints of my parent sends me into a fight-or-flight response.

That's why I was getting panic attacks during my time off in Malaysia. My brain was saying "going back to Japan is dangerous" due to unre-

solved interpersonal conflicts there that subconsciously reminded me of my childhood.

For privacy reasons, I won't go into details about my biological family or the conflicts in Japan. What I'd like to share, instead, is what helped me live with PTSD and what I gained positively from the experience.

How to live well with trauma

By the end of one year, I was off psychiatric medication—which was a relatively quick recovery. I could list many other coping mechanisms or healthy habits that have helped me recover and maintain good mental health. But here are four things that are especially helpful for dealing with trauma:

First, I deliberately remind myself, "I'm not in the past anymore. This person is not my parent."

Second, I take slow, deep breaths when feeling anxious. Sometimes I combine this with prayer, such as "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The combination of breathing and prayer reduces my heart rate and helps me recognize God's presence with me in the moment.

Third, I occasionally do the Prayer of Examen. It's a centuries-old Christian exercise in which we briefly review our past day, week, month, or year, etc. We try to see how God was present in our joys and pains, be thankful, and mentally prepare for the next day.

Fourth, I find that physical exercise releases a lot of pent-up stress. (This is how I ended up with injuries, though!) Besides playing badminton with a group of nice *obaasan*, I also do judo. Judo, especially, has been a great way for me to release anger in an appropriate way within a controlled environment. Due to COVID-19 I

was unable to engage in this sport for three years, and that was when I had more anxiety and stress, leading up to the 2021 breakdown in Malaysia. When I finally returned to judo, I was a happier person.

Not a disadvantage

It's now been three years since my PTSD diagnosis. Though I'm off regular medication, I'm not fully healed from childhood trauma. This can be frustrating at times, but I'm all right with it.

Back in college, I had attended counseling for quite a while and thought I had freedom from my past. But, oftentimes, God heals us in stages. Jesus didn't heal the blind man in John 9 all at once, but in two stages.

I still react with fear or anger when meeting someone who reminds me of my childhood. And once in a long while, I still feel a level of anxiety that requires temporary medication.

I wish God would just heal me completely because it feels like walking with a limp. But my spiritual director encouraged me by paraphrasing Henri Nouwen, who wrote *The Wounded Healer*, "Your disadvantage may actually help you to serve well in Japan. We bring healing to others from our own woundedness."

Recently, two Japanese male friends shared about their depression with me after I first mentioned my difficulties due to PTSD. One friend said, "You're the first person I've told about my depression." So while I may feel PTSD is a disability sometimes, I see it grants me an ability to be more sensitive and empathetic, opening doors to more personal conversations.

I've come to realize that there is more beneath the surface in me and in others. Have you met someone who reacted disproportionately? Seemed unreasonable or even downright "crazy"? It's possible they may be react-

ing to something in their past without knowing it, just as I may. I try to keep that in mind and not take things too personally, although it can be hard to remember!

Rather than see PTSD as a disadvantage in my life, I'm learning to see it as God's means of grace. It grounds me in humility and dependence on him. I pray it may also be his means of mercy to other people suffering silently in Japan. **JH**

1. Martin H. Teicher et al., "The Effects of Childhood Maltreatment on Brain Structure, Function and Connectivity," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 17, 652-66, <http://doi.org/10.1038/nrn.2016.111> (September 19, 2016).

Image: Vecteezy.com

Nathan (See Huang) Lim served as an independent missionary in Chiba, Japan, from 2016 to 2024. He is now with OM Japan. He and his wife are from Malaysia.



Reflections

By Janet Dallman

from the JEMA Still Waters Spiritual Retreat

Spending time with Jesus, in nature, with fellow travellers on the journey in Japan is time well spent

The Still Waters Retreat, attended by 15 participants, was held at Yamanaka Chalet from April 22–25, 2024. This article shares reflections and comments from attendees, who share insights into the various parts of this life-giving retreat.

Ministry has felt a bit like a treadmill—I was starting to feel like a mouse on a wheel. The retreat was really timely for me to get away to catch my breath!

To officially take time off away from ministry and spend days to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord was a luxury hard to come by. I needed more than just my weekly Sabbath to feel rested and refreshed.

Alive to the beauty of God

The theme of the retreat was “Alive to the Beauty of God,” based on the book of the same title by Dane Ortlund (speaker at CPI Renew 2024 [Japan Church Planting Institute]).¹

The theme helped me be drawn to Him, not pushed by duty or obligation. Peter and Janet nourished my heart, mind and soul with plenty of spiritual food, creative ideas and questions for further reflection. I also enjoyed time for walks, reading or just rest. I can recommend this retreat wholeheartedly to anybody who needs spiritual refreshment.

Time with God

We also participated in Compline (an evening service originating in the sixth century) and Lectio Divina (a form of Bible reading and meditation). Some participants took a spiritual awareness walk, using the five senses to engage with God’s creation and listen for his voice; others made a spiritual collage, focusing on God through art. Times alone with God were interspersed with time in small groups, with lots of free time to relax and times together to share spiritual lessons and have fun.

It’s been a helpful spiritual discipline for me, since taking a retreat is essentially an act of faith. I leave behind all the pressures and list of never-ending responsibilities in order to devote this time to Him.

Collage response

One participant shares their experience with a series of collages:

The first [collage] I labelled ‘Beauty in Resilience’. As I was praying and sorting through pictures I began to see this theme of beauty that is only appreciated because it came into being in a hard place. It reminded me that no matter how bleak our circumstances, no matter how rocky the ground we cultivate, God is able to equip us to survive and thrive.

The second [collage] is titled ‘Pure delight—being known and loved’. What delight there is in friends enjoying their favourite ice cream flavours or a father and son enjoying the sunset together. Great or small, there is such an array of things that God gives us to enjoy.



Poetic responses

A participant reflected on their heavenly citizenship this way:

“Now I’ve received a promise, then I will have what is promised.
 Away from home, but going home.
 Now a stranger, then at home.
 Currently a pilgrim, soon a citizen.
 Always a traveller until I reach home.
 Out of place until Jesus brings me to his place.
 Always a ‘square peg in a round hole’, then, in a hole prepared for me.
 Mostly a forgettable face, some time, a dear friend.
 Exiles with an eternal inheritance.
 A wanderer longing for home.
 Refugees waiting for their certain refuge.
 At the moment, I don’t fit, but in that moment to come, I will fit completely.
 A stranger looking forward to a city with foundations.
 A tent dweller waiting to come to a city called home.
 Homeless but sure of a heavenly home.
 Living on the road, but longing to be in the city of God.”

Another participant shared a poem from their reflections on Matthew 11:25–30:

<p>Come to me; receive rest.</p> <p>Come you who are weary you who have been contending you who are thirsty you who don’t know you who are holding both faith and questions you who need rest</p> <p>Come to me; receive rest.</p> <p>to me your Brother your Friend your Comforter your Refuge your Strength your Present Help your Rest</p>	<p>Come to me; receive rest.</p> <p>receive relieve living water a listening ear comfort peace rest</p> <p>Come to me; receive rest.</p> <p>rest from striving from fighting from carrying from searching from trying from pleasing</p> <p>Come to me; receive rest.</p>
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The third is a collage of wildflowers with the title ‘God knows them all by name’. Though no human eye may ever behold them, their beauty is a delight to their Maker, who knows them each by name. It doesn’t matter how long they last, or how vibrant their colours—each fulfils its God-given purpose. Though our lives may go unnoticed and unseen, we are equally known and delighted in by our Maker.

but restful and a good balance of solitude and also good fellowship with others. The beautiful setting of Lake Yamanaka and Mount Fuji adds to the beauty. We missionaries are constantly in a state of transition and busyness, and this retreat provides just the right amount of spiritual guidance and community to enhance our personal times with the Lord.

has been in Japan for decades and is feeling weary, to the person who is in love with Jesus and wants to go deeper, to the person who is grieving and needs some space, to the person who values time with Jesus, to the person who wants to flourish in their life with Jesus and in ministry. Basically, I recommend Still Waters Retreat to each missionary in Japan. Spending time with Jesus, in nature, with fellow travelers on the journey in Japan is time well spent. **JH**

Why go on retreat?

One participant said:

I highly recommend this retreat as it is truly a retreat—not busy,

The final word goes to another participant:

I would recommend Still Waters Retreat to the person who has just arrived in Japan and is feeling overwhelmed, to the person who

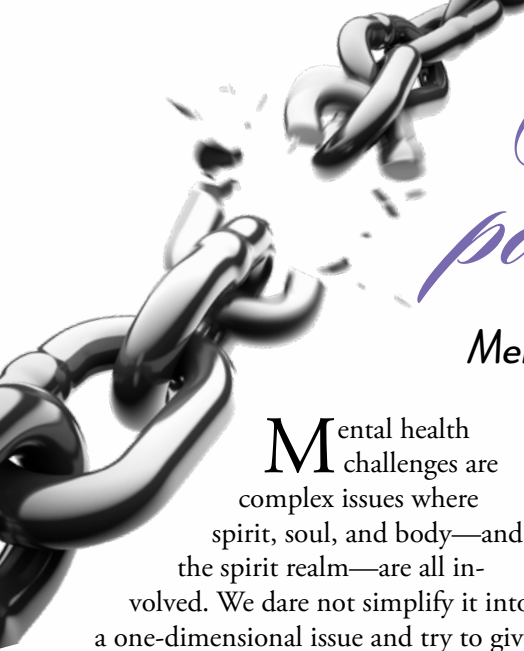
If you want to experience “Still Waters—Alive to the Beauty of God” for yourself, JEMA will be running this spiritual retreat again from April 21–24, 2025. This retreat is for men and women of all ages, nationalities and agencies, and only married couples share a room! For more information, contact Janet at jp.mca@omfmail.com.

1. Dane Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Crossway, 2014).

Collage photos submitted by author

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





Sin, oppression, and the path to freedom

By Jef Linscott

Mental health issues often hide underlying spiritual roots

Mental health challenges are complex issues where spirit, soul, and body—and the spirit realm—are all involved. We dare not simplify it into a one-dimensional issue and try to give fix-all statements. With those who are willing, we can approach mental health issues holistically and cover the bases that we might not normally consider. In this article, we will look at three often overlooked but important issues when discussing mental health: unconfessed or unshared sin, sexual shame, and demonic oppression.

Unconfessed and unshared sin

“I’ve never told anyone this before in my life, but . . .”

In our men’s ministry, we often heard these words from committed Christians—pastors, missionaries, Christian leaders alike—struggling in some area of their lives. It always gives me hope as sharing and confession is a significant step towards healing, freedom, and change—even though the journey can be long. I believe that creating a culture where believers confess their sins to trusted brothers and sisters is an essential step in the discipleship process and should be introduced as a norm of the Christian life early in the mentoring and discipling relationship. Psalm 32 shows how unconfessed sin leads to mental anguish, “groaning all day long,” “your hand heavy upon me; my strength sapped as in the heat of summer” (v. 3–4 NIV).

It’s also helpful to differentiate between unconfessed sin (before God) and unshared sin, which hasn’t been entrusted to a brother or sister in the Lord. We are forgiven when we confess sin to God (1 John 1:9), but James 5:16 gives us a huge key when it says, “Confess your sin one to each other . . . so that you may be healed”

(NIV). Oftentimes for true freedom and healing, we need both. For some sin, we will only be fully healed when we embrace humility and fear of the Lord to share in the context of trusting, vulnerable relationships, sharing absolutely everything.

Several years ago, a Japanese pastor in his late sixties unexpectedly reached out to me, seeking someone to confide in. He revealed that he had been battling intense depression and a significant loss of energy. In our first meeting, he courageously confessed his struggle with pornography and sincerely prayed for forgiveness. That moment of confession became a pivotal breakthrough, lifting the weight of his depression and marking the start of a journey towards increasing freedom and joy.

The shame of sexual sin or sexual abuse

Sexual sin is in a category of its own, according to 1 Corinthians 6:18. Additionally, the trauma of sexual abuse can trap a person in a lifetime of shame and mental anguish. As representatives of Jesus, we truly carry the good news of forgiveness, wholeness, restoration, cleansing, reconciliation, and freedom. We must be equipped and ready to lead sexually broken people to forgiveness and wholeness through the power of the cross—whether they are victims, perpetrators, or both.

Personally walking in sexual freedom and wholeness as Christian leaders and sharing our stories openly with others in an appropriate way gives people confidence in the power of God to save and heal them. When we experience freedom in Christ, we can boldly lead others to the same freedom.

A woman my wife was praying with opened up for the first time about the trauma of sexual abuse that sent her life into a downward spiral, leading to financial hardship, prostitution,

and eventually severe emotional and mental health struggles that resulted in hospitalisation. She confessed her sins and repented, and God began healing the deep wounds from her past, lifting the heavy burdens of depression and mental anguish. Now, she lives in peace and is pursuing a career in social welfare, profoundly grateful to God for her newfound freedom.

Emotional trauma and demonic bondage from adultery, fornication, pornography, sexual abuse, abortion, etc. are rife in Japanese society, although often hidden behind polite smiles. This is not just outside the church; sadly, they often remain unaddressed within church communities. Caring for these people is a huge opportunity for ministry to pre-believers who are often aware of their guilt and shame regarding sexual sin and are looking for a way to be free. While addressing these deep issues of the heart, we may well help pre-believers (like the man born blind in John 9) meet Jesus as healer before they know him as the Saviour!

Demonic oppression

Unconfessed, unshared sin is an open door to the enemy to steal, kill, and destroy (like the thief in John 10:10).

Stasi and John Eldredge (Wild at Heart ministries) speak about the deep connection between emotional healing and the reality of spiritual warfare, particularly demonic oppression. They highlight the importance of addressing underlying spiritual issues when seeking healing, as unresolved spiritual bondage can hinder emotional and physical well-being.

While prayer and faith are crucial, it’s also essential to be aware of the demonic battle, especially when facing persistent sin or mental struggles that don’t respond to conventional

discipleship or medical therapy approaches. We must have a holistic approach to healing that includes spiritual, emotional, relational, and psychological dimensions.

Recently, some close friends involved in counselling and deliverance ministry shared an experience they had during a marriage counselling session: as they were praying about the husband's struggle with anger, he was lifted up and thrown backwards against the wall while manifesting a demon. As they approached him to pray, God revealed the source of the demonic bondage, and the man was quickly delivered. He was delighted and encouraged to know that the anger he had struggled with for so long was not just his own poor choices but was also empowered by a demonic entity.

Unforgiveness can also prevent someone from healing and experiencing peace. My wife was in a worship meeting where a woman began to manifest violently. Feeling led by the Holy Spirit, she quietly led the woman to forgive her husband for repeated infidelity. She repented, the demon was cast out, peace returned, and the woman was healed of a long-term mental struggle that had plagued her life.

Where to start

The thought of praying against demons might terrify you! When it comes to teaching on this topic, many Christians are confused by an over-emphasis on one side or denial on the other side, but neither extreme is helpful. It is important to develop an understanding of demonic oppression and how it can manifest today so that if we do encounter this kind of situation, we are prepared. What I have found helpful is resting in my identity in Christ and knowledge of his power as I step out in faith and obedience. By simply being ready and equipped and responding proactively to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can help bring freedom to the prisoners and liberty to the oppressed. **JH**

Jef Linscott (New Zealand) came to work with YWAM in 1992. He and his wife, Aya, are now independent missionaries working in discipleship, publishing, and encouragement to prepare the church in Japan for harvest.

RESOURCES:

If deliverance is new to you, the author recommends the books and resources below available in English and Japanese. The recommendations here are limited to the author's own experience. Please use godly wisdom and advice, God's Word, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern the best freedom and deliverance tools to use in your ministry.

The Bondage Breaker

Neil T. Anderson addresses the struggles that many believers face, such as feelings of guilt, depression, anxiety, and spiritual oppression. Anderson emphasises the importance of understanding one's identity in Christ and the power of biblical truths to break free from the lies and strongholds that keep people in bondage. He provides practical steps and prayers for overcoming negative thoughts, sinful habits, and demonic influences, encouraging readers to embrace the freedom and victory that Jesus offers. The book is widely used in Christian counselling and spiritual warfare ministries.

Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Harvest House Publishers: 2019). Japanese title: 鎖を解き放つ主, <https://gospel-light.info/?pid=7770579>

Soul Care

Dr. Rob Reimer's work focuses on inner healing and spiritual growth by addressing issues that hinder a believer's relationship with God and others. He outlines seven principles for renewal: identity in Christ, repentance, breaking family sin patterns, forgiveness, healing wounds, overcoming fears, and dealing with demonic influences. Through practical guidance and personal stories, Reimer helps readers achieve spiritual freedom and emotional wholeness, leading to a deeper relationship with God and a healthier life.

Rob Reimer, *Soul Care: 7 Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul* (Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2016).

Japanese title: ソウルケア, <https://gospel-light.info/?pid=176552517>

Path to Freedom

The Path to Freedom ministry (自由への道) guides individuals to spiritual and emotional freedom through biblical principles and prayer. It focuses on identity in Christ, repentance, and breaking spiritual strongholds. The ministry offers one-on-one prayer sessions, small group support, and training in both Japanese and English, empowering believers to live victoriously and help others find freedom.

自由への道: 心の癒し、解放のミニストーリー, Onfire Japan, onfire.jp/jiyu
For more information in English or Japanese: mail@onfire.jp

PureHeart Japan

PureHeart Japan offers a biblically grounded approach to nurturing spiritual and emotional freedom in sexuality. Central to this is the PureHeart Challenge, a program guiding participants through emotional, spiritual, and sexual restoration with daily reflections, prayers, and exercises. The challenge promotes healing, identity in Christ, and lasting spiritual growth through supportive relationships.

PureHeart Japan onfire.jp/purity/
For more information in English or Japanese: purity@onfire.jp

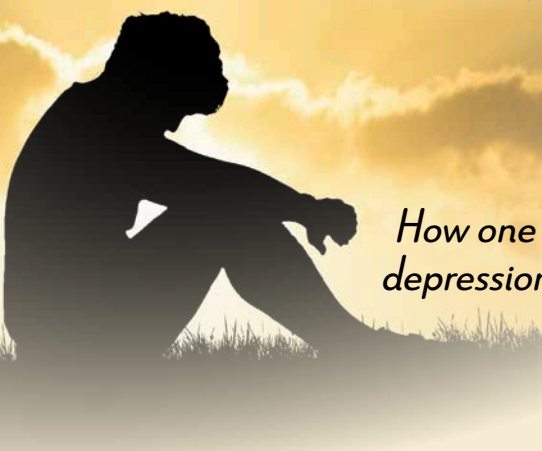
SOZO: A Journey into Freedom and Wholeness

Teresa Liebscher and Dawna DeSilva offer practical tools and spiritual insights from the SOZO ministry to help readers experience emotional and spiritual healing. Through real-life stories and practical advice, this book guides you towards deeper intimacy with God and lasting freedom.

Dawna de Silva and Teresa Liebscher, *SOZO Saved Healed Delivered: A Journey into Freedom with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (Destiny Image Incorporated, 2017). Japanese title: SOZO 救い・癒し・解放: 父、御子、聖霊と歩む自由への旅, <https://gospel-light.info/?pid=156962240>

Taking precautions and leaning on two truths

By Peter Dallman



How one missionary has coped with depression over many years of service

I have been a missionary in Japan for 25 years, and I suffer with periodic bouts of depression. I've been on medication on and off (mostly on) for about 30 years now. One time we had to cut short our term of service because I was so ill and not getting better. It took me two and a half years in the UK to sufficiently recover to return to Japan.

During the worst times, it has been bad, really bad. I remember leading a small group and putting my head on the table in front of the Japanese believers and weeping for a few minutes. There were some Sundays when I was in tears at eight thirty in the morning and had to be preaching at eleven.

Other missionaries have had a range of reactions to my admission of mental illness. At one end of the spectrum, some have said, "You must have sinned." On the other hand, others have said, "I'm so glad you shared that; it enabled me to ask for help too."

Right precautions go a long way

Now I do all the right things. I exercise—running or cycling about three times a week for 30–60 minutes. I pray and read the Bible regularly and take a Sabbath: going out to a park, seeing friends, or just taking it easy. I have a hobby, modular origami, and I don't work late into the night.

During my time in Japan, I have seen a number of doctors.¹ They have all been kind and understand-

ing. Mostly they don't spend too long talking with me, just 10 minutes or so. They ask about sleep, appetite, and emotional stability.

I have also had some counselling in Japan. This was a bit of a challenge. I used a workbook in English to examine my thoughts and feelings, but each week, I talked to the counsellor in Japanese.

Now I look out for any warning signs that I'm sliding downhill again. For me, stomach pains are a key signal; a couple of days of those and I need to examine my thinking and my doing. My wife, Janet, also knows other warning signs—me being especially quiet or withdrawn. At those times, she will ask questions like "Are you doing all right? Do you need to increase your medication? What can you stop doing?"

When I take too much on myself, I get into trouble. I can begin to think that people's salvation or growth is solely dependent on my witness or work. Or I may start to believe that God could not possibly use someone as weak and sinful as me. I might wonder if my mistakes or failures are final. It is then that dark thoughts, tears, and despair set in.

So what do I do when the warning signals flash? I remind myself of two truths.

Two important truths

I remember that I am God's beloved. The disciple whom Jesus loved, in the gospel of John, knows he is loved by Jesus. Brennan Manning reminds

us, "Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion."² Before I am a missionary, before I do or don't do anything, I am God's beloved.

The other truth that I call to mind is this: I am not the Master, I'm just a servant. Results are not the measure of who I am or what I do. I am simply called to be faithful in what the Master commands (1 Cor. 4:2). Being a servant of God tells me that I am useful to God, but it is his work and not mine.

I know a number of missionaries who have struggled and still struggle with mental health issues. Perhaps you are a missionary who struggles. Maybe there is someone in your organisation here in Japan who is on the edge.

We all know that Japan is a country where mental health issues are widespread. There may well be people in your church for whom it is a live issue.

The truths that help me may help you or others as well.

I don't want to hide my mental illness but be open and honest with people. Most missionaries are not the spiritual giants that books are written about. Admitting our weaknesses appropriately can help others reduce the fear and shame of doing the same.

Whatever you do, please don't give up helping and encouraging those who struggle with mental illness. **JH**

1. JEMA's member care resources page lists a number of places you can seek help in Japan and overseas, as well as online: <https://jema.org/resources/member-care/>
2. Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (NavPress Publishing Group, 2015), 40.

Photo: Vecteezy.com

Peter Dallman serves with OMF and is from the UK. He, with his wife, Janet, have served in church planting and welcoming new workers. He now serves in training and development.

Toolkit for mental health ministry

By Ralph Clatworthy

It's important to get equipped

I picked up the ringing phone. It was Sayuri. Again. (Name changed for privacy.)

“Can I get a Bible from you?”

Normally we would be delighted to have someone asking for a Bible. But we had already given her two Bibles; Sayuri was asking for a third time. Something didn't seem right. I hesitated. In the background, I heard Sayuri's mother yelling at her, “Leave those missionaries alone and get off the phone!” *Click!*

Sayuri was in her thirties and had come to Sunday worship a couple of times. Her appearance was unusual. She was unkempt, with a slightly wild look in her eyes. Conversation was difficult. She always left church right after the service was over.

Thankfully, in the week after this phone call, a female member of our church planting team was able to visit Sayuri at home and was invited to her room, where her condition became clearer. The room was piled high with personal belongings. Clothes, books, and everything else imaginable was stacked in disarray almost waist-high in the room. It was impossible to take a safe step forward.

I am not a mental health professional, but when I heard the report, a picture started to come into focus, Sayuri probably had a serious mental illness. We decided not to give her another Bible. But we did continue to hold her up in prayer, asking that God in his mercy would break through into her life.

Looking back at our ministry

Over a period of more than 20 years, my wife and I were in charge of three different church planting ministries: in Sendai, then Yokohama, and finally in a small city in Chiba Prefecture. It was not uncommon for mental health patients to show up at our churches. They always seemed to come with a vague



sense that they needed help and that they were going to be made well at a Christian church. We saw people with depression, schizophrenia, paranoia, and other conditions.

Probably the most difficult time for us was when a member of our church with bipolar disorder committed suicide. She had been hospitalized for several years, and we did not know her well. But we knew her faith in Jesus Christ to be strong, and I had no hesitation about conducting her funeral in the usual Christian way.

Helping those suffering from mental health problems was always a challenge for us. Looking back, we are thankful for times we were able to help but also regret when we could not help more.

A toolkit for helping

So what are missionaries to do when God sends us people with mental health problems? I like to picture a toolkit available for us. The trick is to know which tool to use for which person. I can recommend honing your skills with the following:

Prayer. We can all pray for God's healing and grace for those who suffer from mental health problems.

Spiritual warfare. This is a special kind of prayer in the name of Jesus Christ to release the person suffering mental distress from demons and their influence. Missionaries should consider basic training in this type of deliverance ministry, including discernment as to whether an individual is in need of this kind of ministry. (Please see the article on page 22 in this issue.)

Medical. Missionaries should search out psychiatrists in their area that they can work with and refer individuals to. There may even be Christian psychiatrists who are available for help. Ask pastors, doctors, and other missionaries for ideas.¹

Counseling. This will probably require some intentional training. In my experience, counseling can really stretch missionaries' ability in Japanese when counselees are speaking freely from the heart about their problems.² It's important to know local professionals you can refer people to. Even non-Christian counselors may be better than none at all.

Incorporation. People who are mentally ill can sometimes be helped by participating in groups and the everyday lives of ordinary members of society. Incorporating someone who is mentally ill into church life with its variety of young and old, men and women, can restore that person's self-confidence. But it can be a common mistake to expect too much participation too early. Missionaries need to be sensitive as to how quickly to try to incorporate someone into church life.

In conclusion, I sometimes taught those with mental health problems to write this verse on a note card to read throughout the day: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7 NKJV). **JH**

1. JEMA's member care resources page lists a number of places you can seek help in Japan and overseas, as well as online: <https://jema.org/resources/member-care/>

2. For further reading and resources on counseling: <https://japanharvest.org/biblical-counseling-and-its-powerful-impact/>

Ralph Clatworthy (US) served for 36 years with OMF International. He is now retired in Sapporo with his wife Miho and continues to serve where God provides opportunity.

In the thick of things

A missionary's struggle with her calling to Japan and her calling as a mother in the midst of her teenager's struggle with mental illness

Anonymous

I was pulling away from our local supermarket in Japan when from the back seat came the tentative confession of our teenager, "I took a bunch of pills today." The world seemed to pause to let my unbelief emerge into this unsettling reality. The pastels of dusk were peeking above the apartment buildings across the street. My hands tightened on the steering wheel. The right blinker was deafening as our car sat motionless in the middle of the parking lot.

We were die-hard church planters in Japan. A favorite line when speaking at partner churches was "We've got the greatest job in the world!" My calling from God, since the age of 13, has been to overseas missions; and since the age of 20, after spending a summer in tight quarters with a Japanese pastor's family, it has been about serving in Japan. Sure, there were challenges, but nothing got in the way of living out this calling. But this was different.

We found a Christian mental health organization based in Thailand that offered online therapy and immediately got weekly sessions for our child. An online Christian psychiatrist offered support, and we found a mental health clinic in our city that was able to dispense antidepressants. We reassessed schooling options and I began going out with our teen for weekly meetings over coffee to talk through the struggles and read through a workbook for teens on making good choices. My husband and I sought the counsel of our mission therapist in order to help cope with our own struggles.

But our teen did not get better. The medication, we later learned, was too conservative to be therapeutic. Things only got worse. One morning we found ourselves racing to the hospital after a much more serious overdose of 30 pills. The young doctor took some blood

and hooked our teen to an IV. After hours of waiting, he called us back in and pronounced to all of us, including our child, "You'd have to take five times more than this in order to die." Not the most helpful advice.

A needed home assignment

Thankfully, home assignment was coming up. Our family enjoyed a short vacation, and then we traveled to our mission headquarters for a debrief. As we shared with our member care team, we were advised to delay our return to Japan until our teen's mental health situation had stabilized. We knew this was best and were thankful, in a way, to be "given permission" to stay. But we were also really concerned for our ministry and team back in Japan, our minds reeling with all the ramifications of this change in plans.

The Lord provided. Within a couple of weeks, we found a psychiatrist and a Christian therapist near us even though we were initially told it might take months. We enrolled our kids into a private school for the semester. Due to a cancellation, we could stay in our short-term missionary housing and keep our leased van for an extended period. Meanwhile, we continued to pray for healing and breakthroughs for our child.

That fall, we made three separate visits to the hospital emergency room to deal with our teen's crises, one of which included a week-long suicide watch hospitalization. Our child was beyond miserable, and we were heartbroken.

As the weeks rolled on, there were no significant improvements, and we wondered if we might never return to Japan. We explored many options, including moving to another region in Japan where we might find better health care options. I made so many

calls to various professionals, tracking down leads in hopes of a magic formula that would enable our return.

The school of God

In late March, we knew we had to make a decision. I had cried every day for a month, pleading with God to make a way back to the place of my calling. But he did not seem too keen to answer that prayer. We began to pivot toward staying in our home country. We set up a call with godly mentors in Japan. My honest hope was that, after explaining our family's situation, they would suggest that we tell our child to buck up and allow us to get back to our real life in Japan.

But that is not what they said.

This is what has remained with me: "You are in the School of God. It is sometimes very painful. But God is so pleased with your willingness to sacrifice your own desires and calling for the sake of your children. I sense that he is so pleased with you."

I did not feel very pleasing. I felt useless. My whole calling and identity as an adult felt wiped away. And then, our friend said, "Read Romans 12:1." The next morning, I was alone at home. I opened my Bible and read the familiar words: "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice . . . which is your spiritual worship" (ESV). I got down on the floor on my knees, and I sobbed and I prayed and I held out to God my calling to Japan. Somewhere along the way, I had begun to think of this calling as mine. It had stopped being his. My life and Japan were all pressed together in my clenched fist, like clay formed into a misshapen idol. So I opened my hands and whispered prayers, giving back to God what had



never been mine, acknowledging in a new way my holy calling as mother and all that might mean.

Lessons to share

We have resettled over this past year in our country of origin. We still have much to learn, but here are a few lessons we would like to share:

Let God work through family challenges to strengthen our families

My husband and I received a new round of marriage counseling and loved it! We pray together every morning before our day gets going. We are in this together, tighter than any ministry bond we might have shared before. This summer, we have had a skilled therapist lead our family through online counseling sessions. She guided us through prompts, such as: What is it like to live inside the body and mind of one who is neurodivergent? What is it like to live in that wake? We learned the term “glass children”—when there is a child with special needs in a family, sometimes the others can feel invisible. We are trying to process all these things.

Surround yourself with strong support

Zoom now opens up a world of options. During our first year back, a long-distance friend set up a support team. Every month, three dear friends

(from three of my different worlds) set aside two hours for a Zoom call. I share; they give insights and pray. In addition, I have had support from two mom friends who have been missionaries in Japan and have children with mental illness. *They get me.* I talk regularly with friends with whom I served in Japan. *They know me.* Several friends and my sisters are on speed dial for when things are hard. There are local Japanese friends who have cared for us in very specific and amazing ways. These friendships have been vital pillars to my survival!

Be open to God's shaping activity

These past four years have been a season of pain but also tremendous growth and inner change. I have a spiritual director who helps me reflect on what God is doing in my life.

Serving from scarcity

Just as Elijah asked the widow for the last of her flour and oil, so, too, it can be our privilege to serve from our scarcity. We are on the prayer team at our church, and we have so much more empathy for the hurting!

God is the blessed controller of all things

My mom had this verse (from 1 Timothy 6:15, Phillips) on her kitchen

windowsill, and I have followed suit. I have struggled with truly believing this at times, but ultimately I trust in a sovereign God. This means that if moving across the world is best for one of our children, he will make it best for the rest of us. We can already see his amazing wisdom, even while we grieve what we have left. He has provided all that we need, including meaningful ministry for both my husband and me.

I would love to tell you we have come through the battle of mental illness on the other side. But we are still in the thick of things. Our teen has recently switched schools while continuing with ongoing care from mental professionals. Our beloved has received some very hard diagnoses with long-term implications. Suicidal episodes and my own propensity to catastrophize have led my mind to wander too far, too many times. We continue to pray for healing every single day. But in the midst of huge uncertainties, struggles, and fear, God has been very near. He has ministered to my heart in specific and beautiful ways, reminding me of his everlasting arms. And at those times when there is nothing left to hold on to, we are caught by him. **JH**



By Hoi-Yan Shea

The embrace of God's people helped me to come through burnout

You are a treasure

erally and spiritually) and provided far beyond what I could imagine or ask.

As I meditated on his Word, taking long walks, reading, and journaling, God began to restore my soul. As I was sitting by a lake watching the sunset one evening, the beauty of the scenery filled me with pleasure. “The Lord your God . . . will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (ESV). These words from Zephaniah 3:17 came to mind, and it struck me that God delighted in me even more than I delighted in his creation.

I experienced God’s love through his people. Friends I hardly knew poured into me. A family hosted me in their home in beautiful surroundings next to a lake. Others invited me to their homes, treated me to meals, and drove me around. They listened to me, cried with me, and prayed for me. Up to now, I knew God loved me, but I had lived as though his love depended on my godliness and service. It was when I could not perform that I experienced his unconditional love.

Friends spoke God’s truth into my life, saying, “You are a treasure” and “We have enjoyed you.” A couple I stayed with regularly expressed their love for me. They noticed and acknowledged my strengths and gifts and communicated their appreciation

Recently, for the first time since committing to missionary work in 2012, I found myself wondering, “What will I do if I quit being a missionary?” It had been a difficult couple of years, and I had been feeling drained, unmotivated, and tearful for some time. I always thought I was resilient, but this time I could not bounce back. Thoughts about the future filled me with dread and despair, and I could not see myself thriving, let alone surviving as a missionary in the long-term.

A friend first noticed something was amiss when we chatted over the phone. “It sounds like burnout and situational

depression,” the medical advisor said to me. After consulting my team, the OMF leadership, and a medical advisor, I was counselled to take leave for recovery from burnout. Friends from Kansas (US) generously offered to host me for three months. I arrived in Kansas feeling like I was walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but God met me in the shadows.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want

I did not know what I needed, but God knew. The Good Shepherd led me to green pastures and quiet waters (lit-

for my input and help, however small and insignificant. Over time, the love and truth of these words began to seep through the cynicism and defensive walls of my heart.

Our words have immense power, both to destroy and to restore. As we speak God's words of truth and love to people, we, too, can be part of his work in healing and building up the broken, the hopeless, and the downcast.

Perfect love casts out fear

"I constantly feel that I should be doing more and guilty if I am not being productive. I don't want to be motivated by fear and guilt anymore. I want to serve freely knowing I am loved," I shared with my counsellor.

I realized how much of my service was compelled by the need for approval and love. My ceaseless striving

for godliness and selflessness was a vain attempt to suppress a deep sense of unworthiness and the fear of rejection.

"Perhaps your new ministry is to live out this newfound freedom," my counsellor affirmed.

Many of my Japanese friends are weary and weighed down by the expectations and obligations of their family and society. Although it looks different, they similarly live in bondage. Initially, I was reluctant to tell my Japanese friends about my burnout because I feared being judged. Contrary to my expectation, I was met with compassion and vulnerability when I told them about my medical leave, and it gave me a glimpse into their honest thoughts (本音 *honne*). "I see love in the way your organization responded to your burnout," my gym instructor said to me. While Japanese people appear

resilient and bear with the rigidity of Japanese society, they desire something better. Their hearts desire love and compassion.

Several weeks after returning to Japan, I met a friend who was on the verge of burnout. As I shared about my burnout and restoration, she opened up about her struggles, and my story ministered to her. God uses us unexpectedly when we don't have it all together. He speaks most powerfully through our brokenness and weakness if we are willing to be vulnerable.

My prayer and vision are that my life would point others to a different way, one of freedom and love in Christ. **JH**

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

Rolling stress away

By Susan Driscoll

An easy-to-read book of life-giving principles to find more peace in your missionary life

"Roll it over to God." With a heavy sigh and a deep breath, I said it again, this time out loud, "Roll it over to God." I was reminding myself of one aspect of the Stress Cycle in Lee Hotchkiss's book *Stress and Relational Peace: Marking the Trail for Walking in Peace*. As I had so many times before in the midst of stressful situations, difficult people, and unmet expectations, I was

putting into practice the biblical command of Psalm 55:22 "Cast your cares on the Lord" (NIV). Reminding myself of the truth that God is in control and then giving him control is a life-giving step in the midst of stressful situations that I have no control over.

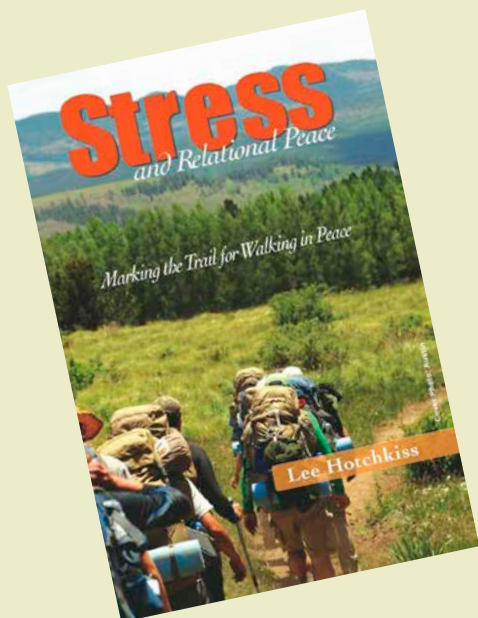
From my teenage years, I have been exposed to these principles as my dad (Lee Hotchkiss) taught them to countless missionaries all over the world, including those in Japan many times. They have helped us tackle missionary life in Japan for almost 30 years. My husband and I taught these tools to our kids, complete with silly hand motions of throwing a bowling ball, as we reminded ourselves to roll the difficult, stressful situation over to God.

Granted I am a little biased, but these useful principles have impacted my life so much that I can't help but recommend this book (as well as his first book, *Handling Stress Effectively* which is more in-depth on the topic).

Other aspects covered in this book include pinpointing whether the other person is speaking on the feeling or fact level, guarding ourselves from trying to climb the success "ladder" (even in our ministries), and seeking to understand how our emotions (and lack of handling them well) can affect our family and close relationships.

This newly published book is written with the international ministry worker in mind. With just 100 pages, it is a quick read but also helpful to refer back to. It is available on Amazon Japan (Kindle and paperback). I encourage you to pick up a copy and join me in rolling the stressful "bowling-ball" situations of missionary life over to God and rest peacefully in his sovereign care. **JH**

Susan Driscoll serves in OMF with her husband, Tim (US). They have three sons who live all over the world with their families. They've worked in church planting and now help lead missionaries. Susan's blog: <http://memoirsfamissionarymom.blogspot.com>



Working with children who will create the future

The 30th anniversary of Wai Wai Children's Club, Ibaraki YMCA

Christian Shimbun, September 11, 2024 Translated by David McIntyre with DeepL

“*Hibi no kate o...* (Give us our daily bread...)” The children’s energetic praise and prayers can be heard. This is the “Waiwai Children’s Club” at the Ibaraki YMCA Higashi Arai Center in Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture. Right now, the children gathered at the afterschool care center are having afternoon snacks. This year marks the 30th anniversary of this work by the YMCA.

Responding to the needs of families with Biblical values

The Ibaraki YMCA currently runs four centers in Tsukuba City and Ushiku City. Its work is with early childhood education, including kindergarten and nursery schools, the “Wai Wai Children’s Club” afterschool care center, an afterschool day service for children with disabilities, summer and winter camps, and sports classes. All of these opportunities work with children who will create the future. We interviewed Yasuo Miyata, general manager, and Nobuhiko Itō, deputy general manager.

How many children are there?

Itō: The number of children enrolled in the children’s clubs is 150 here in Higashi Arai, 40 in Ushiku, 100 in Midori, and about 120 in Ōsone. The fact that we can take care of children until 9:00 pm seems to be attractive, since many parents are essential workers or single parents.

Miyata: When we started in 2004, there were not that many kids and activities were held only three days a week. But many people thought it would be good if they could leave their children with us until the evening. The following year, we expanded to five days a week. When we went to

talk to the Tsukuba City Board of Education, at first they said, “Just do what you want.” But as the number of children increased, they began to notice us more, and in 2010 we were certified as the “Wai Wai Children’s Club.” We started taking business fees and became financially stable.

I heard a prayer of thanksgiving before the meal earlier.

Itō: We do it not only at children’s clubs but also at nursery schools. This isn’t just about whether we pray or not. It is important for the YMCA to stand on biblical values and pass them on, no matter what program we do. If all you want to do is let them play without injuring themselves until their parents come to pick them up, there is no need for the YMCA to do it.

Not “teachers” but other human beings?

Miyata: At the YMCA, children call all staff members by their nicknames. I want the children to see me not as a teacher, but as an adult who is a good example.

What is your nickname?

Miyata: It’s “Sōri.” Not “Prime Minister,” but from “I’m sorry.” The kids say that I say “I’m sorry” a lot. A boy named Satō-kun gave me that

name about 20 years ago, shortly after I arrived here. They watch us very closely.

It must be difficult to have everyone share the same philosophy.

Itō: We have 50 full-time staff and 100 part-time staff. In total, 40% are Christians, which is the highest



Top: Summer school Center: Ski camp Bottom: “Pink Shirt Day” to think about discrimination

uest 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!"

Practical and legal affairs that bring the church to life

Growing interest in charitable bequests for the benefit of churches and mission in Japan

Christian Shimbun, August 21, 2024 Translated by David McIntyre using DeepL

Charitable bequests to churches, charities, and other public organizations are becoming more common. However, the complicated process of making a will can sometimes cause problems. We asked Nobuyoshi Sai, a lawyer at a Christian NGO who works on charitable bequests, about the issue.

I want to donate part of my estate

Mr. Sai graduated from Tohoku University with a doctorate in law. His areas of practice include general civil law (inheritance, wills, corporate law, and Christian NGO law), with a particular focus on the legal relationship between radiation exposure and cancer in the atomic bomb litigation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He is currently based in Tokyo.

Sai has had a series of people from churches asking him for help with donating a portion of their estate to the church. "Often the person lives

alone and is estranged from relatives. In some cases, relatives also decline to receive the inheritance because they don't want the hassle. On the other hand, the person feels they have been blessed by the church and they are helped by people giving them rides to church and to the hospital."

In 2022, the amount of unclaimed property without heirs reached a record 76.8 billion yen nationwide. The number has doubled in the past nine years. Property without an heir is transferred to the national treasury. The increases in the number of people who are unmarried, childless, and living alone are cited as reasons for this trend. Against this backdrop, interest in charitable bequests has increased due to heightened awareness of end-of-life planning.

But charitable bequests have not spread among Christian organizations.



Sai

Sai has discussed this with the staff of Hunger Zero, a Christian NGO he supports as a board member. As a result, the organization began publicizing their support for charitable bequests. Now, he is being consulted by a wide variety of organizations.

It is important to follow the person's wishes

A will is required for any charitable bequests. There are different types of wills including those written by the person themselves and those drawn up by a notary public. "We recommend a notarized will," Sai said.

"Above all, it is important to follow the wishes of the donor," Sai emphasizes. "It is difficult for pastors to talk to church members about inheritance issues, so it might help if churches could invite lecturers to hold seminars on the subject," he said. ■

percentage among the 34 YMCAs in Japan.

It is certainly difficult to share our philosophy. The professional staff in particular have formed much of their views from experience. That is not enough. But the volunteer leaders, many of whom are university students, are passing on the YMCA's unique characteristics, as the senior staff mentor the younger ones.

Miyata: I would like to see more Christian staff members. That is why we signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement with Tokyo Christian University (TCU) in 2021. So far, two graduates have come to work for us as staff members.

Has there been any cooperation with churches in the past?

Miyata: The history of the Ibaraki YMCA goes back to 1975, when the Tsukuba Christian Activities Committee (TCAC) of the United Church of Christ in Japan was established. The Ibaraki YMCA was established in 1994, and 101 churchgoers registered as members, whose help continues to support our work today.

I guess you need the cooperation of the church even more.

Miyata: There are still people we don't reach, and there are probably many people in need whom we don't know about. Two years ago, we started

a Mongolian language supplementary school on Saturdays. The impetus for this came from a Mongolian woman who came to our Japanese language class and told us that there were many Mongolians in Tsukuba. I had probably seen Mongolian children before, but I wasn't aware of the need.

We must be more attentive. Then our work will expand. We also need more cooperation from the church. Most of our ministry is to people who do not know God. I think the church can also have more contact with society through the YMCA. ■

How does JEMA encourage prayer?

The fellowship of prayer brings us from our many ministries to be one family growing together

What is the fellowship of prayer? It is living in Jesus and his words living in us. JEMA members come from many different denominations and backgrounds, but as we pray together in fellowship with Jesus our head, we find the oneness in him and each other. For he is the head of the church and only in him are we one body. Jesus expresses the oneness we can have in him: “But if you live in life-union with me and if my words live powerfully within you—then you can ask whatever you desire and it will be done” (John 15:7 TPT).

The JEMA Prayer Commission has two main types of gathering: nationwide Zoom prayer meetings, which take place regularly every other month, and four-day prayer summits. Both types of gathering have one agenda—to meet with God to get his heart for reaching Japan. Both types of prayer gatherings are seeking to be places where believers gather, united under one head, Jesus Christ, and are connected with God. And in this way we are encouraging unity in the body of Christ and opening doors for reaching Japan for Christ.

Another way that we encourage ministry through prayer is by prayer walking. In the last few years, we have taught several groups about this in Tokyo. We have used a prayer guide of needs for each prefecture and led small groups on the path around the Imperial Palace grounds. On the

sidewalk every few meters are the name and flower of one of the prefectures. Using these plaques and the prayer need guide, we can pray for all of Japan at the “center” of the country during a one-hour walk.

Prayer walks are also effective in smaller areas with more specific needs. It is easy to do, promotes unity, and discreetly adds a visible presence to the area of concern.

Prayer was the basis for Jesus’ ministry and needs to be for us, too, for we are one with him. Jesus must be our living Word every day; this is how our faith is built for an effective prayer life. “When your lives bear abundant fruit, you demonstrate that you are my mature disciples who glorify my Father!” (John 15:8). This is why it is important for JEMA to facilitate prayer, to encourage all of us to be strengthened in our prayer life to have an effective impact on reaching Japan for Christ. **JH**

Next Prayer Summit: Okutama, May 13–16, 2025

JEMA Prayer Commission: Bill Paris, Akira Mori, Sarah Chang, Carlton Walker

Photo submitted by author

Bill Paris has been serving in Japan since 1987 in Hokkaido, Tokyo, and presently in Iwakuni. His mission group is Assemblies of God in the US.

A recent Okutama Prayer Summit



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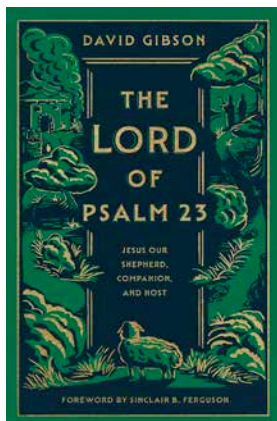
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The Lord of Psalm 23: Jesus Our Shepherd, Companion, and Host

David Gibson (Crossway, 2023)
Kindle version 184 pp.

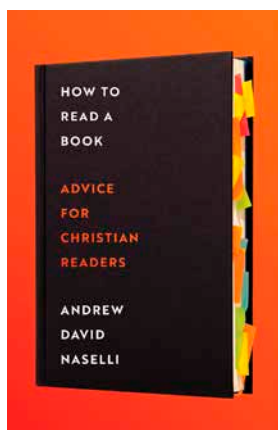
Gibson, minister of Trinity Church in Aberdeen, Scotland, shows us “in the images, poetic beauty, and themes of Psalm 23 just how the Lord Jesus takes complete and absolute responsibility for those who are in his care” (p. 5). The book is the fruit of Gibson’s preaching and is a rich feast. He reminds us “*who* is doing the shepherding” (p. 11) and shows how Jesus leads and where he invites. Because of who Jesus is, we have everything we need. “The greatest of hosts himself prepares the most lavish of feasts” for us! (p. 111). “Jesus welcomes us, cares for us, protects us, and feeds us” (p. 115). “In all his ways with all his people he only ever sends goodness and mercy” (p. 134). This book will help you love and praise Jesus more. I will be reading it again and giving it to others.



How to Read a Book: Advice for Christian Readers

Andrew David Naselli (Canon Press, 2024) 206 pp.

Naselli, professor of systematic theology and New Testament at Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis, US, explores how to read a book by answering four questions that serve as the chapter titles. The titles are: Why should you read? How should you read? What should you read? When should you read? He unpacks seven guidelines on how to read skillfully. One of the guidelines is learning to read at different levels: survey, macro-read, and micro-read. He has seven recommendations on what to read and begins with reading “the Book by the Author of Life” (p. 89). We should read what helps us be vigilant about our character and doctrine, what helps us better understand reality, and what helps us excel at what God has called us to do. He looks at two common excuses for not reading and gives



eight tips to make reading part of our routine. He has helpful appendices: his favorite books, tips for cultivating a culture of reading for children, and how to use social media. Every reader will benefit from reading this book!

Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing

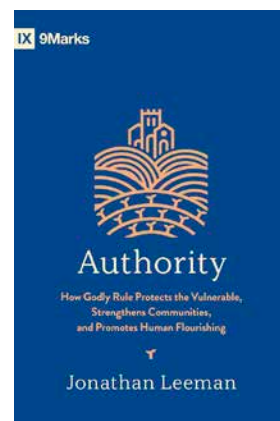
Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing

Jonathan Leeman (Crossway, 2023) 304 pp.

Leeman, editorial director for 9Marks and elder at Cheverly Baptist near Washington, DC, begins his book with a prayer of confession. All of us have misused our authority, and we must begin by confessing so we can learn to use the authority God has given us for the good of others.

In Part 1 “What is Authority?” Leeman shows that authority is God’s good creation gift for sharing his rule and glory. God defines authority as a moral right to make decisions or give commands (see pp. 24–25). Authority after the fall is Satan’s sinister scheme for supplanting God. Authority has been restored by Christ through his sacrifice.

Christ provides the perfect example of authority as he sacrifices and bears the cost of our sin. In Part 2 “What is Submission?” Leeman demonstrates how submission is the path to growth and is never absolute and always has limits. In Part 3, Leeman gives five principles to show how good authority works. Good authority submits to a higher authority. “If you cannot listen and follow, you should not lead” (p. 95). Good authority is not self-protective but bears the cost. In the final part, Leeman looks at what good authority looks like in action. He distinguishes between the authority of command and of counsel and shows how they are different. Parents, the state, and the church have the authority of command, but husbands and elders have the authority of counsel. Leeman knows that some readers will disagree with him on some theological matters, but everyone can learn from his clear, biblical approach. The book will help those in leadership to learn what it means to use authority in a way that does good to others. **JH**



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.

Feeling secure?

Finding personal security in our identity as a child of God, rather than in our role or other relationships

“I don’t think I’m completely OK at the moment.”

That is what I wrote to a friend recently. Our family is facing some difficult things that have affected my mental state.

As I spoke more with my friend and a pastoral support worker from our mission, it became clear that one of the key reasons I was finding things difficult was my work situation. We had changed churches two years ago and there were various things that changed in how I worked. I realised that much of the security I felt, or didn’t feel, in my work as a missionary was closely tied to the amount of interaction I had with people I viewed as work colleagues. In a church context, that includes my pastor and also other people from the congregation that I interact with regularly.

Who or what do I rely on for security?

This has made me ask the question, how much do I actually rely on the Lord Jesus for my security rather than on the people he provided for me? Perhaps to be more precise, did I say that I relied on Jesus without thinking it through and applying that reliance to my work life as a missionary?

This *Japan Harvest* issue is looking at mental health, and it seems appropriate that I’m looking at our security as disciples of Christ, something that has a profound influence on our mental health for ill or for good.

When we come to Japan as missionaries, we set aside various things that helped us feel secure. In day-to-day life, there was family, employment, government supports and other services. Supporting our work as Christians, whether paid or voluntary, were churches and denominational structures, perhaps employment and vision statements we could understand, and the interactions with co-workers on a regular basis. Sometimes we don’t even know we needed or liked having those structures until we arrive in Japan. Some are replaced by new structures, but it can take a while to get used to them and we often understand them much less.

So it has been a little surprising that only in my ninth year as a missionary here, I’m realising how much regular people-contact in a workplace, or at Bible college, or church was an important support structure for me. In my case, this realisation was delayed because I could speak Japanese from the start, having grown up as a missionary kid here.

One big difference between Australia and Japan is how much people are available during the week to meet. Mid-week small groups and meetings in Australia are normal because usually people can finish work by early evening. In Japan, I am involved in church ministry, and many of the people I might minister to work long hours during the week. The pastor we work under is also busy and I don’t

share a workspace with him. I’m also not an official staff member at church, so it can be hard to meet people from church incidentally.

Ways God cares for us

It is important to point out here that our brothers and sisters are an important way that God cares for us. In my case, I need to keep meeting up with people, in small groups and one-on-one, because it is one way God cares for me. Others in this issue have written about various aspects of self-care that we should put in place. It’s also important for me to acknowledge the need to keep deepening my dependence on the Lord Jesus, separate to my relationships with other people—to live as one whose security is in the Lord.

The first thing that helped me when I grappled with this issue of security was the reminder that we are first a beloved child of God. Jesus has died for us so that God can lovingly embrace us as his son or daughter. It has helped me better understand that God loves me and wants to care for me in a specific way. Building on that was seeking to apply what it means to abide in Christ. John 15 speaks of the Lord Jesus as the vine and us as the branches in a vivid metaphor for our relationship.

In my case, re-examining my habits of spending time with the Lord Jesus, daily, weekly, and monthly, has been valuable. My pastor recommended Peter Scazzero’s *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, and that has challenged me to be more deliberate about how I structure my life around the Lord Jesus so that I am abiding in him.

It is still very much a work in progress, and it has been painful. But it has been good to realise how the Lord is using a specific episode in my life to teach me to abide in him more deeply, confirming that my security indeed comes from him. **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.



Language learning in an era of abundance

With so many resources out there, it's vital to develop a regime that works for you

I recall as a high school student watching the news in French on television despite understanding very little of it. Back then (when dinosaurs were still roaming the earth!), there were precious few resources available for language learners beyond the textbooks we used at school, so I would watch the news despite it being well above my comprehension level.

The situation has changed radically since then. There is now an amazing abundance of resources for learning languages, including Japanese. In my previous article, I considered the incredible treasure trove called YouTube. But in addition to YouTube, there are countless podcasts, apps, audio books, websites, online tutors, online courses, and books. And a lot of them are free or inexpensive.

A new learning strategy

This wealth of resources is a huge boon for language learners. But it does require adopting a different learning strategy from when there were few resources. In those days, learning tended to be teacher directed and textbook based. Now, learning is student driven and is based on their needs, learning style, and goals.

The great benefit of having so many resources means that language learning can be much more personalized than previously. By finding something that works for you and matches your learning style and aims, you can tailor a personal language-learning plan. No more ploughing through uninspiring textbooks!

It requires a level of self-awareness about how you learn the best. It also involves a considerable amount of trial and error as you try different things and find out what works for you.

The plan will be personal for you and will look different from those of other learners. I'm hesitant to name specific language-learning tools in this column because there are so many good ones out there and also because what I find helpful might not be helpful for you.

Having said that, my personal language-learning regime involves the following four main elements:

- **The Duolingo app:** A great, free AI-powered app that adopts a gamified approach to learning languages. I find it quite addictive and effective.
- **Cafetalk (cafetalk.com):** An online platform for taking language lessons with tutors via Skype or Zoom. I always take free-conversation lessons. It's a great way to practice conversation while learning about the culture as well.
- **Tadoku reading method:** A reading method that emphasizes reading a lot at a level that doesn't stretch you too much. It eschews looking up words in a dictionary; instead, you try to surmise the meaning of unknown words from their contexts (see my article in Winter 2023 issue of *Japan Harvest*¹).
- **Podcasts and videos:** These really help to improve comprehension and it's possible to listen while doing other tasks such as working out or walking.

I repeat: this is just an example—what you do will probably look very different from what I do.

Make sure that you cover the four bases of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (although the balance will vary depending on your language-learning priorities). Also, as much as possible, try to find activities that you enjoy. That will take the drudgery out of language learning and could even make it something you look forward to doing.

Achieving a balance

One downside to having so many resources is that you can sometimes feel overwhelmed and feel like you're drowning in options. There are always new language-learning tools waiting for you to try, and you could end up spending all your time checking out new ones.

My advice would be to invest a fair amount of time initially in discovering resources that are effective for you. Once you've got a strategy in place that works for you, you can periodically review it and, every once in a while, try a new tool to see if it could be incorporated.

The key thing is to take responsibility for your own learning and intrepidly dip your toe into the vast ocean of resources out there. **JH**

1. <https://japanharvest.org/tadoku-six-years-on/>

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.



Purposeful praying

“The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something and enter God’s realm where everything is possible. He specializes in the impossible. Nothing is too great for His almighty power. Nothing is too small for His love.” ~ Corrie ten Boom¹

The practice of prayer

There are many things in Jesus’s life that impressed His disciples. One of them was prayer. Jesus, God’s Son, prayed. He prayed in many places and at many different times. His example caused them to ask Jesus, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1 NASB). Not how to pray but the practice of actually doing it.

Why is prayer so essential? Because if we don’t pray, we’ll lose heart and become discouraged, and anxiety will fill our heart and we won’t feel God’s peace. Here are some aspects of the practice of praying.

Be devote: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). The Greek word for “devoted” means to be strong toward, to endure in, to persevere in, to be continually steadfast with. It’s a commitment. I must, by an act of my will, choose to pray fervently and continuously. I must make a conscious effort to relate all that happens to God. It must become my lifestyle.

Stay alert: This is the hard part of prayer. We should try not to go off on tangents or fall asleep while praying. Prayer is like talking to a good friend. Would you fall asleep when talking with your best friend? Of course not!

Satan will try to distract us from praying. That’s why we must be committed to praying intently. Here are some suggestions to help us focus:

- When distracted, write it down so you can deal with it later.
- If you get sleepy, walk around as you pray.
- If you don’t mean it, don’t say it. Saying copy prayers is a trap. Be real in your prayer life.

Thankfulness: Though it might sound strange, we also keep alert in our prayers by thanking God. Thankfulness must permeate our prayer life. It’s the underlying attitude of prayer. We have so much to be thankful for: I can come boldly before His throne, I don’t have to carry my burdens and anxieties, God has promised to hear and answer my prayers (though it might be yes, no, or wait), He cares for me and will work in my life.

The content of prayer

“Praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way that I ought to proclaim it” (Col. 4:3–4 NASB).

Once we are committed to praying, how do we do so purposefully? Paul gives many examples of specific intercessory prayers we can offer for Christians and those who hear their message.

Open doors: We need to pray that God will open doors for others to share Jesus Christ. At times, a silent witness is fine, for example, with those we know well (1 Peter 3:1).

But we need to pray for openings for all Christians to truly share the gospel.

Focus: Once an opportunity comes, we should pray that the focus will be on Jesus, the mystery of God, and how to have a relationship with Him. It’s not a complicated message—it’s simply that Jesus can come and fill us and empower us (Colossians 1:25–29).

Clarity: Pray that the message will not only be simple but clear—with no religious or cultural restraints.

Boldness: We should pray that Christians will not be afraid but boldly preach Jesus Christ.

Paul’s boldness landed him in prison, but even then he prayed that he would continue to be bold.

Conviction: We also pray for non-Christians (who hear the gospel from Christians). We should pray that the Holy Spirit will clearly illuminate the truth of their sin and of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross. We pray that they will accept Jesus as Savior and be truly free and that they will understand the message—conviction of sin, accepting the cross as God’s answer to sin, and believing in Jesus as Savior.

In conclusion, real prayer is hard work (Colossians 2:1, 4:12). It’s a spiritual battle. Are you committed to prayer? How much time did you spend in prayer last week? May God teach us to pray. Let’s be specific about what we want God to do in our lives and the lives of others. We need God to do great things in our lives, in our churches, and in our communities. He will do it in answer to our prayers (Jeremiah 33:3). **JH**

1. Corrie ten Boom, “30 Faith-Inspired Corrie Ten Boom Quotes,” *Think About Such Things*, <https://thinkaboutsuchthings.com/corrie-ten-boom-quotes/> (accessed October 17, 2024).

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.

Writing is good for your mental health

Studies show that writing can help you deal with hard things

My friend Roger struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after serving as a military chaplain. He has turned to writing to help process his experiences and emotions and has found it to be very helpful. Roger said, “Writing [my novel] felt like I was undergoing the most massive mental detox imaginable,” (author’s Facebook page in February 2023).

You don’t have to write a novel to benefit from writing. You can write a private journal, letters, texts, or emails to friends, or something more public like a blog or articles for a magazine like *Japan Harvest*.

My first article for *Japan Harvest*, “Crying in the Snow,”¹ started life as an email in my early language school days, a heart cry to close friends about something that had driven me to tears. I’m not good at journaling. Instead, I have spent many hours over the years processing my thoughts via texting to close friends and writing on my personal blog.

But perhaps you don’t know where to start when you face a white page? You can use a tool called a writing prompt. This can be anything that helps to inspire and

guide your writing content: a question, a statement, or even a picture or song. A good writing prompt can draw out things that you never imagined were in your mind. One helpful way to approach a task like this is to set a timer for five minutes and write (or draw) as continuously as you can during that time, not stopping to make any corrections. Remember, it’s private. There is no obligation to show this very rough piece of writing to anyone.

Try one of these topics:

- Write about an item you have that isn’t expensive but means a lot to you.
- Write about something nice a stranger did for you.
- Think of a song, a movie, or an event that has encouraged you recently. Why do you think it spoke to you? What do you think God is trying to tell you with that encouragement?
- Write about something funny you saw or experienced recently. Why did it make you laugh? Describe the colours you saw and sounds you heard at the time. Describe your reaction and thoughts.
- Think about your favourite vacation place or somewhere you’d love to go for a holiday, or look at a photo of that place. What would you do there? If it’s a memory, tell some stories of good times that you had there and the people you shared those memories with.

If this is hard, try practising. Do it for five minutes once a day for a week. Or try for 10 minutes each Friday. Find an accountability partner who wants to try it too. If writing or typing is hard, try speech to text so you can speak your thoughts. Remember, this isn’t polished writing. This is for your own self-care—it’s totally up to you who sees what you’ve written.

After you have done this, you might find a gem there that you want to explore further, to write more about, or perhaps to develop into a bigger piece of writing that could be published in one form or another.

Above all, if you are struggling with your health, remember that studies have shown that writing can improve both our mental and physical health and help us work through challenges in our lives. So try writing about your life and see how it helps you. **JH**

1. Wendy Marshall, *Japan Harvest* <https://japanharvest.org/backissue/60-3-winter-2009/>, (Winter 2009, 22).

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 Japan using social media.



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Mary Schaeffer and her husband Jonathan reside near Cleveland, Ohio. They started their ministry at Grace Church in 1998 and have watched it grow to almost 4,000. They feel so privileged to minister there, and love seeing Jesus transform lives. He is making His church more reflective of His love for diversity; currently there are services in six different languages every Sunday at Grace! Mary's goal is simply this: "Growing in love for the Lord Jesus and for people who matter so much to Him...here and around the world." She and Jonathan enjoy being active outdoors and also traveling to see their five children, who live scattered across the US from the east coast to the west coast. Their two grandchildren bring them lots of joy, mostly via FaceTime, but in person whenever possible.

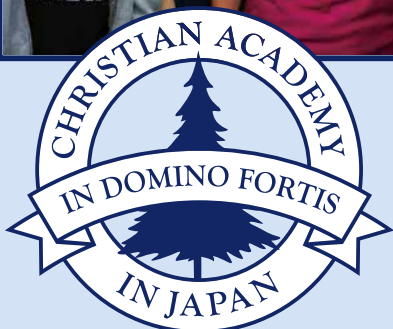


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