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

Every other month



JEMA Online Prayer Gathering

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April

JEMA Still Waters Spiritual Retreat

(full)

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



June

WIM Kansai Summer Day of Prayer

June 2, 2025; Location TBD

August

Karuizawa Refresh Conference

August 3–10, 2025
Karuizawa Union Church



September

WIM Kansai Autumn Day of Prayer

September 29, 2025; Location TBD



October

WIM Kanto Fall Day of Prayer PLUS

October 8, 2025; Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo

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

jema.org

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



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Stages of the missionary life

Looking back at our missionary careers

I look back at my 24 years in Japan and can see how I've changed. In 2018, I attended a workshop with our mission that is designed to help us learn and grow in ourselves and in our ministry. It was about gifting and looking at how God has worked in and through our past to bring us to where we are now. We did a project that entailed looking back at our lives. I realised that my first 10 years in Japan were an especially challenging time during which I questioned my call, tried different things, and learned new skills. After that, I settled into a clear ministry (working with this magazine). I became more specialised and skilled in what I did, as well as more settled.

Last year, I listened to a podcast where Jonathan and Elizabeth Trotter were interviewed about the missionary life cycle. I've written a summary of their very helpful thoughts on this topic on page 23. Jonathan has come up with five stages of the missionary life—take a look and see if you recognise your present or past self in the stages.

Can you look back and see how God has grown you? Have you gone through periods of just surviving? Or being pessimistic? Are you tempted now to be a know-it-all? Can you see how God is bringing other missionaries through different life stages in their service for him? How could you best help or encourage them?

Remembering COVID

Where were you when COVID-19 began? I'm sure you have a story. It's been five years this spring since that history-altering event began to make an impact worldwide. It's worth taking time to reflect on what's changed in your life, in your ministry, and in Japan as a result of COVID-19. One of our articles is an author's personal story from 2021, but you will have your own stories and thoughts. Grab an opportunity when you're in conversation with a friend or colleague to reflect on the changes you've seen.

Change in content and team

If you look closely, you'll see we have a change in the content in this issue. Our acquisitions editor has found people to write on various topics that are relevant to JEMA members but not necessarily on the theme of that magazine issue. So this time we have articles on missiology, coaching, and discipleship. We've also started regular columns, written by different people, that will include short biographical articles about Japanese leaders and past missionaries.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Summer 2025: The How and Why of Mission

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

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

Spring 2026: Using stories to communicate (proposals due by October 31)

Growing through my ministry journey

My wife and I have lived in six prefectures and been involved in five different sorts of ministry. God has used each stage to help me grow in how I see my ministry in Japan.

On May 21, 1993, my wife, Susan, and I landed at Narita Airport with our two very young sons. We were in our late twenties. I was confident that we would be great missionaries in Japan. However, my mindset is now significantly different than it was thirty years ago. With each shift in mindset, I have searched for different ministries to match. Each ministry experience then led to new thinking. Looking back, I don't think I was ever wrong; I was just incomplete and growing. During our first term, I could not have done what we do now. Nor could I return to what I was doing during our first term, but I needed that experience to grow.

Idealistic beginnings

Before we arrived in Japan, I had spent over three years working with a youth ministry in New Jersey to prepare for work in Japan. We spent several years raising financial support. I had a Bible degree and a minor in writing. All I had to do was learn Japanese and adapt to the customs of Japan. I would then be able to write curriculum, teach the Bible, lead students to Christ, and enjoy great success as a missionary. This idealism lasted less than a year. My wife and I struggled to take care of the daily needs of our family, study the language, connect with Japanese, and thrive. Isolation (even with other missionaries nearby), homesickness, struggles in our marriage, and miscommunication in Japanese were just some of the realities we faced.



By John Edwards

After two years of language school, we moved to Yokohama to begin ministry with high school students. I quickly realized I would never become Japanese. My English writing abilities were not useful in the Japanese ministry we were part of. There were plenty of good writers among the Japanese staff. I wasn't even sure we were needed at all. After our first four-year term ended, I wondered if we would be able to return. I felt useless in Kanto with so many others far better equipped to do the work.

Parachurch is the only way

During our home service, I communicated with my coworkers about moving out of Kanto. They had plenty of workers, so perhaps I could work with high school students somewhere else. I proposed Kochi, where I had first come to Japan as an exchange student. The mission counter-proposed Kansai as they were working on reopening

a ministry in that area but had no missionaries and just two part-time Japanese workers. We moved to Nara for our second and third terms.

How exciting it was to watch the ministry grow! In eight years, we expanded from two weekly Bible studies for students to eight. My assistance was valuable. We saw students come to faith and Christian kids grow in the Lord. Some even gained courage to be active witnesses for Christ at their schools and in their communities. At the same time, many came from churches with no other young people except their siblings. I visited one church that did have several students, and I sat in on their Sunday school class. They were bored.

I thought, "The church is not reaching the youth (at least not the high school students). This is the way to reach Japan. We cannot rely on the church." Even though I was active in a church on Sundays, my mindset



was one of judgment *against* the church.

Over time, however, I began to see that my beloved parachurch organization had the same barrier to the gospel that I perceived the churches had. To hear the gospel, unbelievers had to come to a Christian meeting or event. The Christian students were encouraged to bring their unsaved friends to our events. The more experienced I became in the ministry, the more time I spent preparing messages and planning events. At the same time, having been inspired by Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) and the movie *Patch Adams*, I began to engage with high school students outside of our meetings—at McDonald’s, on trains, in parks, and in stores. They were often happy to have a foreign adult initiate conversation with them. I wanted to do more of this, but my responsibilities kept growing. The lack of time and energy to go out into the community and seek out students to talk with frustrated me. Finally, I made the difficult decision to leave this ministry. I would give the local church a try.

Churches are doing effective outreach

My mission suggested some ministries in the Kanto area. So back we went to the place where I had felt so useless during our first term. But now I would be able to focus on outreach in a church. From the start, I was impressed by the number of unbelievers that came into the church during the week. There was a morning café, gospel choir practice, English Bible study, and a preschool program. All of these weekly or monthly programs attracted unbelievers. They mingled with believers. They saw and heard the gospel. The church also had several weekly prayer meetings at different times—early morning, late morning, afternoon, and evening. The church was praying for each other, and they were praying for the community.

The church had a reputation of compassion in the community. A woman who had lost her baby in the womb

came into the church seeking help. Starting with the pastor, several people surrounded this woman with love and assistance. My past judgment of the church was not accurate. This church, and probably many others, were serving the community in various ways, and people were recognizing the church as a safe, enjoyable, and even compassionate place to come. They were seeing Christians as good, loving people.

Having seen all that, I still found one aspect frustrating—the church building-centered ministry. I was expected to be at the church building five days a week even when there was nothing going on. I was discovering on my bicycle commute to the church that I was able to meet lots of people along a riverbank path—people walking their dogs, elderly sitting on benches, and children playing in parks. Again, my time and energy were spent in the confines of the Christian meeting place.

Balance and inspiring others

For personal reasons, we left Japan for a few years. I served as a mobilizer and recruiter for our mission organization in the US. I met many college students interested in ministry in Japan, but they wanted an internship—some sort of short-term experience in ministry to see if God really wanted them in Japan long-term. Our Japan director suggested we start such an internship program when we returned to Japan. After the triple disaster of March 11, 2011, missionaries traveled into the disaster area to help out. We joined three other SEND missionaries in Miyagi when we returned to Japan in 2013. We came alongside a church whose building had been swept away in the tsunami.

From a rented building with a café and an apartment, this church worked with volunteer teams to help victims. By the time we arrived, temporary housing was set up. We served people in the rented space with a café and a children’s program. Later, we added children’s English classes. Additionally, we were getting to know the neighbors around our rented house. At their request, we started an English time for them in our house. With interns now serving with us, we also looked

for ways to meet unbelievers at neutral locations—not a church building and not our home. We joined English conversation groups in Sendai. We went on guided tours and got to know the staff of the tourist information desk. We assisted in a sports *chanbara* (sword fighting with inflated balloon-like swords) outreach at the local school led by a local Japanese believer.

This season of ministry allowed me to use skills I gained from previous term experiences in the parachurch organization, local church, and every day interactions with Japanese people. I set my schedule so I was only at the church building two or three days a week and at our house once or twice a week for set programs. And I went out into the community for daily jogs passing the schools and participating in non-church-related activities. It became natural to do this with interns who were observing and participating in what missionary life might look like.

Currently (and probably in our second to last term as missionaries in Japan), we live in a small city with no church. We are hosting interns while we serve a church in a neighboring town and carry out ministry in the church building, in our home, and in the community. It seems I’ve gone full circle, back to my initial idealism. This time, however, it is not centered on becoming Japanese. Rather, it is about living life not so much as a missionary but as an intentional believer every day. I embrace my own journey. Perhaps there will be yet another chapter as I near retirement (from ministry in Japan), but for now this is where I find myself. I’m glad for the gift of reflection and for the growth and expansion of my thinking as I’ve gone through different stages of joyous ministry. Changes sometimes brought about frustration, but I’ve come to appreciate what each stage has taught me. **JH**

Map: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Topographic_map_Japan-en.svg
Pins: Vecteezy.com

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

If the devil can't **stop** you, he will **push** you!

By Judith Ricken

*Learning about burnout, developing a plan to prevent burnout,
and encouraging others to set healthy boundaries in ministry*

I've wanted to be a missionary since I was thirteen. I was eager. There was no plan B. I was going to serve as a medical missionary in Africa or India. During my nursing training, I was able to do a work experience training block in Mali, West Africa. The missionary doctor working there told me about an organization that sends out medical missionaries (DMÄT Deutsches Missionsärzte Team). I was on fire. I needed that training, too. I was still in the middle of my nursing training, but I didn't care and enrolled in their two-year preparation program.

Discovering burnout

The classes were held over seven weekends in another part of Germany. Surely, I could fit that into my schedule. It was an exciting time. I got nearer and nearer to fulfilling my dream. I met others who already had served or were going to serve as medical missionaries. There were so many options. The second or third of those training sessions was about burnout. The instructor said, "The five things that lead to burnout are perfectionism, idealism, yearning for harmony. . ." (I don't remember the last two, sorry!); then I counted them off on my fingers and realized, I had all five of them!

I also met a missionary there who had been on the mission field for only two years and got such a bad case of burnout that ten years later, she still wasn't able to work properly. In retrospect, I now think that was rather an



Young Judith in nursing training in Mali

extreme case. But back then I thought, "That is burnout!" and realized that I was rushing right into it. I will be forever grateful to this organization for their teaching, but at that time I decided to quit their training, focus on my nursing training only, and get to know myself. Why was I so perfectionistic, idealistic, and yearning for harmony? If this was destroying me, I needed to work on it. A little time later, I saw a quote in a magazine that summed up my situation very nicely: If the devil can't stop you, he will push you.

I received more and more confirmation that I needed to change tracks. I remember praying, "Okay, okay, I will take a break in preparation for the mission field, concentrate on finishing

my nursing training, and get some work experience, whilst looking at my personality, possibly getting some counseling. But then when it's time to go, you need to call me!" I was now determined to not get burnout (idealism still in place—haha!).

In nursing training, we had standardized procedures for nearly everything—an A4 paper that explained why this procedure was necessary, how to prepare for it, how to do it, and how to tidy up after it. We called them "Standards." Many were for prophylaxes (preventative actions): pneumonia prophylaxis, bed sore prophylaxis, contraction prophylaxis, and so on. There was even one on how to make tea properly (no joke!). I then developed the idea to make an A4 paper called the Standard for burnout prophylaxis. I never did, but with the idea stuck in my mind, I have always been very careful about not overworking. I got rid of perfectionism during Bible college (80 percent is enough!), still struggle with idealism, but consider taking time off very important.

Putting burnout prevention into practice

About 18 months later, God called me to the mission field, but not as I expected. A few years later, I found myself as an intern in Japan, not Africa or India, and not as a medical missionary.

In my mission (GAM), there were great stories of former missionaries putting in 80-hour weeks and considering

that normal. The missionary couple I was working with had experienced burnout themselves and had a different approach. The day off was non-negotiable. This was a good environment for my first missionary working experience on the field. I still remember the mantra—people are always more important than programs. We care about people, so if all our programs make people tired, then let's cancel them. This made perfect sense to me.

It was difficult at first to figure out what to actually do on my day off in a foreign land, but I decided not to work, even if I didn't know what to do. Since then, I've been very keen to learn about self-care and encourage others to take it seriously. As Germans, we are very blessed with a minimum of 20 days per year of paid time off. Taking three complete weeks off is considered totally normal in Germany. In 2018, when I started working with KGK (Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai, a university student ministry), I was shocked to find that their regulations said a worker must take one "long holiday" per year, and yet that long holiday was defined as five days in a row! "But that's short," I thought.

I had heard that working for KGK can be very demanding, so I decided to make sure I was strong and healthy. Like I said, I never finished the neat A4 Standard, but I summed it up in a short statement: "Eat well, sleep well, exercise." I took up the responsibility to ask my teammates when they were taking the "long holiday" and encourage them to do so. I ask them what refreshes them and what they do on their "day off." I'm trying to lead by example, but at the same time I'm very aware that they face much more pressure and expectations than I do. Culturally, it's not so easy for them to take time off. And yet I have noticed a change in the organization.

KGK's theme for the last three years (2021–2024) has been 再建 (*saiken*, rebuilding) and part of it is how we work as staff. The General Secretary (Shinya Yoshizawa) said when he started working for KGK saying "no" to a student's request was unthinkable. We were there to serve and sacrifice after all. But if that destroys the staff's health in the long run, this is not good. We need balance. Since then KGK has built a member care system and staff have to evaluate their health in their

monthly report. I'm very happy about this positive change.

It is helpful when your organization gives you healthy boundaries and requires you to take time off, but we also have individual responsibility. We might not all be in a position to change things in our organization, but we can all take responsibility for our own body, mind, and soul and form our own "burnout prophylaxis" Standard. It might look different from mine or your teammates' but the important thing is that it works for you!

Have you thought about what lies behind the tendency to overwork? Are you perfectionistic, idealistic, or looking for harmony? Are there boundaries in place that prevent you from overworking? Do you have healthy role models you can imitate and ask for help? Please take time to ponder these things, as this is too important a topic to skip over. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Judith Ricken is a German Alliance Missionary (GAM); she currently works with KGK in Nagoya. In her free time, she chases the hundred famous mountains of Japan.



Judith's calendar with 休 (yasumi or kyū, rest)

The adjusting missionary

By Sue Plumb Takamoto

Challenges of Japanese culture and the unique role of community

These are the words of a female missionary:

I want so much to belong. Sometimes I think I kind of belong and then I realize that I really don't belong. The scary thing for me is that I don't belong in America. I go back to America and I am totally out of it and I don't feel like, in America, that I belong. So it's like I don't belong anywhere. . . . Oh, not belonging is the hardest thing to deal with in my 19 years here.

Analysis of the individual journeys of forty missionaries serving in Japan from sixteen different mission agencies has revealed noteworthy and often surprising adjustment patterns.¹ Unfortunately, it takes 7.8 years for the average missionary to adjust to Japan! The statistics are discouraging; in fact, many career missionaries end up only staying two terms, meaning they leave the field just as they are about to finally begin to feel more at home and able to move towards effective ministry.

Fortunately, there are some significant factors that can greatly aid the missionary. Understanding the particular cultural challenges of the missionary and the unique factors that aid the adjustment process can greatly help the adjusting missionary and those of us who coach, train, and mentor new missionaries. This article will look at the importance of unique community in the missionary adjustment process.

Cultural struggles of the adjusting missionary

One of the qualitative research methods I have employed is called metaphor

analysis. We don't always have the right words to use when we are describing a process or our feelings, and we choose metaphors that can best summarize our situation. As I examined the responses of missionaries in my interviews with them about their adjustment process, I analyzed the metaphors that each one used, looking for common threads and themes to describe the journey. Three images repeatedly came out to show how missionaries feel while adjusting to Japan:

- Missionaries feel “outside of the club” before they have adjusted.
- Accepted/gaining entrance—The process of adjusting for the missionary is that of moving from the outside to the inside; once the missionary feels adjusted, he/she feels “on the inside.”
- Guest/home/key—The missionary adjustment process is like a movement from being a guest outside of a home to moving into a home.

The adjusting missionaries have the feeling of being on the outside, of not being welcomed in a deeper sense into this culture where they choose to make

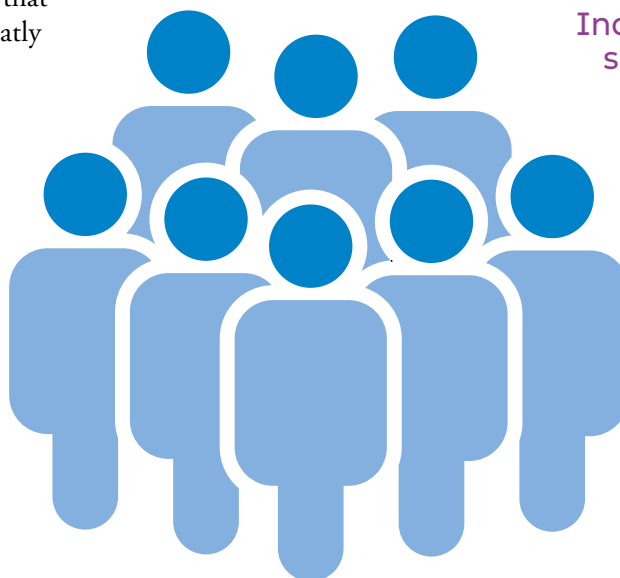
their home. There is often a feeling of loneliness and being disconnected; the extreme cultural differences between Japan and a Western missionary's own culture contributes to the sense of isolation during the process of adjustment. Here are four cultural challenges for Western missionaries.

Strong group mentality

The group mentality is the foundation of the Japanese society. One misanthropologist states of this culture, “Social relationships always take priority over individual relationships.”² The group mentality and dependence on those within the group begin from early childhood socialization and extend throughout adult society. Thus, being on the inside of the group is of utmost significance to the Japanese. Although there is no conscious desire on the part of Japanese people to exclude missionaries from belonging, this island-nation mentality does not resemble the values of the “melting-pot-American” way of living. It is no wonder, then, that missionaries seeking to find a home of security, identification, and connectedness have such a great struggle in Japan.

Indirect and hierarchical system

The Japanese system of building relationships through hierarchical structures often flows contrary to Western standards of fairness or rational thinking. Missionaries realize that, even though they are studying the language and perhaps have read some books on culture, there are still invisible governing laws that command the formation of relationships. As one mis-



sionary stated, “You want to be so nice and you don’t quite know how to do it because there is a whole different set of rules.”

For missionaries who seek to build relationships as a means toward evangelism or who want to find a place to belong, it is disconcerting to not know the rules or to discover that the rules are very different from what one may know. Missionary men, in particular, expressed frustration in never being able to form deeper relationships with Japanese men. The strong value North Americans place on equality clashes with the Japanese choice of inequality in relationships.

Form over function

Both male and female missionaries struggle with the frustration of the Japanese need for proper appearance over truth, form over correctness. Foreigners coming to Japan will not only initially be outsiders from the group, but they will usually not understand the socialization process that has been an ongoing learning process since childhood. Whereas individualistic cultures can permit fluid boundaries and new people entering, collective cultures like Japan have a much harder time allowing people who do not know the rules into the group. The need to follow a certain form, which may not make sense to the Western missionary, can cause excessive stress and prolong the missionary’s sense of being on the outside and not even knowing the right key to get inside.

The Japanese church

While certainly not intentional, many adjusting missionaries find their new experience of serving in a Japanese church to be an alienating or negative force in their adjustment. This difficult experience can be exacerbated by the surprise of not having expected the problem. They are often disheartened that their Japanese church is not what they had expected. Language and culture create numerous challenges for the missionary adjusting to an estab-

lished Japanese church, but one of the main things we need to recognize is that it is almost always difficult in any context in Japan for an outsider to find acceptance in an already established entity. It doesn’t make the Japanese church bad or insensitive, but this is simply a reality that can create challenges for the missionary.

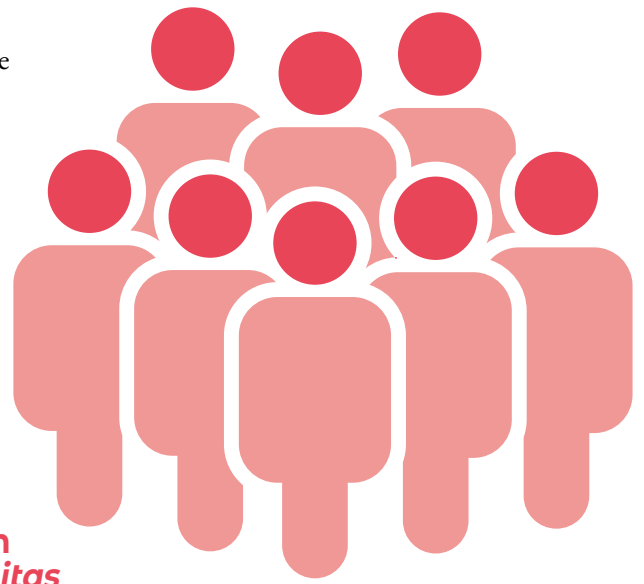
Preventing alienation by creating *communitas*

When missionaries arrive in Japan, they quickly realize that who they were in their home country does not matter very much. Most are, in a sense, starting over. The inability to communicate, read, or write quickly removes any airs of importance from a missionary. Thus, they are thrust into a situation where their past relationships, formed

within the structures of their home society, are no longer significant in defining who they are. They must start from a more basal and undifferentiated level to create relationships.

The adjustment process for missionaries occurs most quickly and effectively when they are given a chance to belong.

Because the challenges of belonging in Japan are uniquely difficult, as discussed above, it takes intentionality and an understanding of the need for community to help the adjusting missionary jump this high hurdle. The concept of *communitas* is an anthropological term that describes what happens with a group of people who are all in the midst of adjusting, starting something new, and being stripped of hierarchical structures. If a new missionary can become part of something new that is starting, they have a much better chance of finding acceptance, belonging, and therefore, adjustment to Japan. Here are several places where missionaries find acceptance and belonging, assisting in moving past the initial challenges of isolation.



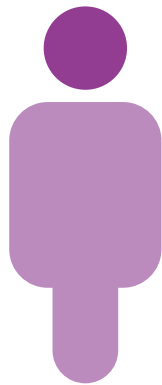
Experiences of *communitas* with other foreigners

Language school

Although it is considered grueling and painful by many missionaries, language school is often the context where *communitas* initially occurs for many missionaries. Many language school classes are full-time and contain other expatriates who have recently come to Japan and are experiencing similar surprises, difficulties, and joys in adjusting to Japan. Most importantly, all have been stripped of their previous status; there is a level playing field for bonding to happen.

Missionary small group

The small group experience (with other missionaries, expats, or Japanese) has served as a vital place for *communitas* to happen. The two most significant qualities of these experiences are forming relationships with others in the same boat who could go through the fire together and finding a place of belonging, acceptance, and encouragement. This feels crucial for the missionary’s growth and movement forward. Paul Tournier, known for his work in pastoral counseling, writes, “Jesus himself sought support from three of his disciples when he faced the greatest renunciation in his life, the acceptance of the Passion and the cross. He did not ask for their advice. . . He asked them to watch with him, and pray . . . I am often amazed at the progress that



can be made by a [person] when he finds real support.”³

Missionaries are searching for connectedness and for acceptance. Because the adjustment process involves lack of structure and status, a spiritual oasis and a bond of being with like-minded people becomes life-giving for many missionaries who otherwise may be facing a life crisis.

Experiences of *communitas* with Japanese

Missionary moms with young kids

One of the most interesting settings for *communitas* to occur among young moms was in the midst of sending their small children to Japanese nursery schools/kindergartens. In Japan, the *yōchien* system is complicated, expensive, and time-consuming for mothers. Many moms new to the system liken it to a full-time job—having to prepare just the right snacks and lunches, dress their child in the proper uniforms each day, and attend the many meetings and functions and school trips. Yet it is here that many missionary moms have found unlikely *communitas* among the other moms: “[The young Japanese moms] made us feel a part of everything . . . I didn’t end up feeling lonely because they made a real point of making us feel like we belonged.”

Japanese and missionary moms are thrown together into a new life stage where, like their children, they are new and learning together. It serves as a bridge into the wider Japanese community for the missionary mother, a means for learning more Japanese language and culture, and an “in” into the usually tight community. I made my best Japanese friend when my daughter started *yōchien*; Natsuko guided me through many of my challenges, including the surprising excrement tests we needed to perform on our children, and we became lifelong friends. She brought me into the group and helped me to feel at home.

Church planting community

Church-planting projects, or starting new small groups or cell groups, provide a unique opportunity for new missionaries and Christian Japanese to

bond together based on their mutually new assignments, being thrown together into a new situation.

“[These three women from my church] were helpful and encouraging and hospitable and just did so many fun things together—it was very precious.”

“[Involvement in cell groups] was a lot of sharing—this person’s pouring out their heart and I have no idea why they’re crying—and it’s a good motivation for learning Japanese to really understand their hearts, so when you felt like you could bond with this person—that’s when I started adjusting—feeling like I had my community in Japanese people.”

The Japanese and foreign members join together in a new project that puts everyone together, on the inside, from the beginning. These experiences of bonding between the missionaries and the Japanese church members serve as a unique bridge that aid greatly in adjustment.

Conclusion

While there are many different types of *communitas* that can help the adjusting missionary find help towards adjustment, I would suggest that the best possible scenario to help missionaries adjust is to give them the opportunity to be placed in a group with Japanese who are starting something new. Church planting or other outreach teams form the ideal setting for missionaries to learn language, culture, and be part of the inside of a group that has not yet gelled. The new team can learn and grow together, with the missionary being part of the inside from the beginning.

There are other options as well for missionaries working in churches that are not doing church planting. During our first two years as a married couple in Japan, Eric and I were working with a larger church in Sendai.

As we began meeting our neighbors, we made a plan with some of our church members to start an evening English class in our home. This became much more than just a class—we

had frequent barbecues, informal tea times with the ladies, and long times of fellowship into the night. We discovered that many of our neighbors were fairly isolated and not already belonging somewhere else; our gatherings became a place of identity and bonding for all of us. More than at our church, Eric and I found this to be a wonderful place for *communitas*, language learning, and friendships to form. (And two of our neighbors became Christians during that time!)

The missionary adjusting to Japan has a great number of challenges, with the huge overarching challenge being the human need to move from being on the outside to being on the inside. The best setup for missionaries to find a key to feeling “at home” in Japan is to be part of an experience in which hierarchical structures are removed and everyone is able to be part of starting something new. Understanding the need to place new missionaries into opportunities for *communitas* can make a huge difference in their adjustment process and ministry effectiveness. **JH**

1. Susan Plumb Takamoto, “Liminality and the North American Missionary Adjustment Process in Japan,” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2003), 378.
2. John Offner, *Relations that Succeed: Establishing and Maintaining Excellent Social Connections*, (Harper-Collins, 1988), 75.
3. Paul Tournier, *A Place for You: Psychology and Religion*, (Harper & Row, 1968), 180.

Vector images: Vecteezy.com

Sue Plumb Takamoto and her husband, Eric, have recently relocated to the US after over 22 years of living in Japan. They are continuing their ministry with A3 (formerly Asian Access) and love reaching out to Japanese families in their area.



Missionary families rooted in Christ

By Gabriella Kashiwakura

We need strong missionary families to endure the challenges of spreading the gospel in a foreign culture

Missionaries are surrounded by a variety of challenges. We may have to deal with cultural differences, language barriers, adapting to new routines and lifestyle, and isolation. Most probably, we deal with more than one of those things simultaneously, and all this adjusting requires time.

Missionary families need to be strong in Christ to endure the challenges of spreading the gospel in a foreign culture. This happens as each member reflects the faithfulness and power of God in their lives, even in the midst of challenges. This can be an opportunity to reflect God's grace as he gives us the capacity to recover from difficult situations. Therefore, our faith in God needs to be part of the daily routine of the family because he is the one who sustains us and gives the mission meaning. God is also the one who gives us purpose, something that helps families adapt to the mission field.

Here are some ideas to build strong missionary families:

Teamwork and mutual understanding

As a family, we are a team. The Bible says in Romans 12:5: "In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (NIV). A missionary family is a united body moving forward towards a mission. All members are connected; if one falls, the entire body feels the impact. Also, each member is going through their own internal process, facing their own challenges. Adapting to a new culture is not easy.

When I came to Japan, my husband and I were basically newlyweds. He already had significant experience in Japan. On the other hand, the missionary context was new to me. He had to guide me through aspects of culture and daily life, letting me adjust in my own time. This partnership was essential for me to navigate the mission

field. He was adapting to married life as well; however, he was mindful that I was adjusting both to the marriage and to the culture around me. Patience was the key.

Supporting environment

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:10 that two are better than one, because, if either falls, one can help the other. An encouraging family is a family in which all members know they are not alone; we can pray for and support each other. This principle is crucial when tensions rise.

Time with family

Do not be so caught up with serving that you forget to enjoy your family. Enjoying time together can fill us up emotionally and psychologically, strengthening us. Through those moments together, we can reinforce our identity in Christ and encourage each other. We are a family in the mission field and part of that mission, maybe even the primary mission, is maintaining the strength of our family.

Rooted in Christ

Our purpose comes from Christ. In fact, our mission as Christians is to make Christ known. Our identity does not come from our nationalities but from the fact that we belong to God (John 1:12). During our time on the field, the devil may try to make us doubt our identity. Identity is not about what you do but about who you are in Christ. This is what gives meaning to our lives.

This is also important for the sake of missionary children. Missionaries with children are parents first and so should be modeling a life that shows that their identity is in Christ. Psalm 127 says "children are a heritage from the Lord"; therefore, we must make God visible to them as missionary parents. This is

even more urgent in places where the gospel is still mainly unknown, such as Japan.

Identity formation starts from the first moments of a baby with the parents, meaning that the parents' behavior when facing adversity and change help shape the child's identity. Our children cannot be neglected. A central part of God's work is for missionaries



to love their children, and for children to feel that love.

Attitude to the local culture

Lastly, it is important for the family to be positive about the new culture, especially if they are here long term and if there are young children. We are not aiming to change a culture but to make Christ known. As missionaries, we need to resist negative feelings towards the locals and should try to avoid communicating any such negativity to our children. If there are aspects of the new culture that are against the principles we follow, we should teach our children why we do not follow them. However, a culture mainly represents the history and the essence of a people, and this should be respected. **JH**

Photo submitted by author

Gabriella Kashiwakura, 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.

Disjointed, disruptive delights of deputation

Trips to visit our support team is a strange part of missionary life that can leave us confused, but hopefully also encouraged

By Rachel Hughes

Deputation, home assignment, furlough, visiting your passport country—whatever you call it—these trips are fraught with extremes of stress, joy, disappointment, encouragement, and all associated feelings. It's a phenomenon unique to the missionary life cycle that significantly impacts our life journey. During our almost 14 years of missionary life, our family has completed six "home assignments", and I've recognised some common stages, each with pitfalls and joys. Whether your experiences are similar or not, if you have mixed feelings about travelling to your passport country and engaging with supporters there, I understand!

Looming

The first stage, "looming in the distant future", is characterised by emotional discussions searching for dates that suit each family member, our ministry partners here and there, our mission organisation, and our extended family over there. But the perfect time does not exist! We face impossible decisions like dates that suit supporting churches but leave our kids missing out on major life milestones, or, meet the needs of ministry on location but miss major extended-family events. Whatever we decide, it's never ideal, and someone is disappointed.

Now-but-not-yet

In everyday life *here* in Japan we're usually running at capacity, but as the time comes closer, details for *there* need to be planned. Deputation schedules, conferences, meetings, living arrangements, medical appointments, family events, school enrolments, car loans, and the list goes on. For example, *here* I'm taking the kids to soccer, chatting with other mums, but the back of my mind whirrs away: How to keep fit over *there*? Can a soccer ball go in checked-in luggage? Can we borrow bikes? Would bikes fit in the car? What car? Oh, I have to text that person about that car. Oh no! Did I just agree to cook church lunch *here* this Sunday? Oh dear! Focus, *here*, now!

It's very hard to focus when half your brain is fixating on problems of another time and place. It's exhausting!

Work, not pleasure, confusion

Another difficulty in the detailed planning stage is the endless potential

for disappointing the extended family. The fact that we're coming for work can be hard to explain. If we arrange to stay with one family member while in town visiting a supporting church, we have to apologise because—after scheduling all the home groups, youth groups and other events—we have time for just one dinner with them. So, they're upset we're coming to stay but "they'll hardly see us". Meanwhile, other family members assume we'll spend all that time with the other family and feel overlooked. Weeks before we've even set foot in the country, we've already managed to offend a significant number of our extended family!

The Day

The travel day finally arrives. We survive the horrors of getting to the airport, get our luggage under weight (doing the last-minute shuffle between bags), survive security



(losing a child's beloved water bottle that somehow still, after all our checking, had water in it!), navigate immigration (finding working, non-sticky pens for endless forms while a clinging child whinges they're thirsty), get to our gate, then finally sit on the plane and catch our breath. Then there are transfers. More luggage to cart, more overtired, stressed-out kids to urge quickly through airports, more paperwork, more lines, more security—me spread-eagled in the machine, Dene in his socks, hitching up his trousers (the clingy child attached to his leg), repacking bags while searching for shoes and belt. Eventually, we walk out into the bright light of our destination. The air smells familiar. The birds sound *natsukashii*. A car stops at the pedestrian crossing, and we bow instinctively, blush, and hurry across. We have arrived.

Reverse culture shock

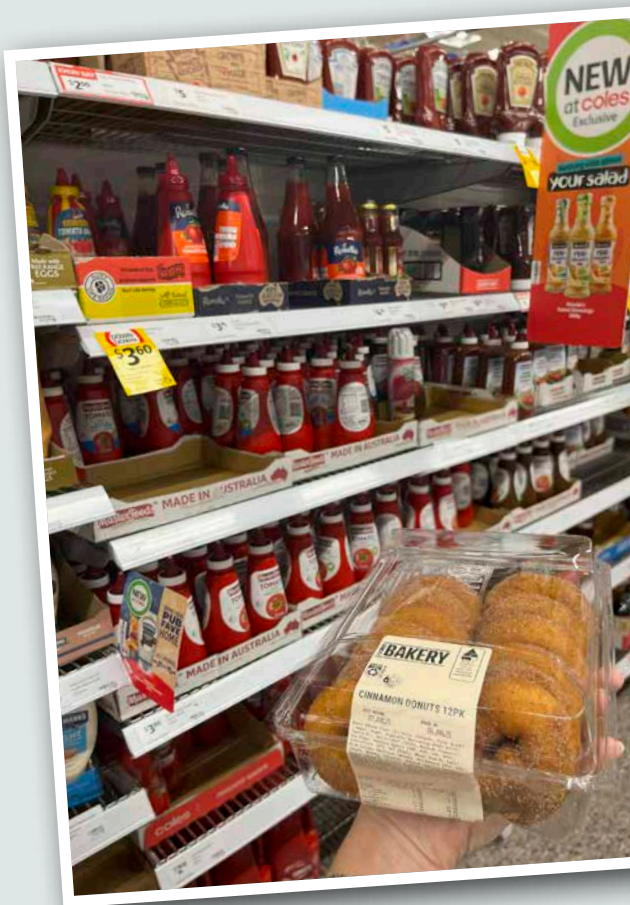
Very soon, we visit the shops for everyday items. There's always some new shock, often what people are wearing (or not!). I remember thinking, "Oh, I can see that man's feet!" and quickly averting my eyes, only to see another man in flip-flops, then realising with horror the entire shop was filled with men's hairy feet! Another time, my son stopped, mid-aisle, threw his arms out wide towards an entire shelf of ketchup and tomato sauces and loudly exclaimed, "Tomato sauce! What would you like?! Red, red, or red!" I'm often unable to make decisions and come out with a strange variety of items, mostly not what's needed. I'm shocked by prices, bamboozled by variety, and invariably come away with fresh cinnamon donuts.

Getting down to business

By this stage, we've remembered how to function and are basically set up, so we start visiting the mission's home office, supporting churches, and groups. We travel widely, but perhaps even if you stay in one place, you might also experience some of these common events of regular home assignment weeks:

"Tuesday night meltdowns" where family members take turns (hopefully) to decide they've had enough. The "When can we go home?" misunderstanding where a child asks to go home, we answer "Soon," but they break down crying, "No, not that home, *home-home*," and we have to explain it will be a few months yet. This last one is exacerbated when it takes place at your mother's house, and Grandma realises her grandchild doesn't think of this country as home.

Then there's the argument-in-the-car-on-the-way-to-church combined with entering-the-church-to-be-confronted-with-a-larger-than-life-sized-poster-of-yourself. For us, this argument often starts in the car with a child refusing to go to Sunday school, turns into a fight with one parent (despite our best efforts to be patient), who is then criticised by the other parent questioning whether that was the wisest thing to say under the circumstances, at which point the second child defends the first parent, the first child cries, and the parents fume while pulling into the car park. We all get out of the car, promise whatever bribes will get our kids to perform and keep



us sane for the next two hours, plaster on our best smiles and enter the lobby to be confronted with a picture-perfect poster of ourselves on the wall. Oh, the irony!

Another occurrence is the "sudden memory dysfunction". After a few weeks of taking our show on the road, I experience a heart-pounding moment in the middle of a talk where I can't remember if I've said the next point today or if that was at the other church last week. I panic, mouth open, hesitate, take a breath, then from the front row, my son's little voice pipes up reciting the next line.

But then I'm reminded of the joys of being on the road as a family. Our regular schedule in Japan has us all off in different directions, but for home



assignment time, we get to be together. And Dene and I do enjoy working as a team, formulating presentations and considering how to communicate the nuances of ministry in Japan to an Australian audience. We make some awesome family memories.

“How’s Japan?” degeneration

In after-church conversations, we hope for scintillating exchanges with supporters, comparing analyses of Australian and Japanese cultures and sharing strategies for gospel ministry that best meets society’s felt needs. But often we find ourselves talking to visitors, or being shown photos of someone’s ski trip to Hokkaido, or hearing about the stress of renovating a second bathroom and laundry room (clearly, the irony that no one in Japan has a second bathroom or a laundry room is lost!). Eventually, we descend into that classic conversation:

“How’s Japan?”

“It’s good.”

But then there’s always a couple of people who are clued in. “I don’t want to take too much of your time, but just wanted to ask, how is that little girl and her mum going? The ones from your music class who came to the church event last summer. I’ve been praying for them and would love to hear if you’ve seen them again?”

Or “How are you going with that university campus group that was down to just one member? I’ve been praying you’ll find more Christians on campus.” And we realise that though we’ve never met in person, they’ve been reading our newsletters and praying more faithfully for little Miki-chan and the campus ministry than we have! And this person thinks what we’re doing is valuable and important for God’s kingdom. Our hearts are filled. We’re reminded to pray for Miki-chan, her mum, and that lone Christian on campus. We look forward to catching up with them all when we go back. We are encouraged!

Finance frazzle

Something I find very confusing and unpredictable about this stage is finance. Firstly, seeking financial support can be erratic. Some churches give massive amounts with very little prompting, while other churches give less than what it costs us to visit them. Secondly, our personal finances are stretched. People often want to meet at a café, and prices add up. But without our own home, we can’t invite people over, and with no fridge to store leftovers,

*Finally, we walk out of the airport
at the other end and breathe
that familiar smell of “home”.*

even our daily food budget becomes expensive. Then randomly, (often older) folk press money into my hand as they shake goodbye, saying, “This is just a little something for you to enjoy.” Such generosity fills my heart.

Travelling can leave us financially vulnerable. But it also gives us opportunity to experience the generosity of God’s family. Cars to loan, houses to house-sit, offers of babysitting, dinner vouchers, a trip to the zoo, a youth group outing paid for. Over the years, we’ve received incredibly thoughtful gifts that remind us of God’s generosity through his people.

Friendship confusion

In between all the official visits, we’re helping our kids continue with schooling, maintain relationships with old friends they hope to return to, and navigate new friendships which they know they’ll leave (so may not want to invest in, but feel really left out when they’re not included, like not being invited to a birthday party). It’s a lot for young hearts to handle.

And it’s not only kids who struggle with friendships. I’m often grieved that some who were very close friends before we left have moved on and seem to have forgotten that we were close. But with a few good friends, we pick

up where we left off as if no time has passed. And then there is the joy of new friends who show genuine care and interest.

End-blur stage

The last few weeks are often a blur of last-minute coffee catch-ups, tying up medical things, office meetings to plan our next few years, a few years’ worth of underwear and shoe shopping, and trying to get to the beach one last time. Then there is the packing, weighing, reorganising of paperwork, and plans to get to the airport.

After a restless night, filled with dreams of lugging kids and suitcases through unending corridors of unknown airports, we have another one of those airport-days. Finally, we walk out of the airport at the other end and breathe that familiar smell of “home”. Ah, the joy of sleeping in our own bed! We are exhausted! In the next few days, we gradually return to our usual schedule and greetings of “How was your holiday?”

I find the whole experience overwhelming—socially, emotionally, spiritually, even physically. The pitfalls, disappointments, grief, and stress all take a toll. But it’s wonderful to meet people who partner with us, who encourage us and share our kingdom goals. It’s reassuring that our family want to spend time with us because they love us. It’s refreshing to go to church in my heart language, to hear Biblical preaching and sing heartfelt praise in lively churches with thriving kids and youth ministries. It’s exciting to meet young adults with incisive questions considering a life of ministry and valuing our input.

The home assignment is an extremely stressful and demanding element in the cycle of missionary life, but also a source of great joy, encouragement, and evidence of God’s blessing on our lives. **JH**

Supermarket photo submitted by author

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

The prodigal daughter

Putting my children's lives totally in the Lord's hand causes me to pray and trust in God in new ways!

That day I was busy homeschooling our younger children. But, after years of rebellion and major conflict, it wasn't uncommon to be at odds with our oldest child. The night before, I had gone to bed knowing that she would come home late from work, and Daddy would deal with it. I anticipated that again we would discover what appeared to be lies and deceit; yet another house rule broken. In the morning, I found out that, as usual, he'd tried to talk to her the night before and didn't get anywhere. When she came down that morning, she wanted to press her case with him, but he was on his way out the door to a meeting. It would have to wait, and he left.

She disappeared upstairs, and I could hear strange noises, like unusual things were being moved around. She came up and down the stairs many times. At some point, everything went quiet. We reached an end to the homeschool unit I was teaching, and I went to check on her. She was nowhere to be found. The following months of sleepless nights, waiting for her to come back of her own volition, were excruciating.

Self-doubt

Where did we go wrong? What should we have done differently? What if I had said this then or stopped that before it started? Did we give her social media too early? Too late? If we weren't missionaries, would she have had less identity struggles? If we had been in a big church with an amazing youth department and lots of great influences surrounding her, would that have fixed it? The questions and self-blame haunted me day in and day out.

We had dealt with this rebellious phase for several years. The very dangerous choices came one after another,

and just when we thought the next issue couldn't be any more outlandish, it was. Just when we thought that another more horrible choice couldn't possibly be made, it was.

At the Father's feet

We prayed and we prayed. When her choices almost led her straight into being trafficked, we laid her at the Father's feet and said, "Whatever it takes, Lord, get her attention and open her eyes." My faith was challenged to its limits.

The final outcome is still unknown. Several times, things have looked positive and then regressed. Have we been through the worst of it? That remains to be seen. God knew and saw the moment she walked out that door the first time, and he has known and seen every



situation all along the way. He has rescued her from *so many* unbelievably dangerous situations in truly miraculous ways many times. Each time I watch God orchestrate an incredible intervention, my trust rises. I am ashamed that I don't trust him more, even before I see just how merciful he can be to her in her sin.

I now know the pain the prodigal's father felt as he watched his son walk away. I know all the fears. The waiting is the hardest. How do you not let fear become the baseline emotion that is so

near you can't escape it? How do you do ministry when thoughts of that precious child and her well-being plague your every thought every moment of every day?

Trust

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1 NIV).

I cannot see the future, but I serve a God who does. I must learn to place my trust at all times in his character and not my own. I must learn to be confident in his love and care for us (especially my children), not my love as a parent. I must put my assurance in his sovereignty, not my fumbling attempts to respond to what happens. If we are called to be missionaries, my kids are called to be missionary kids. God knew they would be ours. I must have faith in God. He is my daughter's creator, her sustainer, her ultimate protector. And he is also mine.

This stage, of transition into being the parents of young adults, is *hard!* If you are a parent who struggles with all these fears and uncertainties about serving on the field with kids (even if they are little angels), you are certainly not alone. I have found so much

peace in God's Word. Read Psalm 130 and 143.

James 1:2-4 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (ESV). **JH**

The anonymous author of this article has served in Japan for a few decades. She especially loves discipleship and church planting. In her free time, she enjoys podcasts and books, needlework and hitting the gym!

Strength in losing

After years as a missionary, I was becoming overwhelmed by feelings of loss. I had two choices: burn out or lean into something better.

By Cynthia Ruble

I used to thrill to these words: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:34–35 NKJV).

This is the passage I was reading when, at age 35, God saved me out of a particularly sinful lifestyle. I counted everything “as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). In my zeal, I soon went to seminary and then straight to Japan as a missionary.

More than 20 years later, however, I felt that my zeal and passion were waning. I was getting easily annoyed, even angered, by everyday-type sins against me and the normal sacrifices I had to make. These were trials experienced by many in ministry or just in everyday life. A root of bitterness was springing up, and I wondered if I was headed toward burnout.

I noticed that underlying my stress was a sense of loss. I often had a mental calculation going on in my head: Was this worth the effort? Would I get compensated for that? Would there be any fruit from this sacrifice? I seemed to be tired of losing.

Certainly, before I became a Christian, I didn’t like losing. When I was growing up, calling someone a loser was one of the worst insults possible. In fact, I left the faith of my parents because I thought Christianity was for losers. I wanted to enjoy all the world had to offer. I assume it’s a common human trait to want to feel like a winner (even if it’s only to get a trophy).

But losing is a major theme of Scripture. Jesus calls it counting the cost: “So, likewise, whoever of you does not

forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Verses like this began to scare me. Was I willing to lose everything for him all over again? Did I trust him with childlike faith? I had to admit I didn’t. I thought he might fail me as I got older. Was I going to wake up one day and realize that my ministry had been in vain? Was I going to end up without enough resources to take care of my son? Was I giving up too much compared to other people?

Distrusting God is a sin as old as the Garden of Eden. It was important to realize this was spiritual warfare. The Enemy would love nothing better than for me (and you) to give up. I could rationalize it in so many ways. I knew it wasn’t God’s will for me to burn out. On the other hand, I couldn’t continue the way I was in good conscience. Could God renew me, an older missionary?

The first step of repentance

In my mind, God was indifferent to my sinful feelings. After all, ministry is hard. Many years wear us down, and it’s normal to be concerned about the future and to get stressed out. But of course, the underlying sins of not trusting God and essentially wanting to take my life back were serious and revealed a heart of unbelief. My bitterness was displeasing to God and quenching his Spirit.

Most convicting, though, was recounting how generous God had been to me over the years and how much Jesus had lost for me. It contrasted so greatly with my lack of love and grace. I cried out for God to forgive me and to lead me to be more like him. This was the essential first step that allowed

the Holy Spirit to begin to renew my heart.

Acknowledging trials and losses

Paul wrote, “Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake” (2 Cor. 12:10). Paul took pleasure in his trials? That seemed to be the opposite of feeling loss. I started getting excited but then immediately thought—*Well, my trials are petty and don’t count. I’m certainly not Paul, nor a house-church pastor in China, nor a refugee from Ukraine, nor someone with a very sick child, etc..*

It’s good to resist self-pity. But by discounting my everyday trials, I was treating them as annoyances that needed to be solved, blips on my way to bigger and better things.



And it wasn't helping my response to these everyday trials. It's not for us to put a value on our trials. How big is big enough? Only God knows the value of our trials because only he knows all he is doing through our lives.

Instead, I realized I needed to accept my small but constant trials as those that God has sent me for his purposes and to stop excluding myself from the many wonderful promises of Scripture. So I began reading those promises as though they applied to me—"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). "For My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor. 12:9).

These promises applied to me, too!

But the verses that helped me actually take pleasure in my trials were these: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). "Yes all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"

(2 Tim. 3:12). "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

If I had no trials and persecutions along the path of serving Christ, what would it mean? "Losses and crosses" are an essential part of our salvation. I could thank God for them all—small, medium, and large.

Looking for ways to lose

Jesus warns us about laying up treasures on earth and tells us to lay up treasures in heaven instead. I realized that perhaps with every loss for Christ, I was laying up treasure in heaven. So I began to ask myself, "How can I lose my life/time/money/self-centeredness in this situation?" It was a productive question. Of course, I'm not advocating having no boundaries or working feverishly to earn God's favor. But I needed to do more than try to throw sin out. I needed to ask Jesus in and fight it proactively.

In the same vein, when something happened that felt like loss to me, I started looking for an opportunity for generosity. I had always loved the verse that says, "A generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand" (Isa. 32:8).

Instead of focusing on how I could stop feeling loss, I thought of something the offending person would appreciate. This redirected my thoughts and led to more prayer. The first time I tried this, the result was that a woman living in my house readily agreed to do a Bible study with me. (Since I wrote this article, she has gone on to attend church regularly and is looking forward to baptism.) Then another woman joined us. The atmosphere in my house became full of love and joy. It has been one of the highlights of my ministry.

This leads to the last and most obvious point.

Loss is gain

It is one of the wonderful paradoxes of the Christian life that what may look like loss as we serve Christ is actually gain, often in this life and especially in the life to come. We all know this, though it's easy to forget as the years go by. I love this quote by Arthur Pink speaking about the widow of Zarephath: "She was no loser by her generosity."¹ Generously giving all she had brought great blessing to the widow, her son, and Elijah. I have been put to shame over and over again at how bountifully God rewards my pitiful attempts at generosity.

Perhaps one reason Jesus calls us to forsake all else is that he knows that will free us from the fear of loss. I believe that fear of loss keeps us from living in the peace that Christ promised. It may be the fear of losing money and material things or intangibles like respect, reputation, influence, freedom, comfort, enjoyment, and so on. But the willingness to lose is our strength in weakness. It's what sets us apart and demonstrates the surpassing value of Christ to a watching world. **JH**

1. Arthur Pink, "The Life of Elijah," *Grace Gems*, https://www.gracegems.org/Pink/life_of_elijah.htm (accessed December 18, 2024).

Cynthia Ruble lives with her adopted son, Micah, in Nagoya, where she helped start Life Hope Network, a crisis pregnancy ministry. Since 2005, she has taken in pregnant women who need a place to live.



Returning, not retiring: *Discerning God's unwanted guidance*

By Shan Reed

What happens when God urges us to take a turn in the road that we didn't see coming?

On August 27, 1996, I sat on an airplane headed for Narita Airport equipped with a calling to serve Jesus in Japan for the next two years and a brand-new mini Bible. The inflight magazine had an article about the Ten Commandments, so I pulled out my Bible to look them up. As I flipped through Exodus, I noticed a section heading titled, “God’s Angel to Prepare the Way.” I stopped and read: “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared” (Ex. 23:20, NIV).

Flying to the country for the first time to live and minister, I was encouraged by the words I read. Even though I had been waiting to get to Japan since I was 13 years old and knew God had called me to be here, I could not speak the language and had not met the missionaries with whom I would be working. I returned to this verse many times during the first few months in Japan, especially when I had to get on a train to travel somewhere by myself.

That first two-year term was to help my mom see that I really could live in Japan and God had called me to be here for my career. It was a joy to return as a career missionary in November 2001. I had had the privilege of growing up in a church that supported a missionary in Japan who had lived here her whole career. She returned to the US the year I came, and I felt like I was going to do the same thing. I, too, would live and minister in Japan until I retired.

What a shock, in January 2022, when I began to hear God speak about change, about returning to the US soon, while still in my mid-fifties. We had a little discussion—I reminded him that I was staying until I retire. He

reminded me that his timing is different from my timing.

I spent much of the winter in prayer, listening to Jesus. Once I understood this was his leading, I began talking with a small number of friends and colleagues who I knew would pray with me through this discernment process. The support and prayers of these trusted sisters and brothers gave me the peace and assurance to know this was God’s leading.

Research campaign

I had planned to be in Japan until I retired. I did not know what it would look like to make such a big change. Both of my parents had basically worked in the same job all their lives. Many of my colleagues had recently retired. I didn’t know who to talk to. Was I making the right decision? What would it look like to leave? What would it look like to return to my passport country?

So I read books about decision-making, about transitions, and about ending well. As one who loves to read and study, these books encouraged me and challenged me.

Along with all the books and articles I read, I also started talking to friends who had gone through a similar transition of returning to their passport countries even though they had planned to stay until retirement. I sent a survey that some people filled out or that I used to interview others.

My main questions were about how people made the decision to leave, the emotions involved and how people processed

them. I also asked about reentry. The people who replied had served 4–25 years in Japan, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Macedonia. Although some of them had originally committed to short-term, they all had expected to stay long-term, which most defined as until retirement.

How people made the decision

We each make decisions in different ways. I suppose there are as many answers to the question of how one decides as there are people who are asked. However, I did notice some themes.

The most common theme was prayer. One respondent said, “Sit with God. Stay longer. Slow down and be quiet with Him.” I appreciated this response. Making this decision to change course midstream is not something we can do spur of the moment, on a whim.

Another respondent noted that because they know God’s voice from walking with him for years, they could hear him clearly. This ability to know God’s voice comes out of time spent with Jesus, sitting with him, staying longer.



One married person said that they had to lean into each other as a couple. What was God saying to them individually and as a couple? As a single person, I do not always think about how married people make decisions.

The second most common theme was conversation with a mentor, a small number of friends and/or colleagues, or supporters. God has created us for community, to seek him together, to listen to him with and for each other, and to notice what he is doing in each other's lives. I am grateful for the people in my life who are willing to sit in Jesus's presence with and for me.

Emotions

The emotions involved in making such a decision and transition are what one might expect: grief, anger, depression, loneliness, relief, sadness, fear, peace, comfort, uncertainty, second-guessing, confusion, lostness. The methods of processing these emotions again are as numerous as the people and personalities answering the question: journaling, prayer, debriefing, crying/allowing oneself to cry, counseling, resting in God's peace, lots of time with the Lord, talking with friends.

Many of the people who responded intimated that the journey of processing these emotions takes more time than one wants to admit.

Reentry questions

Now that I have made the decision to return to the US and have begun processing the emotions that go along with this decision and transition, the questions about reentry are growing. The

comment from one respondent that challenges me the most is "Be patient!" I am working on patience with Jesus's help. Others also mentioned giving yourself grace and time to just *be*. This is a huge life transition that should not be rushed.

Several people recommended attending a formal debriefing for missionaries. Noting that it is often an expensive investment, one person said that an alternative is to at least find a person with whom to process my emotions, experience on the field, and reentry—a trusted friend or pastor or a spiritual director.

As I prepare to get on an airplane again to change countries, I rely on the promises of God that he will never leave me and that he will, again, send an angel ahead of me to prepare the way. I leave you with two bits of advice from our colleagues:

"Knowing this is where the Lord has led you really helps—just like it did when you first went to the field."

"The Lord loves us deeply, and no matter what choices we make in the process, he is with us. Do not worry." **JH**

Photo submitted by author

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

Resources

Debriefing: (Sorry, I only have information for the US)

Missionary Training International, Debriefing & Renewal (DAR)
<https://www.mti.org/dar>

Link Care Foundation, <https://linkcare.org>

Interlude Debriefing Retreat, Barnabas International,
<https://barnabas.org/events/interlude>

Books and Articles: (Read by me or recommended by those who answered the survey)

Gina Brenna Butz, *Making Peace with Change: Navigating Life's Messy Transitions with Honesty and Grace.*

Melissa Chaplin, *Returning Well: Your Guide to Thriving Back "Home" After Serving Cross-Culturally.*

Annie F. Downs, *100 Days to Brave: Devotions for Unlocking Your Most Courageous Self.*

Sue Eenigenburg and Eva Burkholder, *Grit to Stay Grace to Go: Staying Well in Cross-Cultural Ministry.*

Emily P. Freeman, *How to Walk into a Room: The Art of Knowing When to Stay and When to Walk Away.*

Garry Friesen with J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View.*

Annie Meldrum, "I Grew Up Serving the Church in the Middle East. Coming 'Home' was Hard." Christianity Today Online Edition, August 12, 2024.

Ellen Rosenberger, *Ending Well: How to Say Goodbye to Your Life Overseas and Prepare for Re-entry.*

Amy Young, *Looming Transitions: Starting and Finishing Well in Cross-Cultural Service.*





Unexpected Succession

By Jack Garrott

Finding a successor is of vital importance for any minister and particularly for a missionary, but God may provide unexpectedly

It is widely said that there's no success without a successor. Succession is a matter of great importance for any minister, but it can reach crisis proportions in the context of organizationally independent ministries.

I arrived in Omura in 1981 as a self-supporting independent missionary with no overseas financial support. It has been a great adventure and a glorious experience of God's provision, but at 76, the question of who will pastor this congregation after I'm gone has some real urgency. By the Japanese government's designation, I am now in "the latter part of old age," so I have been seriously seeking the Lord as to whom he would designate to shepherd this flock after me.

Over the 40 years we have been operating as an organized church, there have been several people who have gone into full-time ministry and left this church, at least geographically. To some of those individuals we gave the title of assistant pastor, but none have stayed planted here. At least two I had considered as real possibilities for a successor.

But I am not worried; in fact, I have friends, including a retired pastor, who are far more anxious about it than I am! I have always felt the Lord would raise up his choice when the time came, and that seems to be happening.

Unexpected provision

Recently, the Lord started opening my eyes to someone I would never

have considered in the past. In the first place, this person is a woman, and I have been unsure about women pastors in the past. In the second place, she only has a high school education. In the third place, she suffered from clinical depression in the past to the point that she didn't leave her house for over two years. Talk about unqualified!

However, the Holy Spirit worked in her mightily, and today she is as mature, grounded, and happy a Christian as you could hope to find. Her brother-in-law and then her husband both became Christians because the changes in her were so dramatic they couldn't doubt the reality of God.

God's equipping

Some months ago, I challenged the church to step into ministries for which the Lord had equipped them, including preaching, and she volunteered. She has only preached a few times so far, but each of her messages has been solidly biblical and edifying. Her style is different from mine, and that's a good thing. Looking back, I can see that she has been increasingly central to the life of this congregation over the past several years.

Although I am a seminary graduate with a master's degree, I have never felt that academic credentials were essential for people in ministry. (They aren't bad, but they're not essential in and of themselves. After all, Christian semi-

naries didn't even exist for the first 300 years of the church!)

The question then becomes how have I been nurturing and mentoring her? I am very aware of the devil's traps, having had multiple friends who fell into adultery, either physically or emotionally, so I have not had one-to-one teaching sessions with this woman. However, my greatest goal for everyone in the congregation is to learn how God loves them individually, to listen to him, and to trust that he really does speak to them and through them. This starts with a vital, consistent devotional life. This woman has definitely grown in her understanding and devotional life, which is why I have great peace with the idea of her being my successor.

I feel she has my spiritual DNA as well as the skills to express it, and that is precisely what we need to look for in a successor. She knows the area as well as this church and has certainly experienced the transformative power of God. I feel she is God's instrument for this part of the body of Christ for the next several years at least, and I look forward to what the Lord is going to do through her. **JH**

Image: Vecteezy.com

Jack Garrott was born in 1948 in Fukuoka to American Southern Baptist missionaries. He has lived in Omura, Nagasaki, as a self-supporting independent missionary since 1981 and is the pastor of Shinsei no Sato Christian Church.

Don't be a know-it-all

By Wendy Marshall



Last year, I listened to a podcast where Jonathan and Elizabeth Trotter were interviewed about the missionary life cycle. Elizabeth Trotter is the editor of the website/blog *A Life Overseas*, and they both are part of the writing team there. The related blog article at <https://www.alifeoverseas.com/the-missionary-life-cycle-in-five-stages> is definitely worth a read.

These are the five stages of the missionary life cycle that Jonathan came up with from his long experience on the mission field and with missionaries:

1. Idealist/ignorant (pre-field)
2. Learner/survivor (arrival to year two)
3. Established/workaholic (year two to year seven)
4. Experienced/pessimistic (year seven to year infinity)

5. Learner/know-it-all

Jonathan described these stages using two types of approaches people often fall into. Of course, this is a generalisation. It's only one way to look at the missionary life, but it is a model to help us think about the different ways people approach cross-cultural work. It also helps to explain the differences, say, between me and someone who has just arrived in Japan. Jonathan gives this advice about the ways to best help our colleagues:

1. Nurture the idealists while cautioning the ignorant.
2. Mentor the learners. Encourage the survivors.

3. Encourage the established.
4. Listen to the experienced.
5. Keep on learning. All of us, all the time.

The last one is really important for those of us who've been here a longer time. Always seek to have a learning posture! Share your wisdom and experience to those who will listen, offer your help, but don't be a know-it-all or a jerk. **JH**

Was it enough?

By Eileen Barkman

When we ask, "Did we do enough?" Jesus answers with his all-sufficiency

Stepping out of ministry in Japan has evoked a variety of thoughts and feelings in us. Since our return to the US on July 13, 2024, one of the nagging questions we frequently find ourselves asking is "Did we do enough?"

Did we share Jesus's love enough? Did we pray enough? Did we explain the gospel clearly enough? Did we engage in spiritual conversations enough?

If you have ever asked yourselves questions like these—wondering if you have done enough of this or that—you well know the guilt that quickly rises! No answer to any of these questions is good enough.

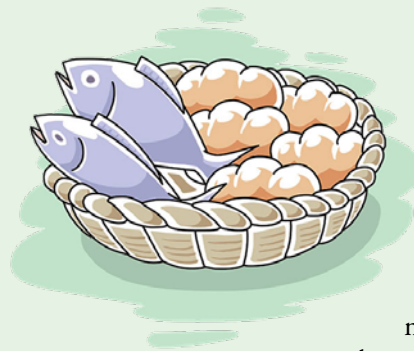
God so kindly led me to recall the story of the five loaves and two fish in the feeding of the 5,000. Here was a boy who gave his small lunch to Jesus. Was it enough? Of course not! When 5,000 men (plus women and

children) are hungry, no one really could have even expected that it would be enough! That wasn't the point. Not even 1,000 loaves would have been enough!

But the boy gave all he had to Jesus, and *Jesus* was the one who made the lunch *enough* for all who were hungry. And as we all know, there were leftovers—twelve baskets full!

And speaking of the boy, I realized that in three out of the four gospel stories of this incident, the boy is not even referred to at all! It is all about Jesus and how he took a lunch and multiplied it so that each person in the hungry crowd was satisfied to the full.

Maybe we are asking the wrong questions. Obviously, it's not about the



boy or his lunch after all. Nor is it about me, the missionary. And the little lunch we brought to Jesus was sadly pitiful and definitely *not* even close to

being enough. But when

Jesus takes it, blesses it, and multiplies it for his purposes and for the praise of *his* glorious name, it is simply amazing what he can accomplish!

Let's celebrate the all-sufficiency of our precious Lord Jesus! He has been, is, and always will be, *enough*. And he will continue to carry on the good work he has begun in Japan! **JH**

Eileen Barkman, along with her husband, Dave, served in Japan with SEND International from 1985 to July 2024. They have transitioned to ministry to family in Kansas, US.

Finding treasures in darkness

We found hope in God as things went from bad to worse for my mom during the covid pandemic

By Kari Miyano

August 2021 found me in deep despair. Things were shut down due to covid, masks were required in Japan, and this was not the way I wanted to live. To make matters worse, my mom in America told me she had been experiencing pain in her lower back and leg.

Two times she had called 911 to get emergency help due to extreme pain. By September, Mom was scheduled for back surgery. Somehow a little piece of her backbone had chipped off, and this chip was pressing on a nerve, creating intense pain. My sister Kristi, in Alabama (US), told me to start working on getting to America so I could be there to help care for Mom as she recovered from surgery. This was a big deal as there were not many flights. I bought tickets for mid-November, the earliest I could get time off from work.

Covid enters the story

Mom's pain was so severe that we were all looking forward to the day of surgery. Mom's condition was worsening, and then, right before surgery, she was diagnosed with covid.

This is an excerpt from my prayer letter on Monday, September 27, 2021.

Hello friends. Thank you for your continued prayers for my mom, Lois. Today I heard an encouraging statement, "Value the process, not just the result." So, I am seeking to value this whole process. It seems to me God is concerned with personal relationships and drawing people together at this time, as well as healing Mom.

Prayer points are still the same.

1. Complete healing from covid.
2. Amazingly successful surgery Wednesday this week.

And in the process God is leading me to share this story so that He can be glorified, and that people can be encouraged as we're all going through trials at this time.

I'm grateful for the way I have learned how to pray and put my trust in the faithful character of God and his word. Thank you everyone for your support!

With love,
Kari

"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:17-18 NKJV).

Then the doctor told Kristi that Mom first needed to recover from covid before she could have surgery. Things were going from bad to worse. Kristi sent a picture of Mom lying in bed in the emergency room with a white sheet covering

her. She looked dead, and when I saw it, I burst into tears, thinking that Mom was close to death. "Lord, I cannot argue with you. If this is your time to take Mom home to heaven, I will accept that and surrender her to you," I prayed as I cried. I sent an email letter of love and appreciation to Mom and asked Kristi to read it to her in case this was the last chance for me to convey my love to her.

As I shared this news with a seasoned missionary-pastor friend in Japan, she told me to quit looking at that picture and start believing that Mom would live. My husband also told me to start praying for Mom to live. He said it wasn't time for her to die. I embraced these words, which led me to live by faith and not by sight.

Living by faith

Taking their advice, I decided to launch a prayer siege and petition the Lord for Mom's healing from covid.¹ By this time, I had my own Zoom account, and Zoom prayer calls were a regular part of my life. I decided to start a daily 10-minute call to pray for Mom. I invited family, friends, and friends of Mom. I also started keeping a daily journal and sending out regular updates on Mom's condition so people would know how they could pray.

Kristi took on the task of bringing Mom to her home to nurture her back to health because the hospital was full of covid patients and there was no room for her there. It was a big ordeal as Mom could barely walk, was in great pain, and the electrolytes in her body were low, making it hard for her to get better. Mom's best friend Carol, in Minnesota, began showing up regularly on the Zoom prayer call. We used different Scriptures to pray for healing, strength, and miracles. We even prayed that the bone chip would move and stop pressing on the nerve and that surgery wouldn't be needed. Many days it was just the two of us. How grateful I was for Carol's love, support, and faithfulness to pray together daily.

I wanted to send a care package to Mom, and so I asked Dawn, a friend I knew from a different online prayer group. Dawn couldn't follow through due to a change in her schedule, so she suggested Elizabeth, another prayer group member, instead. As providence would have it, both Dawn and Elizabeth lived only about 45 minutes from Kristi and Mom!

Elizabeth filled up a basket of goodies in a creative and beautiful way and brought them over to Kristi's house. Elizabeth happened to be a retired nurse, and she began helping observe Mom's health and gave Kristi insights on what to do. A visiting nurse was also seeing Mom on a regular basis. I continued to get regular updates from Kristi and would share these with my prayer people.



Kristi, Mom, Kari

Kristi bought Mom a red walker with wheels and hand-brakes so she could walk to the bathroom or to the kitchen table. It was all she could do to get to the dining table. When she got there, she could barely eat, and Kristi had to coax her to take a few bites. Mom lost 20 pounds over this period and had difficulty in speaking. She got out of breath easily and could only speak short sentences.

Healing

We continued longing and praying for Mom to be restored to health. Finally, after 68 days, Mom was healed of covid. God had come through. My husband and missionary-pastor friend were right. It was not the time for Mom to die, though I was at first disheartened when I looked at the photo that screamed of death.

Adding to the joy, while the surgery was delayed, the little bone chip miraculously moved! It was no longer pressing on Mom's nerve. The pain had lifted. Surgery was no longer needed! Hallelujah! God had come through in a huge, surprising, and glorious way!

Mom still needed to regain strength and get her voice back, but she was on the way to recovery. How I praised the Lord for his faithfulness and for each one of the prayer friends who rallied with me.

By the time I arrived in America in November 2021, Mom had completely recovered from covid, could walk and move on her own again, gotten her voice back, and was free from back pain! She did not need my help to recover from surgery because the surgery was not needed. Instead, my sister, Mom, and I, along with my adult children, were able to have a very joyous Thanksgiving, thanking God for how

he had granted us a miracle. It turned out to be the first Thanksgiving that my sister, Mom, and I had had together in over 30 years. Our hearts were full of praise and thanksgiving to our great God. I was able to stay through December, and we also got to celebrate Christmas together. This was completely different from what I was expecting in September when I thought that Mom might die. God had done immeasurably more than we could ask or even imagine, according to his power that was at work in us, just like it is written in Ephesians 3:20.

Postscript

In September 2024, Mom told me about a recent dream. At first, everything was black, but then a small airplane pulling a banner appeared. On the banner was written Isaiah 45:3. She remembered it when she woke up in the morning and went to find out what Isaiah 45:3 says. It reads, "I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord who call you by your name, am the God of Israel." After she shared the dream with me, the Lord reminded me that I had written down this story and saved it on my computer. I felt it was time to share this story and give honor to the Lord for what he did and tell how he gave us great treasures that came through a time of extreme darkness and loss of hope. **JH**

1. A prayer siege means that you diligently and persistently pray about a specific issue.

Photo submitted by author

Kari Miyano (USA) and her Japanese husband are proud to be new grandparents. One of her missions is to teach the gospel as she works as a part-time English teacher. She enjoys biking and tennis.

Offering hope in unexpected pregnancies

How does a regular employee at a company come to lead an organization that supports women with unexpected pregnancies?

Miyoko Tomita has been the head of Life Hope Network (LHN lifehopenet.com) since April 2024. LHN was founded in 2005 with this mission statement: “By God’s grace and for His glory, to help women (and men) facing a hard time in their lives due to unexpected pregnancy or post-abortion trauma to make good life decisions and find true healing.” I took the opportunity to interview Miyoko about LHN for *Japan Harvest*.

Question: What kinds of things do you and your volunteers do at LHN?

Answer: We offer crisis pregnancy counseling and post-abortion counseling by phone and email, and we have a home for pregnant women who need a place to live. (We call them “homestays.”)

Q: Why do you think LHN is a needed ministry in Japan?

A: Not all organizations trying to help at-risk pregnant women in Japan are pro-life. Other organizations also seek to help, but their focus is on a safe birth and no child abuse later. From that standpoint, an abortion can be a good option for women who are wavering. But we’ve learned that even in truly difficult cases, the consequences of abortion lead to depression and regret. We also want to save the baby’s life. So there must be someone who can really speak for the baby. In fact, many pregnant women who contact us say they are thankful that we have a clear opinion instead of saying, “It’s just your choice.” As for post-abortion counseling, there are simply very few organizations doing it.

Q: What is your approach to post-abortion counseling?

A: As Christians, we don’t say it was a good decision to abort, but at the same time, we believe this is not the end of their life, and their life must go on. God can provide a way forward. The first step is to accept the feeling of sadness and regret, and know that God will forgive you. We clearly explain that Jesus has died for them. Then we encourage them to accept the forgiveness of sins, forgive others, and move forward.

Q: Has anyone believed in Jesus through the counseling?

A: It’s done with emails, and we don’t often meet them in person, so it’s a little difficult to see if they have really become a believer. But over the course of the counseling, there are many who feel very relieved by the fact that Jesus forgave them. They pray to be forgiven. They sometimes even ask for a Bible or other books and for a recommendation of a church near them. Sometimes there are women who used to go to church but have quit. After the counselling, they start going back to church.

Q: Tell us about the post-abortion video series.

A: We’ve been using a two-page written text to lead clients through the steps for healing. But these days, young people are used to very short messaging and videos on YouTube and TikTok. It’s been our desire to do this study in an easier way, so we started turning the written studies into a video series, which will be completed in Spring 2025. We feel the video that explains the gospel is especially good.

Q: Why did you get involved at LHN?

A: When I was at college, I was involved in a group helping homeless people. It wasn’t a Christian group, and I wasn’t a Christian then, but I just liked going and helping them. After college, I started to work for a regular company, but I was still going there to help as a volunteer. When I moved from Tokyo to Nagoya, I found it difficult to continue. I even searched for groups in Nagoya and went several times, but it didn’t work out.

Then I started attending the church associated with LHN. I saw what Cynthia was doing (taking in pregnant women who needed a place to live), and I thought, “Well, these women are also homeless.” After being baptized, I casually asked if there was anything I could do and began training in post-abortion counseling.

Q: What did you learn as a LHN volunteer?

A: That abortion is so painful. I was overwhelmed by how these women react, how they regret and weep over their babies. It was so sad to read all the emails. On the other hand, there was the joy of birth. How the homestays looked so happy and proud of their babies. How the little baby becomes a treasure in life. I think knowing this contrast is the backbone of our ministry.

Q: What's it like to take over a ministry from a missionary who is also the founder?

A: This has been Cynthia's ministry from the start, so sometimes people from the government or around us know Cynthia's name rather than LHN. Because Cynthia was a foreigner and she's been always quick to act, that's how everything started and has been sustained until now. We don't have a manual or process; it's really case by case. The post-abortion counseling has also been very personal, based on each counselor's style. I think if this ministry had been started by a Japanese, they would have more structure and it would be easier to step into as the leader. But Cynthia is still around, so the transition can happen gradually. It's better than the missionary suddenly leaving.

Q: How did you decide to become the leader of LHN?

A: I volunteered for eight years. Cynthia told me if I wanted to be more seriously involved, I needed to go to seminary. When I was going to seminary, I was still working. Going to seminary and getting married made me gradually want to quit my job. Cynthia then asked me (or kept asking me!).

I find counseling is hard, but not miserably hard for me. For other people, it is depressing or all-consuming. So I feel God has gifted me for counseling in that way.



Q: How did God prepare you for the leadership of LHN?

A: I think working at a regular company for 13 years was something God let me do because I needed it. I learned things through my job, for example, relationships with colleagues, managing finances, and doing presentations.

I think getting married made me feel more comfortable about asking for help. Before that, I had been trying to do everything by myself. But marriage made me more relaxed, and my husband can always tell when I'm working too hard. Even if I become a leader, it doesn't mean I need to stand alone.

Q: Does your husband's job have anything to do with LHN?

A: He's the pastoral intern at the church affiliated with LHN. Homestays are supposed to come to church on Sundays, and he has a chance to meet them and talk with them. Even former homestays come to the church after they give birth and leave LHN. Since they have no background in Christianity, he tries to connect with them, especially through the simple kids' message that is part of worship.

Q: Just as an aside, do you have any advice for Christian women who are interested in getting married?

A: There is a time for everything. I was 36 and he was 47 when we got married. It's very late, but I don't wish we could be 10 years younger. You can never be too late, and you don't need to feel pressure.

Q: What's the most enjoyable part of your ministry?

A: The babies! When they're born and after they're born, and sometimes we get to see them grow up.

Q: What's the most difficult thing for you?

A: When someone contacts us saying that she just had an abortion when her situation was such that she should have given birth 120% [the abortion could have been avoided].

Q: What is your vision for LHN?

A: My desire is that having a baby is something that is celebrated, which doesn't always happen. We're trying to encourage pregnant women to celebrate. It would be great if we could use every opportunity to promote this celebration. **JH**

Photo of Miyoko Tomita submitted by author

Cynthia Ruble lives with her adopted son, Micah, in Nagoya, where she helped start Life Hope Network, a crisis pregnancy ministry.

Member care: the “why” and the “what”

Any number of challenging issues could take missionaries off the field. JEMA's ministry of member care offers various ways to build resilience and health for those called to proclaim the gospel.

In our own missionary experience in Japan in the 1980s, member care would have undoubtedly helped our well-being and effectiveness. A decade ago, as my wife, Judy, and I began shepherding missionaries (through Barnabas International), we inquired about the need for member care in Japan. Former JEMA President Dale Little suggested that one way to investigate was to “just keep showing up.” So, we did. As we interacted with missionaries at various gatherings, we found a great desire for intentional encouragement.

We found that Faith De La Cour (serving with Asian Access at the time) had done some work in this vital area through JEMA before returning to the US for another assignment. And some of the larger missions were developing their care practices. But for the most part, member care was not yet a significant focus.

Recognizing that resilient missionaries are better able to complete the work God has called them to do, in 2015 the JEMA Leadership Team requested that Judy and I help reboot member care through JEMA for the missionary community in Japan.

We held member care training retreats in 2016 and 2018 and spoke several times on the topic at JEMA Connect in 2017. A JEMA Member Care Committee was formed with people from various missions, and the following purpose statement was constructed to guide the committee's work:

The JEMA Member Care Ministry exists to inform, educate, and resource the missionary community in Japan in order to strengthen their well-being and resilience.

The Member Care Committee works to make available: workshops, retreats, training, and care consultations (in English) to missionaries and Christian workers.

The goal of member care is to help missionaries stay resilient and healthy in their personal, spiritual, relational, and ministry lives. The JEMA Member Care Committee, now under the capable

leadership of Janet Dallman (OMF), seeks to contribute to this goal by:

- providing resources on the JEMA website;
- offering spiritual retreats;
- conducting workshops;
- meeting individuals for care conversations;
- hosting in-person and online gatherings to strengthen resilience, marriages, and spiritual vitality;
- publishing articles in *Japan Harvest*; and
- sharing member care information and opportunities through quarterly “JEMA Member Care News and Notes” emails.

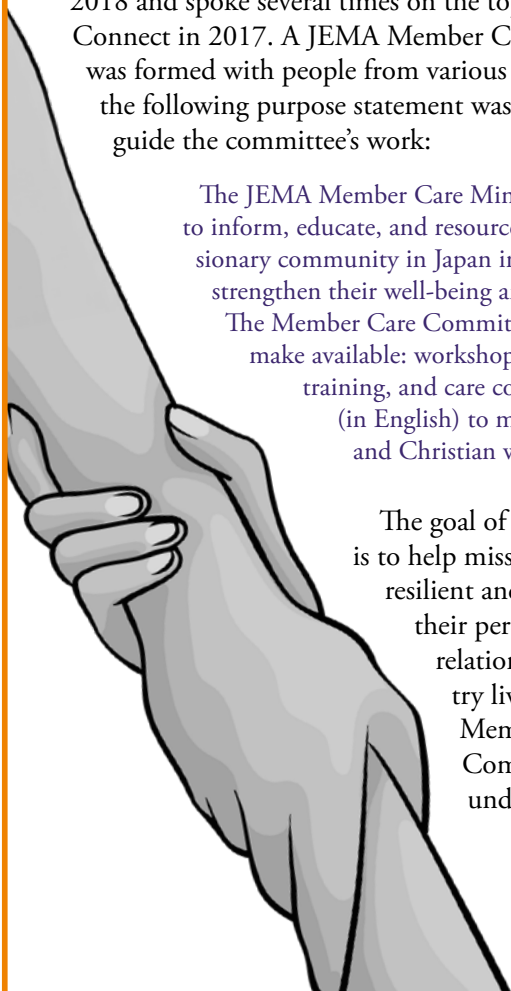
As the community of missionaries in Japan grows, and as the challenges of missionary life and work impact a new generation of missionaries, member care will be vital in assisting the overall vision of reaching Japan for Christ. If you or your organization have a member care need or some ideas about how to take this forward for a new generation, please do not hesitate to contact the JEMA Member Care Committee (jp.mca@omfmail.com). **JH**

Committee member photos submitted by author

Alan Steier and his wife, Judy, have served with Barnabas International for the past 12 years, traveling from their home base in the US to serve missionaries. They were formerly members of the JEMA Member Care Committee.



Current committee members (clockwise from top left): Janet Dallman, Catherine Porter, Nathan Lim, Chris Mason



Coaching in evangelism and discipleship

Our questions are the most powerful tools for ministry

The following, seemingly contradictory, comments not only came from the same person but came in the same conversation:

“I am convinced that the teachings of Jesus Christ are something that all people should live by.”

“I am just not ready to choose Christianity.”

On the surface, it sounded like many other conversations I have had over the years with Japanese people, but there was something about the way he used the word “choose” that caught my attention.

A few strategic questions and listening to the answers revealed why, questions like:

- What makes Christianity so compelling to you?
- What do you mean by “choose”?
- What makes “making the right choice” important to you?

Like the majority of Japanese, Mr. A had grown up Buddhist. Generations of his family had belonged to a particular Buddhist sect until suddenly, and without discussion, the family matriarch changed sects. Mr. A’s father was not happy and made it clear that, once his children became adults, they would never be bound by his religious choices. Mr. A, therefore, has spent his entire adult life carrying this weight of choice on his shoulders. This choice was, unknowingly, creating an obstacle in his spiritual journey. He knew what he wanted; he just couldn’t “choose” it.

Every person that we meet is on a spiritual journey of some kind. It is of vital importance that we are open to finding out where people are on their journey and to respond appropriately.

One of the unwritten rules of coaching is that during a formal coaching session, we must be listening 75 percent of the time and only asking questions the other 25 percent—but not just any questions. Powerful questions. Questions that prompt the coachee to share their entire journey—where they have been, where they are now, and where they want to go. Questions that create awareness for the coachee of the obstacles and the real reasons they exist. Coaching is about helping the coachee take responsibility for their journey.

Good questions are not the sole realm of the coach. They are tools for all of us, any who truly want to engage with those around us in a meaningful way, who want to see evangelism and discipleship not simply as a task, something to check off our to-do list, but a relationship. A journey with another.

But relationships are complicated, right? How do we know what questions to ask? When to be listening? When to be speaking? When to be speaking directly into a person’s life?

In coaching circles, we often use the terms “angle” or “360° questions”. They are designed to help the coachee see things from a different angle, a different perspective. Questions like:

- What are the underlying issues?
- What are emotions you are experiencing?
- What are the values you are trying to honour here?
- In what way does this affect other areas of your life? Your family? Work?

For Mr. A, progress in his spiritual journey required not just introducing him to Jesus, but having his weighty burden of choice lifted. Our conversations centred around his values, in particular making the right choice of religion for his family. After some time, he realised that rather than facing one big choice, he was facing multiple smaller choices, including one which would eventually lead his wife to come to faith and influence Mr. A in turn. Mr. A’s spiritual journey continues, and he is now more open to having deeper conversations.

As we journey with those around us, those in our churches and communities, we must take the time to truly listen, ask questions that matter, and pay attention to the answers. We must also be praying that the Lord our God will give us listening ears and listening hearts. **JH**



Steve Manders, from Australia, arrived in Japan in December 2006. After many years of both church planting and church revitalisation, he currently serves as Ministry Coach for OMF Japan. He can be contacted on jp.ministrycoach@omfmail.com

Model of missions: hero or *hiryō*

Whether conscious or unconscious, our view of the role of a missionary significantly impacts our praxis. Are we hoping for credit as the hero or willing to be forgotten in God's broader story?

“Poop!”¹ my colleague blurted out when I asked our team to describe 肥料 (*hiryō*, fertilizer). We were at our annual training event at the base of Mt. Bandai in beautiful Fukushima, discussing the differences between being a *hero* and *hiryō* as missionaries. The comparison is a convergence of what I have learned about mission work over the last two decades and my love for 親父ギャグ (dad jokes). Images related to the word “hero” come to mind quickly, but few people think much about fertilizer unless they are gardeners or farmers. When I was in Boy Scouts, we had a fundraiser selling various types of fertilizer. I remember driving around with my dad in his truck and unloading fifty-pound bags of some mysterious substance to our friends and neighbors, which I didn’t understand but that they were willing to buy.

Patrick Fung described the second general director of the China Inland Mission, D. E. Hoste, in this way: “He lived to be forgotten in order that Christ may be remembered.”² As I look at Scripture and reflect on my understanding of church history, I am drawn to this quote. I believe the ministry of cross-cultural workers is central to the expansion of the kingdom of God yet it is primarily a call to give our lives, work really hard, and be forgotten in the process. A call not to be a hero but *hiryō*. This is not an unfortunate reality but good missiology.

Hero

When I first came to Japan in 2005, I believed the rural area where I was living would change because of my presence. God had called me to this unreached country. I had experience in ministry, and I believed that God would do something new because I was there. In short, I viewed myself as a hero in the story of what God was doing in Okuchi.

In my experience, most of us would adamantly deny viewing ourselves as heroes in the story of what God is doing in Japan and in our local contexts. We say, with sincerity, that we are here to serve. At the same time, we struggle when we don’t get credit for our contribution or if our ministry is less fruitful than others. I remember once I shared a ministry idea with our ministry partner. A few days later in a meeting, he shared the idea without giving me credit. The group loved it and decided to give it a try—and it went well. I am ashamed to say that I was more upset about not getting credit than I was excited about the fruit we saw in our ministry. I was more interested in being

recognized for the good idea than God being honored and the kingdom advancing through this idea. I wanted to be the hero.

Sometimes Japanese churches can hold hero-like expectations of a missionary. They may be convinced that a missionary can overcome certain problems that they can’t solve themselves. I understand the reasoning behind this thinking, but the dangers of this often-subconscious belief are obvious. It’s not helpful to think of missionaries as heroes.

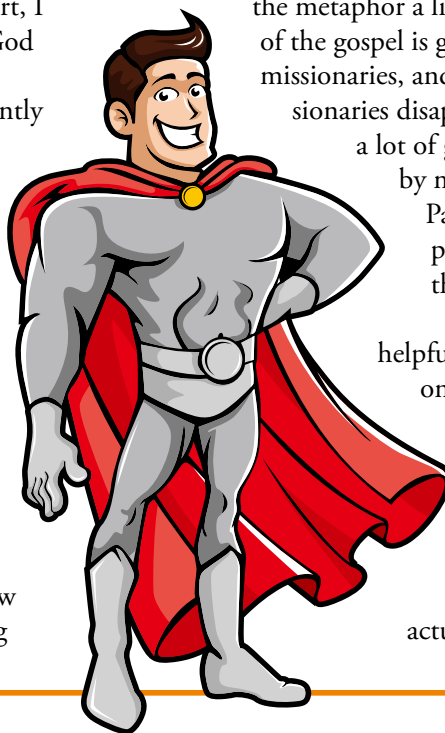
History also serves up heroes. Following World War II, many missionaries came to Japan and did amazing work. I am humbled by these men and women of faith and perseverance, and we see their legacies continuing today. I have been encouraged by the stories of the Kaylors in Kyushu and the Meekos in Tohoku. But there is also an (often unvoiced) expectation that missionaries today will have the same capacity, gifting, and fruit as the postwar generation. It is also significant that the individuals who are most often remembered are those who had the most spectacular or broadest-reaching impact. The majority of the postwar generation have been (appropriately) forgotten. There is an expectation that we will imitate the few who God used to do exceptional things instead of the thousands who lived faithful and fruitful lives and were forgotten.

Hiryō

When used correctly, fertilizer provides nutrition and strengthens a crop that is already growing. The right amount at the right time can help multiply what is already growing. Fertilizer can do little on its own. If we expand the metaphor a little further, we can see how the seed of the gospel is good, the field doesn’t belong to the missionaries, and when everything else goes well, missionaries disappear in the process. When a field bears a lot of good fruit, the fertilizer is forgotten by most people, except for the farmer. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:5–9, the participants are insignificant; God makes things grow.

So why do I think *hiryō*/fertilizer is a helpful metaphor? Other than the weak play on words, I think it provides a picture of how the missionary can bring value without becoming too central in the process. Fertilizer applied at the proper time helps the plant grow healthier and bear more fruit.

Too much or the wrong timing can actually harm the plant. There are also



three helpful built-in assumptions with this metaphor. There is an assumption that somebody else is responsible for the field, that a plant or crop is already bearing fruit in that field, and finally, that missionaries are a type of fertilizer helpful in Japan. The chart below provides a simple comparison of the two approaches to mission:

Table 1 - Qualities of a Hero and Hiryō

Hero	Hiryō
Is the solution	Adds nutrition
Works alone	Is part of a process (and team)
Gets the credit	Is forgotten
Looks cool	Is not a glamorous role
Looks good in a newsletter	Is often hard to describe

From idea to practice

No metaphor is perfect, but I really like this one. I believe in the value of missionaries working cross-culturally to help reach communities where Christ is unknown. In some circles I have also observed momentum toward viewing missionaries as heroes, and in other circles, as unnecessary. We need to avoid both traps. Missionaries are not the ultimate answer—we would all agree that Christ and the gospel are. There is also a tremendous need for missionaries



in Japan, where well over 99% of the population is not actively following Jesus.

I love how the image of fertilizer fights both of these traps. As missionaries, we are not central but add nutrition to the soil for the gospel to bear fruit. In the right amount and with the right timing, we can be both significant and forgotten in the process. In ministry, we have the perfect seed. The gospel is sufficient. We are ministering in the country of Japan, where there are specific needs and challenges. How do we orient our lives in such a way that the soil is enriched and Christ is remembered? Is my ultimate desire to be the hero of the story, or am I ready to embrace a strategy in which I am likely to be forgotten, underappreciated, yet pleasing to our Father in heaven? **JH**

1. I've always wanted to start an article with the word poop (smile).
2. Patrick Fung, *Live to be Forgotten*, OMF International, 2008, Forward, Kindle.

Illustrations: Vecteezy.com

Robert Adair is a Texan who serves in Miyagi Prefecture through a partnership with Shiogama Bible Baptist Church and as the Director of A3 Missional Partners. He is married to Roberta and the father of four energetic boys.

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Being like the youngest

A challenge to change how we talk with people might prompt us to consider how we relate to others as missionaries

Several months ago, my pastor was giving me some feedback about how I interact with people at church. It was helpful because he pointed out that I tend to tell them what I know about a given subject in an effort to continue the conversation. Then he asked me what Jesus said to his disciples in Luke's gospel when they were arguing about who was the greatest.

“The greatest among you should be like . . .’ What does he say next?”

“Doesn't he say, ‘like a servant to all?’”

“That's what everyone says! Have a look. It's different in Luke. ‘The greatest among you should be like the youngest’” (Luke 22:26 NIV).

What does it mean to be like the youngest? In particular, what does it mean to be like the youngest when you have come to Japan as a missionary or Christian expat with the intention of encouraging or training Japanese people to live for Christ?

In my case, becoming youngest actually started with becoming aware of something I did in conversations, probably out of habit. I have been blessed with a good memory and come from a family that enjoys conversing about various current affairs, news, and politics. I then became a journalist, where it was my job to “know things” so I could write about them.

This habit had seeped into my conversations, as I could respond as someone who knew something about many things (although I often knew less than I let on). This would mean my response to a Japanese friend talking about something might be “そう、そう (Yes, that's right)” indicating that I might know something that I could talk about. I would say that to encourage them to keep going, but the danger is that it actually hinders them from continuing as I start talking about the things I want to say.

My pastor encouraged me to answer as someone who doesn't know anything about the subject but is interested to know more. Saying “へー、そうなん (Really? That's cool).”

Subtle? Yes. Difficult? Yes, even in my native language. Worth doing? Absolutely, if I want to take Jesus seriously and grow as a disciple who encourages other disciples.

What it comes down to is finding ways to encourage the other person to speak more (which education experts tell us is what they will remember best) and for us to speak less. This tangibly shows that we care about what the other person has to say more than what we might say in response.

This means that we need to be secure in ourselves so that we do not feel threatened when we don't get to say our bit. This goes back to issues of identity, which I wrote about in the two earlier issues of *Japan Harvest*. Do we rejoice because we are God's beloved child? Are we secure in the Lord Jesus, and are we seeking a stronger relationship with him above all others?

The context of the passage my pastor referred to is helpful in understanding this idea of being youngest. Jesus makes his comment because the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. We can reject the way of gentile kings, who seek to lord it over others, because we are loved by our heavenly Father who has our future secure in the Lord Jesus. Instead, if we are seeking to be great among God's people, a good place to start may be as a person who is able to encourage others to speak and open up about themselves.

While it may feel we are missing opportunities to teach others initially, I think we (including me) need to trust that Jesus knows what he's talking about. Whether we are pastors, teachers at a seminary or other school, working with students or at a church, how might we act like the youngest? If we do that, how might it change us and the people around us? **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.



Show Them Jesus

Jack Klumpenhower (New Growth Press, 2014)

Japanese Title: 見せようイエスさまを 福音に生きる子どもたちを育む
Translated by Nozomu Kusunoki (いのちのことば社、2024)

“I read a lot of great books at Bible college, but this is the only one that ever made me cry,” said the lady who began the book launch of the Japanese translation of *Show Them Jesus*. At the launch we heard many more testimonies of tears, repentance, and change, not only in how we teach children, but also in how we approach God our Father.

In *Show Them Jesus*, Jack Klumpenhower vividly and humbly illustrates his own journey from teaching kids moral lessons to understanding the need to show kids Jesus every week from every part of Scripture. In this powerfully raw testimony, the author shares his mistakes and his pride to highlight the change that God wrought in him.

The book reinforces the idea that, rather than merely assenting to the formula “Jesus died for my sins,” we want kids to know and love the *person* of Jesus more and more. In chapter 7, Klumpenhower shares a story of a group of kids to whom he asked, “Why is Jesus better than anything else?” All they could answer was “Because he forgives our sins and takes us to heaven.” In response, he began a year-long project to write a list of all the reasons why Jesus is better than anything else and keep it on the wall. Together, they discovered more than 70 reasons from all over the Bible. I wonder, if we all began such a list, how would God grow in us a greater love and appreciation of Jesus.

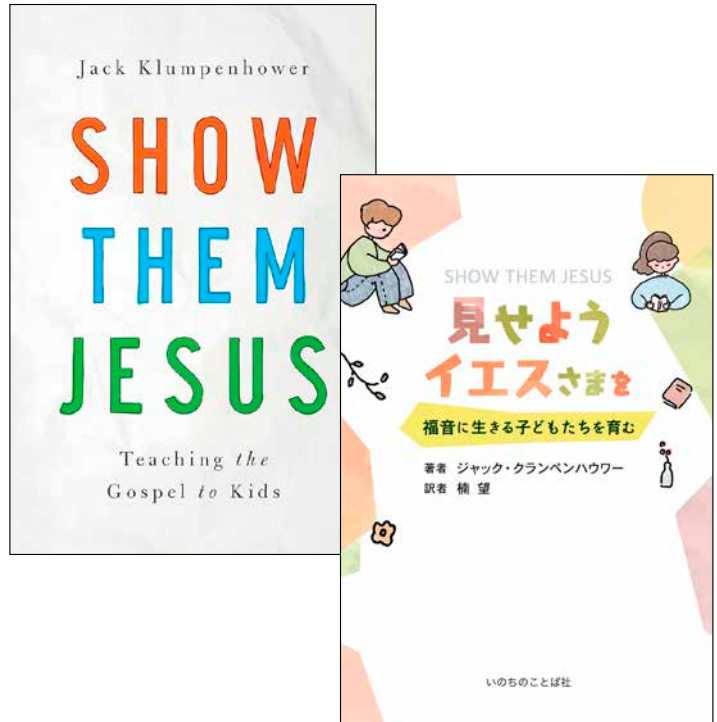
How to show kids Jesus

This book is not a curriculum book and is also not just another gospel-centred-life book. It seeks to show the reader what it’s like to become a person who marvels at Jesus from all of Scripture, then learns to teach children to do the same. This is something that is already happening in Japan with those who translated the book and with those who are reading it and talking to one another about how they’re growing and changing.

As well as sharing moving stories, the author takes his readers through many examples of how to show kids Jesus from the Bible, and he addresses practical issues and challenges common objections.

Avoiding content overload

While this is an immensely helpful book, the author briefly points out his own tendency to overload kids with too much content. Teachers who



love the Bible will always have a lot they want to share with the kids. A child overwhelmed by information is likely to assume that they aren’t good enough to comprehend what is being said. However, overloading kids is not loving, and it does not model grace to kids in the way that Klumpenhower advocates throughout the book. It is a minor point, but I would have liked him to take this concern more seriously.

A great book

This would be a great book for pastors, who could then guide their ministry team through it. Anyone teaching kids, including parents, will benefit from reading it.

It is exciting to anticipate the effect this book might have on children’s ministries in Japan. It’s available in print and audio book in English and in print in Japanese. Praise God for this useful book! **JH**

Book covers from Amazon

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

Our needs change

Missionaries need different kinds of member care as they journey from arrival to retirement

Your agency may already have trained member care personnel living in Japan. Perhaps you have structures and systems in place that provide effective care for all your members from recruitment through to retirement. For those who don't, I hope that sharing my experience over the last few years with WEC Japan will give you ideas that can be applied in your own context.

Starting a member care team

In WEC Japan, member care has traditionally been the job of the branch leader. When there were only 20 branch members, this model worked fairly well. But then, we grew. Some of that growth was fast: Post-Covid, the borders to Japan reopened and many who had been waiting years to arrive suddenly flooded in. WEC Japan grew to over 50 members. In preparation for the influx of new workers, we formed a member care team.

The joy of forming a new team is that you can choose what to focus on. But this is also the struggle—we couldn't do everything straight away.

Our team began simply by trying to lighten the load the branch leader had been carrying. Who could do airport pickups? Who could help new workers find accommodation and start at language school? What about church placements? We also planned orientation events every six months, trying to provide community and teaching as well as a place to share the challenges and confusion of arriving in a new environment.

Helping new missionaries

Are you familiar with the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Scale, also known as “The Social Readjustment Rating Scale”?¹ It gives a list of life events, assigning a number to each one according to the level of stress associated with it. You mark any event on the list that has happened to you in the last year, then at the end, you add up your stress score. If your score is between 150 and 300, it suggests that you have a 50 percent chance of having health problems in the next two years. If your score is over 300, the odds rise to 80 percent. The list includes things like “Changing to a different line of work—36”, “Major change in living condition—25”, “Major changes in working hours or conditions—20”. For new workers, the points quickly add up.

Everything about their lives has changed. Consider their arrival in a new country, being surrounded by new people, new food, plus everything being in a foreign language . . . This is a time when member care is very much needed. Having people to walk alongside

them, people to pray with, people to ask when they don't understand how to throw the trash out—it all makes a difference.

This is where WEC's new member care team focused. It was the most urgent, pressing need for us at that time. But it's been three years since the team was formed, and there is now space to think about the rest of the missionary life cycle.

Growing resilience

As workers finish a period of orientation and become more proficient in Japanese language, many begin full-time work with Japanese-led churches. Others become part of church planting teams or support ministries. They make another massive transition.

I wonder sometimes whether this transition from orientation to ministry is easier than the transition they made when they first arrived in Japan. I know that for me it wasn't. At that point, the honeymoon period was over. I began to sit in long Japanese meetings where I struggled to grasp what was going on, let alone contribute. I began to dread the phrase “the Japanese do it this way.” And the workload! It took everything I had and more. Even having finished language school, my language ability wasn't enough to feel “fed” in a church service, much less feed others.

How can we support our workers during these years? Perhaps it's during this time that teaching resilience can be helpful—to share with our workers practices that will help them persevere.

The book *Resilience in Life and Faith* (by Horsfall and Hawker) contains the SPECS model of resilience. SPECS stands for Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Cognitive, and Creative, and finally, Social and Systemic.

Spiritual resilience means not only looking at our relationship with God and how we grow in that, but also how we are doing with forgiveness and gratitude. Physical resilience involves not just regular exercise, but also our sleeping patterns, weight and diet, rest, and holidays. Learning to be emotionally resilient gives us strategies for managing stress and anxieties. It encourages us to seek resources from others who might know more, such as through spiritual direction or counselling. Cognitive and creative resilience includes looking at our theology of suffering as well as problem-solving techniques. Lastly, the social and systemic aspect is about our relationships—yes, with those closest to us, but also with our mission team and organisation.

If we can identify areas in our lives where we are less resilient, we have the chance to make changes. To not

just avoid burnout but to thrive. Too many workers leave Japan around the time of their second term. I'd love to see that change. I believe it can.

Later in the missionary's life cycle

I've been in this country for 14 years. If I was asked what member care I would like to receive now, it would be different from 14 years ago. Have you heard of the term "self-actualisation"? It means to realise one's full potential and is at the top of the pyramid in psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. To reach the top, your basic needs must be met first: food, water, and shelter. You then need safety and security. Next, good community and a good sense of who you are. Now I am looking at my life with new awareness of the gifts and experiences God has given me, and I'm thinking, how does he want me to use these for the kingdom? What is he calling me to now that I wouldn't have been able to do 14 years ago?

I am convinced that God is still saying, "Go into the world and make disciples." But the way I do that as I grow will change. New doors will open, and it will be right to say no to some of the things I had been doing before. Member care providers can mentor our members through this stage, too, helping them to find a role that is best suited to the person God has made them to be.

This is as far as I can share from personal experience; maybe in a decade's time, I can write more. I know there is much I have left out: home leave and reentry, team conflicts and relationships difficulties, family life, children's education, empty nests, and helping grown children adjust to life elsewhere. Neither have I written about the specialist member care that may be needed for depression, anxiety, grief, or burnout.

Helping workers leave well

But there is one topic I will touch on before I finish. How can we help our workers leave well? Is it possible to stay too long in this country because we have become comfortable while God is asking us to do something different for him? Member

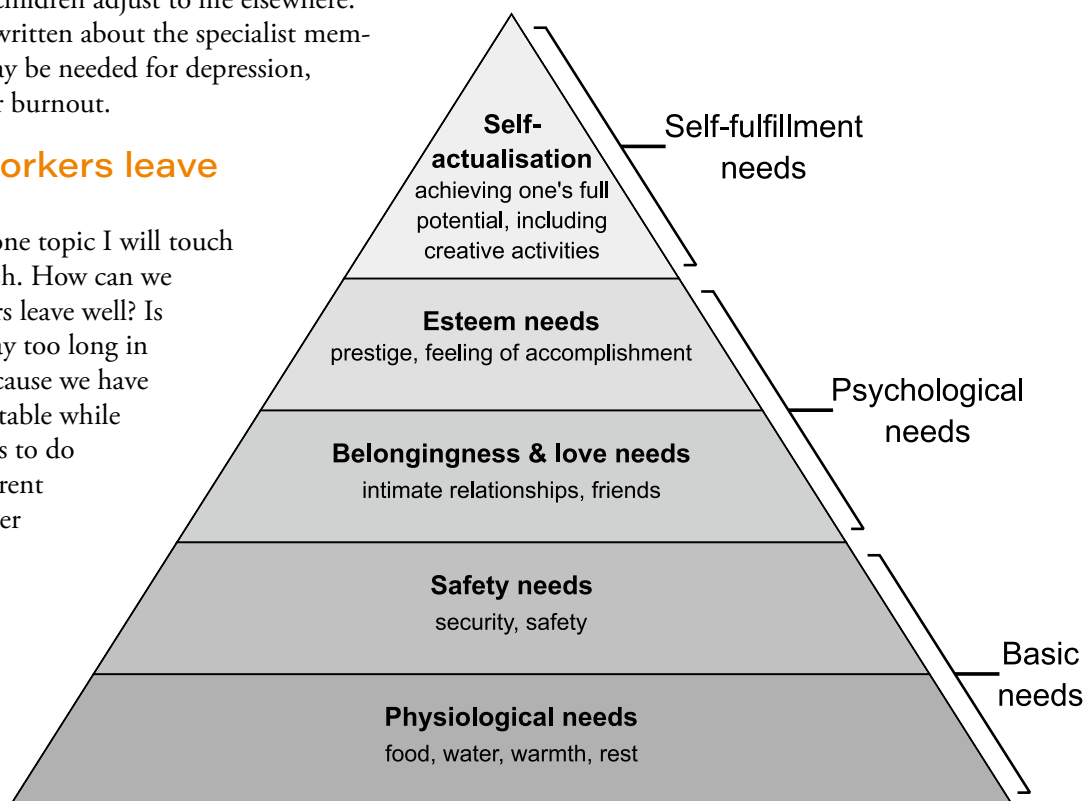
care shouldn't neglect our experienced workers and the retiring ones. They need someone to accompany and pray with them as they make the big decisions leading to retirement or relocation. It's important they have the support of the community they have given their life to when they begin to leave it.

Member care is needed throughout the whole missionary life cycle. As the needs of our members change, so must the approach to member care. The care we give to new workers will be different to those approaching retirement. While we have to start somewhere—perhaps as WEC Japan's team did by prioritising the needs of new workers—we must remember that each and every mission worker is important and sent here by God. As we care for our members, we have the chance to affirm them as his beloved children. **JH**

1. "Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory", The American Institute of Stress, <https://www.stress.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Holmes-Rahe-Stress-inventory.pdf>

Illustration: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs2.svg on Wikimedia Commons

Catherine Porter serves on the member care team for WEC Japan. Originally from the UK, she arrived in Japan in 2011 and spent many years working with tsunami survivors in Tohoku.



Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The Sunday school class that changed my life

How a simple report from a faithful missionary inspired a girl to become a missionary herself

Thirty years ago in 1995, Barbara Wolke, a missionary with the German Alliance Mission (GAM) was on home assignment with her husband, Günther, and together they visited churches in Germany to talk about their ministry and God's work in Japan.

At one particular church, whilst Günther preached to the adults, Barbara came into the Sunday school class. She taught four Japanese greetings: おはようございます (good morning), こんにちは (good day), こんばんは (good evening), and おやすみなさい (good night). Next, she told the story of an ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) patient named Ishikawa-san. He was in his fifties when the illness started. They started to visit him and told him about Jesus. He was saved, prepared for baptism, and baptized in his bed. At that time, he could not talk anymore, and they communicated via a syllable alphabet chart, and he winked his eye when the syllable came he wanted to use.

At least one girl in the class was mesmerized by that story. At the end, Barbara said, "I won't be able to continue this work forever. The question is, who will continue this kind of work when I retire?" The little girl, age 10 or 11, thought, *Maybe that's me!*

After her report, Barbara asked who had remembered the four greetings; somehow, there was only one girl. Barbara gave her a Japanese stand-up doll, saying, "Look, you can play with it when math homework is boring." She showed that when pushed down, the doll would stand up again by itself.

The girl didn't follow up any of this and rather forgot about it, but God didn't forget.

Backstories

Wolkes

The Wolkes traveled to Japan in 1980, studied Japanese at Nanzan University, then worked for two years in a church with a Japanese pastor. After their first home assignment, they went to Oyamada (Mie Prefecture) at the request of the Japanese denominational leadership. For the first five years, they lived in a normal detached house. The largest room became the church. In 1991, they added a chapel to the house, and when that became too small in 2001, they built a large building in Hoshimigaoka. The congregation started with two people, Günther and Barbara, and grew to about 60 members by the time they

left in 2012. In 2008 the large church building was already debt-free.

Ishikawa-san

Ishikawa-san, the ALS patient, later got a special PC which was triggered by minimal movement. He was able to write about his life. A reporter from a Christian newspaper came to interview Ishikawa-san, and this led to an agreement to write a book about his life. At first, they planned to do it from his notes, but Ishikawa-san communicated that he wanted to write the manuscript himself. It took him an enormous amount of strength, but the book was finished. It is called *Shiawase no Kaze* (しあわせの風, Winds of Happiness) and was published by Word of Life Press in 1995. In July 2002, his funeral was held in a large church in Nagoya.

The little girl

And the little girl at that Sunday school class? She became a GAM missionary and came to Japan for the first time in 2013, one year after Barbara had retired. God's timing is perfect. Since I met Barbara as a child, I've moved many times, but the little stand-up doll is still next to my desk. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Judith Ricken is from Germany and serves in Japan with GAM. She first came to Japan in 2013 and is now involved with KGK ministry and chases the hundred famous mountains of Japan.



Ishikawa-san's baptism

Bridging the gap

Some Japanese people are strongly influenced by beliefs in the supernatural, but God is able to open their eyes to see Jesus as we engage with them relationally

“In October, the gods convene in Izumo for their annual meeting, and so it’s an auspicious time to visit,” Kumi explained while handing me a souvenir from her trip to a famous shrine in Izumo (a long way from Iwate, where she lives).

Chatting over lunch at an event organized by a group of therapists and beauticians, I learnt that one of the ladies had a palm-reading stall. Another friend recommended that I see a spiritual healer for my problems.

“I believe my ancestors are constantly watching over and protecting me,” shared Keiko, a local café owner. “My parents and I have always enjoyed visiting and praying at temples. In fact, my hobby is to collect red-ink stamps from temples.” I had noticed a Buddhist charm in her car and that her earrings were made of “power stones” (similar to crystal healing sometimes seen in the West).

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4 ESV).

Reflecting on these conversations

As I reflect on these interactions with Japanese friends, I’m surprised by how religious and spiritual beliefs and practices seem to impact their worldviews and everyday life despite many expressing suspicion or dislike towards “religion”. Moreover, I’m struck by how vastly different the God of Scripture is. Unlike polytheistic gods, the one true God doesn’t need any counsel in making decisions. In contrast to the belief that gods dwell in temples or objects, our God is Lord of heaven and earth and not confined to a building or a place. Enthroned in heaven, our holy God cannot be manipulated into doing our bidding but is to be worshipped on his terms.

I’m sometimes tempted to give up when chatting with my Japanese non-Christian friends. What can I say that will make any difference to their long-held beliefs and worldviews? How do I even begin to convey a God so different from their human conceptions? How can this impossible gap be bridged?

“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). What good news that we have Jesus who bridged heaven and earth to save humanity who was blind and dead in their sins!



The fact is, the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, and convicting and saving a sinner is as impossible as bringing light out of darkness. However, God can shine “the light of the knowledge of [his] glory” into sinful people whose hearts are shrouded in darkness (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus can lift the veil from their hearts that they may see he alone is God. I’m humbled that it is not my persuasion or influence, but God who saves those he has called.

Being a bridge

Like Paul, we follow in the footsteps of our Lord in bridging the gap. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. In Athens, Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel but not without first forging cultural bridges by acknowledging the Athenians’ religious devotion and beliefs (Acts 17:16–31). In Japan, I’ve found that investing time in forming relationships of trust is key for people to be comfortable in sharing about themselves. Taking a genuine interest in others has often led to them asking questions about me.

After chatting about Keiko’s *Obon* customs, she began asking questions about my beliefs and practices as a Christian.¹ “I guess you don’t celebrate Obon? I thought Christians pray as we do.”

“As Christians we respect our ancestors, but we don’t worship them. And yes, we pray to God as you do, but we don’t need to go to a particular place. It’s a bit complicated. Are you sure you want me to explain?” I asked hesitantly.

“I love learning about these things!” she replied enthusiastically.

We spent the next hour chatting about the God who revealed himself through the Bible and how Jesus is the fulfilment of the temple and sacrificial system, and the way for us to approach God anytime and anywhere as children can with a father.

Despite my initial sense of helplessness and resignation, God opened the way for me to witness his wondrous truths to Keiko. May God give us humility, love, and discernment to bridge cultural and spiritual gaps so that our Japanese friends may come to know Jesus who laid down his life to be the bridge between us and God. **JH**

1. Obon is an annual festival in Japan in summer that venerates deceased ancestors.

Hoi-Yan Shea, an OMF missionary from Australia since 2012, is currently 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.

The plurality of prayer

“Prayer is an art which only the Holy Spirit can teach us. He’s the Giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer. Pray till you can pray.” (Charles Haddon Spurgeon)¹

If you were to ask me, “Which is more important, private personal prayer or public corporate prayer?” I would probably answer, “Yes.” That kind of question is like asking which leg should we walk on. Both private and public prayer are very important for our growth in the Lord. We should not have one without the other.

But there is a problem. Though I’m sure you do pray privately, how often have you spent time in corporate prayer—praying in public with others? Even in Japan, often the local church’s prayer meeting is another opportunity to sing, read the Bible, and hear a sermon. But when it comes to praying, it can become just a time to share prayer requests, and, because of lack of time, the prayer requests are quickly prayed for by one person or with everyone praying Korean-style—each one praying aloud together at the same time. Is that really the best way to have a prayer meeting? Is that really praying?

The model prayer

What is often called “the Lord’s Prayer” is really a model prayer that Jesus gave His disciples. So it would be better to call it “the Disciples’ Prayer.” The actual Lord’s Prayer, where Jesus Himself prayed, is found in John 17. But our model is found in Matthew 6:9–13.

Though I’m sure you know it, here it is (NASB 1995):

“Pray, then, in this way:

‘**Our** Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give **us** this day our daily bread. And forgive **us our** debts, as **we** also have forgiven **our** debtors. And do not lead **us** into temptation, but deliver **us** from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]”

Did you see it? Notice the words I have emphasized. This prayer is quite different from most of our prayers, isn’t it? This prayer does not have the words “I” or “my” or “me.” Gene Getz calls this “rugged individualism” the

hallmark of Western civilization. And I am afraid that we as missionaries have too often shared it with our Japanese brothers and sisters.

Getz says, “Why have we neglected the corporate emphasis on prayer found in Acts and the Epistles? . . . We use the personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘my’ and ‘me.’ We have not been taught to think in terms of ‘we’ and ‘our’ and ‘us.’ Consequently, we ‘individualize’ many references to corporate experience in the New Testament, thus often emphasizing personal prayer. More is said in Acts and the Epistles about corporate prayer, corporate learning of biblical truth, corporate evangelism, and corporate Christian maturity and growth than about the personal aspects of these Christian disciplines.”²

Praying in community

Sadly, many church leaders (and missionaries) struggle to maintain a vibrant private prayer life. One primary reason is that they don’t understand the great encouragement and needful balance of praying regularly with others. Both are vital, practically and biblically. We need to pray in community with other believers.

In Kōchi, we’ve had a monthly prayer time for pastors for over 20 years. It has been the catalyst for our city and prefecture going from a spiritual wasteland (with pastors pointing fingers at each other, leading to great disunity) to becoming a united community of saints. Every year, we have a Praise Worship Day, with many churches joining us for corporate worship and prayer. This came about as we prayed together and allowed God to speak to us and use us. Only He is worthy! Also, at the annual Prayer Summit for Western Japan, missionaries and pastors spend three days in prayer seeking God’s face and return to our churches revived and eager to see God work in our communities.

May we keep a resolute commitment to corporate prayer. The united prayer level of an organization or team never rises higher than the personal example and passion of its leaders. Let’s be prayerful leaders. May it be said of us what was said of Paul: “Behold, he is praying” (Acts 9:11). **JH**

1. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Order and Argument in Prayer,” Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 12, July 15th, 1866. <https://prayer-coach.com/prayer-quotes-charles-spurgeon/#11> (accessed November 28, 2024).
2. Gene Getz, *Praying for One Another* (Victor, 1982), 11.

Photo by Karen Ellrick

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



Tone

How do we convey the right tone in our writing?

“Don’t speak to me in that tone of voice!” Most of us know what tone refers to in this context. It’s what many parents have said and most of us have thought.

What does it mean, though, when it comes to writing? As an editor, I will sometimes read something and conclude that the tone is wrong for the audience and purpose we have in mind. It’s something of a gut feeling that prompts me to look more closely.

Tone is related to the mood the words communicate (spoken or written). When speaking, we can use the inflection of our voices, body language, pauses, and a variety of other techniques to communicate our meaning. Most of us are so skilled at this (especially in our heart language) that we can say one thing but communicate something completely different. We can say “I’m sorry” while communicating that we are not sorry at all.

Conveying your true intention

When it comes to writing, it takes more work to convey tone well. We live in the age of emailing and texting, and we have probably all received messages and wondered what was really meant. Texting often benefits from emoji, but even then, messages can be confusing. In informal writing, people also use techniques like exclamation marks, ellipses, dashes, italics, bolding, and all caps to convey tone. Quotation marks can be used to indicate irony, sarcasm, or that an author is using a word in a non-standard sense.

In more formal writing, it’s best to use word choice as well as sentence structure and length to convey our tone and meaning.

How does your reader feel?

A key question to consider is this: How do you want your reader to feel when they read your writing?

This is where having someone else read your work can be very useful. Something you’ve written might not

sound judgemental to you, but it might make your readers feel unreasonably guilty. Overexaggeration can grate on your reader’s ears. Sometimes a writer piles on too many descriptors to get us to feel sorry for the person, and that can make a true story sound contrived or unrealistic. If it’s fiction, it can sound absurd.

Try this exercise

There are many different tones you can find in writing: formal, informal, optimistic, joyful, sad, discouraging, encouraging, sincere, critical, genuine, fearful, brave, shocking, nervous, calm, hopeful, humorous, and serious.

To help you think about this topic, try reading the following quote by an Australian missionary in Nepal. What tones do you feel?

In my season right now, I am sitting halfway up our hill on the Dhulikhel ridge. As I have been writing this, July has turned to August. But August in Nepal also means rain. This year’s monsoon has seemed endless. It’s our seventh . . . or have I already said that? Right now, I am watching the water pour down in streams across the windowpanes. It is splashing into the mud beneath the swings and making a thudding noise on the roof of the chicken coop. It is bouncing off the banana leaves and landing on the beans below them. Just as inside the house, the boys are bouncing off the walls and landing on their recently-constructed Lego castle.

I deal with the casualties and then return my gaze to the view out the window. The black clouds have absorbed the sky, the weight of them seems to defy gravity. Even the mud houses that sit precariously on the ridge have been blackened into oblivion. My ears pick up the thunder in the distance. It reminds me that the season isn’t done yet. The physical seasons don’t tend to move on until they are ready to. [Naomi Reed, *My Seventh Monsoon* (Ark House Press, 2007), 191–192.]

It makes me feel a little hopeless and frustrated, but the thought that seasons move on makes me feel hopeful and want to read on to hear how she coped with this long monsoon season (and the bouncy boys). The tone is also personal; we could be sitting across the table from the author telling her story. What does it make you feel?

Try this same exercise with another passage, maybe the closest book at hand or revisiting an author you love. See if it helps you better shape the tone of your writing to serve your audience and purpose. **JH**



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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