



Japan Laying a Foundation

Japan

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Friendships open people to the Gospel in tsunami-ravaged Japan



Hannah Sakurai, left, of Calvary Chapel Kokobunji, Japan, and Lysie Salas and Frankie Chaidez from CC Montebello, CA, pray for a Japanese woman. The believers offered prayer after hearing the lady's story, which included being hospitalized 100 days for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after the March tsunami.

Vicky Mireles of Calvary Chapel Montebello, CA, and missionary Amy Totsis sat with an elderly Japanese woman in her tiny living room, the handmade quilt they had delivered days earlier draped across a table. They had returned to bring matching pillows, trying to brighten the government-issued prefabricated home. Their hostess then told them of the day the tsunami came.

When their neighbors alerted them of the coming tsunami, Henmi and her husband

ran to their car in their houseclothes, grabbing only their dog and a purse. From higher ground, they watched waves overtake their home and the many people unable to escape in time. They slept in their car through the snowy night, with only their slippers for warmth, and went days without food until they discovered the evacuation center in Ishinomaki's elementary school.

Vicky was filled with compassion but also gratefulness—grateful Amy's translation

allowed her to hear Henmi's story, grateful God brought her across the Pacific to deliver a message of hope greater than the devastation Henmi had seen. Vicky knew that the Japanese often listen out of politeness, but as she told the woman about God's love for her and the hope He offers, she could tell from Henmi's intent questions that her heart was engaged. Just then, Amy's husband, Joseph Totsis, arrived with his guitar and lyrics for "Jesus, Lord of Heaven" in English and Japanese. Henmi joyfully lifted her voice

with the others to sing. When Vicky learned Henmi had attended a Christian school as a child, she realized, "The seeds were planted so long ago, but God is faithful. It took the tsunami for her to hear the Word of God again. I'm still praying the Lord will save her."

The delivery of over 1,000 quilts, handmade by a quilter's group in Vacaville, CA, was one of many outreaches that opened doors to deeper relationships with survivors of March's tsunami in the Tohoku region



Missionaries Amy and Joseph Totsis, center and right, laugh with a young woman about a card trick. The cards were used as conversation starters during outreach.

of Japan. Increased trust in Christians is enabling residents to overcome cultural barriers and the intense privacy which prevented many from learning about God previously. Pastor Rick Barnett, CC Okinawa, leads CC's response to the Japanese crisis. He said, "Calvary Chapels in Japan are very grateful for Committed Relief and the American believers who have come alongside us over the last seven months, sharing Christ's light in a very dark time. Japan needs Jesus—we would be blessed by teams continuing to come." During a recent trip to Ishinomaki, Amy, Joseph, and Japanese believers, joined by friends from CC Montebello, built on the foundation previous teams have laid. "As their needs and our methods continue changing, the principle

remains the same—to let them see Christ in us," Joseph said.

Stirred to Action

Now missionaries in Osaka, Joseph and Amy met at CC Montebello, their sending church. Amy's love for Japan had been consistent since her first trip there in 1998, and Joseph's was spurred by a 2002 outreach in Osaka. He recalled, "We passed out thousands of fliers for this huge event, but nobody showed. Most people went home discouraged, not intending to return. My heart stirred, though—I realized Japan needs more help." Amy was already a missionary in Japan when they both started to consider each other for marriage, and Joseph joined her after their 2010 wedding.

"As their needs and our methods continue changing, the principle remains the same—to let them see Christ in us."

Missionary Joseph Totsis

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.

James 1:22a

On their second day, the team hosted a barbecue and had a worship concert for the 150 families still living in the evacuation center. Dan Bolinger of CC Iruma shared the Gospel. Describing living conditions there, team-member Raul “Juny” Manzo said, “Picture walking into a department store with racks of donated clothes. The brown gym floor is sectioned off into 8x12 living areas—people are sleeping on 2-inch white mats on top of cardboard, separated from other families by see-through satin sheets with no privacy.” Most of the residents enjoyed the concert. One drunken man, however, was unhappy with the team’s presence and kept shouting to turn the music down and leave. Finally, he deliberately broke the glass surrounding the fire alarm, turning on the sprinklers and ushering in police and emergency workers. Disgusted residents informed the Christians this was the fourth time the man had acted in a hostile manner. Juny recalled, “The natural part of me wanted him to shut up—but the spiritual side of me realized, he doesn’t need to shut up—he needs Jesus.” Through the translation of a believer from CC Okinawa, Vicky asked a woman about the man’s past and discovered that his entire family had died in the tsunami. Moved to compassion, she asked the man’s name. The woman was puzzled: Why did Vicky want to know? “So I can pray for him,” Vicky explained. Disregarding her culture’s formality, the woman enveloped her in a hug. She was overwhelmed that Christians could love a man like that.

A visit to the Kono family’s bungalow reminded Juny that the Japanese people’s spiritual needs preceded the March disasters. In their home, the couple had altars to Mary, Buddha, and their ancestors. The wife asked if anyone could tell her about Christianity and the couple paid close attention as Juny presented the Gospel. When asked if he wanted to know Christ, however, her husband looked at the ground and said, “I’m not ready yet.” Juny recalled, “That showed me the state so many Japanese people are in—they’re so confused about spirituality. But that’s why we go—to share His hope, peace, and comfort.” Vicky added, “Japan is different from places like the Philippines or Mexico where I’ve gone on mission trips before. They don’t even have the basics of



Before leaving Ishinomaki, Elizabeth Harris, right, of CC Montebello receives a hug from a newfound friend.

Christianity in their culture. There’s such a need for people to know who Jesus is.”

Conduits of Hope

The team sought to encourage those left hopeless in the tsunami’s aftermath. Joseph noted how God used their simple efforts to restore belongings or even dreams people had lost. One woman was overjoyed to receive a quilt because she was a quilter and had lost everything she created. While mucking out the home of a couple who had lost their fish market in the tsunami, Joseph’s shovel hit a carved wooden fish that had washed in from somewhere else. “What are the odds of finding something like that? It’s just the Lord, giving hope,” he declared. Before leaving Ishinomaki, the team used supplies brought for children’s crafts to make photo frames. Team members printed pictures of themselves with residents they befriended and delivered them individually. All recipients were moved, but Toshiko Ito clutched the frame to her chest while her eyes filled with tears. She had lost all her photographs in the tsunami—this would be the first one in her new home.

As the team left, they were relieved that the people they had encountered could continue learning about Christ’s love at a



During a festival, Candie Duggan of CC Hamakua, HI, teaches hula dancing to Higashimatsushima residents. As believers worldwide continue ministering and sharing the Gospel in the tsunami-devastated Tohoku region, Joseph declared, “We bring hope into a hopeless situation.”

community center in their temporary housing complex. Recently, Pastor Chizuo of CC Kokobunji held his fourth Bible study there, during which a former Yakuza—a member of the Japanese mafia—and a police officer sat side by side. Kazuko, another attendee, shared how 30 years prior she had almost been baptized in a Protestant church, but immense cultural pressure—accepting Christ in Japan often means losing one’s family and reputation—had prevented her. However, she said, “Jesus has watched over me all these years—this time, I believe I can cross the line.” The Bible study that day was on the parable of the sower in Mark 4:

“But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” Mark 4:8

It reminded Chizuo of the outreach the day before, planting flowers around the prefabricated homes. A resident had commented, “These flowers grow strong when deeply rooted in hard ground.” Encouraged, Chizuo thought, *I will keep watering these people by teaching the Word of God.*

Rick Barnett said that while needs remain great, his hope for how God will move is still greater. He remarked, “We are looking forward to this next season, when we see the harvest God brings from the seeds sown into the lives of so many.”

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A man living in Ishinomaki’s evacuation center shows his wife a picture of Joseph and himself. Joseph made him the frame after the two met at a barbecue outreach.