

A life-changing month – learning to trust God at the sharp end in Japan

When university friends Simon Clark and Matt Ryan embarked on a summer mission to Japan with JCL they knew it would be hot, hard work and challenging. But neither of them knew that the experience would also affect them deeply, as Simon writes below.

When Matt and I started this mission, we could never have known what was to come. I'd already been living in Japan for nearly 7 months and thought my grasp of the culture and people here was pretty solid, but when it came to church life, to quote one of the church leaders we met, 'this isn't the real Japan!' The Church in Japan is noticeably small but individual Christians are strong, as Matt and I have both learned. The overarching theme that emerged for us was, I think, to stay humble, and try to avoid thinking of ourselves in terms of 'western missionaries saving foreigners'. In just a month we met so many astounding people and did so many amazing things that I have no doubt God is working in this country.

The message of Christ is still widely unknown here

As it turned out we had to remain flexible and rely on God a lot. We often found ourselves the centre of attention, and little can prepare you for being asked to perform a solo of Amazing Grace, or to preach the first message some people ever hear with only an hour's notice. So what did we do?

Taking part in street evangelism



Children at the Kagato Bible camp.

When we first got to Kansai Bible College, which was to be our main base, we really didn't know what to

We visited four churches and they were all very different. From older ages in a more conservative setting to a group of rockers worshipping until 4am, the activity was amazing. The churches were open nearly every day, always active, and people made it their entire lives to be welcoming. There were a

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Northern Lights

If you thought the Japanese community in the UK was largely confined to London you'd be mistaken. Here Tadashi Yoshizawa tells us of one couple's mission to share God's love with Japanese in Aberdeen. His story also highlights problems faced by some Christians in Japan.

Hello, I am Tadashi from Aberdeen. It has been one year since I, my wife Junko and our 7-year old daughter Hanna moved to northeast Scotland. Although we had previously lived in England about five years ago, things have changed so much, it felt like coming to a new country. Junko and I are 100% native Japanese, and so is Hanna - but she was born in England, brought up in South Korea and now she has a very cute Scottish accent! Because of this, our family sometimes speaks rather strange Japanese. Through all this however God has led us in grace and wonder into a new chapter of ministry.

To tell you a little about myself, I became a Christian at 23 having been born into a traditional Japanese Buddhist-Shinto family. Growing up I had little Christian contact. Moreover, studying astronomy at Kyoto University for six years, the Bible seemed unrealistic and unreliable to me. But, did you know even scientists think about God? As I studied this unreachable, vast ocean of a universe, I began to wonder about God. I finally knocked at the door of a church in Kyoto for the first time in my life. I joined a weekday beginners' course which used Christian literature instead of the Bible so it was much easier to understand. When I realised that Jesus died for me I

Children's craft class



Members of the Japanese school in Aberdeen

felt peace in my heart. God changed my perspective and my life, especially my relationship with Junko. We decided to marry and build a Christian home.

However, hardship came along from the start as my parents opposed our marriage and would not attend our wedding. They thought I was disloyal because I would no longer fulfil family obligations of ancestral worship. There are no Christians in my family tree so I was going against family tradition. Out of shame, they concealed my conversion and our marriage from my relatives for four years until Hanna was two. During this difficult time, God sustained our faith and transformed our suffering so that we can in turn support others in trouble. After theological study in England, I worked for three years as a pastor for a Japanese congregation in South Korea. Now I am back in Aberdeen to continue my studies at postgraduate level.

We hope the school will serve as an invitation to a new life in Jesus

Last February, with the help of a local church, we started a Japanese Saturday school. Japanese children here often have no other Japanese friends at school.

We wanted to provide a place where children and parents could come to relax, share their problems, speak Japanese and enjoy Japanese culture. We organise crafts and seasonal festivals. There is little opportunity to meet Japanese Christians in Aberdeen so we are hoping that this school will serve as an invitation to a new life in Jesus.

The school started as a Japanese group but has now become multinational. Every Saturday, more than thirty people come including children aged up to thirteen, parents and volunteers - the majority of them non-Christians. Last June we held a Japanese summer festival and over 150 locals came. We hope to serve the local community by exchanging Japanese language and culture, and to be a blessing to others as we ourselves have been blessed. You can read about us on our website at www.j-cornerstone.net/school. Please pray for our resource needs (volunteers and teaching materials) to be met, and that Jesus would remain at the centre of all we do.

*Tadashi Yoshizawa
Aberdeen*

Have you checked out the JCL Bookshop yet?

For many Japanese with no Christian background the Bible can seem impenetrable and difficult to understand. Christian literature can help make it more understandable, as Tadashi Yoshizawa found - see article opposite. The JCL bookshop receives enquiries from people all over the world looking for Japanese Christian literature. Enquiries have come from Malaysia, Indonesia, Europe, Australia and the US as well as from throughout the UK. What makes people contact us?



Well, we are the only significant supplier of Japanese Christian literature in the UK, possibly even in Europe. We stock an expanding range of material from Bibles and bilingual Bible studies, to Christian novels and books on various aspects of Christianity. Our bookshop is also accessible online at www.jclglobal.org. Our customers are often English speakers looking for Christian material to give to Japanese friends, but we also have English books on Japan for Christians who

want to learn more. We asked a couple of our customers for their recommendations of good books to read or give away:

"I read and re-read 'Making Friends with the Japanese' [note: now updated and re-issued as "A Christian's Pocket Guide to the Japanese"], and it is so helpful in pointing out some possible pitfalls that I've made my co-teachers read it before starting to lead a class!" Olwen Gosden, English teacher, Brussels.

"We like the Japanese version of the Living Bible. It's very easy to read and understand. Our Japanese

friends appreciate the everyday language and the style of narrative. It makes a wonderful gift.

"Preparing for Baptism" by Takeshi Yokoyama has been very useful for friends who came to faith in the UK. It would also be helpful to those who are wondering about their commitment- one to keep handy!" Ronnie & Miho Iliffe, Canterbury.

To browse our full range of books and tracts go to www.jclglobal.org and click on Bookshop, or telephone us on 01732 455453 for a book list.

Faith, Joy and Encouragement in Wittenberg

Each year Japanese Christians in Europe gather together for fellowship, teaching and encouragement. Council member John Cooke was one of the JCL group that attended this year's gathering in Wittenberg, Germany.

The 25th annual European Japanese Christian Conference was held in early August in Wittenberg - where Martin Luther lived, taught and preached in the early 16th century.

Some 300 people, including about 20 non-Japanese, gathered in the stifling heat to sing, pray and learn from each other. Despite needing to use fans and papers to cool down, the audience listened intently to the messages. They came from all over Europe, and some had even travelled from Japan. They enjoyed renewing friendships and making new ones, singing and praying together, especially in small groups, sharing testimonies, and being encouraged by one

another. I was impressed by their dedication and vitality. It was said that churches in Japan are now being re-invigorated by Christian returnees!

We were all reminded once more of the relevance of Martin Luther's message of five centuries ago - that our salvation is based on "grace alone, faith alone, and scripture alone". The final, memorable evening meeting took place in the Castle Church (Schlosskirche) where Luther once preached, with music in old German from the compositions of Luther, Bach and German hymn-writers, sung by gifted Japanese musicians.

It was a moving experience, witnessing the openness of these Christians to one another, their joy in

People gathered for the Japanese Christians conference



worshipping and praying together, and the obvious encouragement they gave each other. Plans are already in hand to meet again next year, somewhere cooler this time - in Finland!

John Cooke, JCL Council Member, Salisbury

JCL Network Partners - who are they an

Continuing our series on network partners, in this edition we meet partners involved in Japanese church work - but in very different ways and on different sides of the world. Tim Williams is developing work among Japanese youth in London, while Ken and Yuko Chan have found themselves drawn back to Japan and now lead a church in Nara. First let's hear from Tim.

Hi I'm Tim Williams. Some of you might know me as JCL Mission Partner Yuki and Stephen's son, or as Grace's little brother. It's been a year since I moved from Edinburgh, where I was working with the Faith Mission after studying at their Bible college, to London.

A key reason I moved down here, rather than continue in full-time Christian work or study, was to learn for myself what it is like to work full time in the "real world" as a Christian whilst serving the Japanese Church. At the same time I wanted to be part of, or have the backing of, an organisation such as JCL, as I realised I would need advice and encouragement as I sought to reach Japanese inside and outside the workplace. I value the support and fellowship that is available to me as a network partner. As time has passed I have found myself more and more involved in cross-church activities with Japanese in London and I'd like to tell you a little bit about that here, and to ask for your prayers.

One project I'm excited about is called **Juicy**, which stands for Japanese United In Christ, Youth (website at www.juicy-london.blogspot.com).

It is run by five young Japanese people, including myself, who have a vision for building up young Japanese Christians in the London area. We have about a dozen regulars who meet at Waterloo every

Juicy members



A Juicy outreach evening

Thursday to study God's word, pray and enjoy each other's company. We believe it is very important for us as Japanese Christians to be able to read and understand the Bible for ourselves, and not just rely on sermons, helpful though they may be. It is my growing desire that we won't just study and be blessed through fellowship with each other, but that we might really dedicate ourselves to serving Christ. We have already held our first outreach evening. I especially hope that those going back to Japan might have the confidence to start similar activities in their home churches.



A second project I am involved in is called **ReViveNet**. What, you may ask, is that? Well, when I attended the youth conference preceding the main Japanese Christians' European Conference [see article on page 3] people told me, to my joy, that Juicy is inspiring other youth groups in Europe to do something similar, and that Japanese young people in Europe want to become more active in serving Christ. **ReViveNet** aims to support this. It offers a web page (www.Revivenet.org) with resources such as Bible study guides, a prayer forum so we can pray for other groups, and details of different churches. We are still in the process of putting all this together but hope it will be a useful tool for individuals and Japanese youth groups in Europe. We are also planning a three-day New Year conference which will include a video link-up with Japanese Christians in Japan and the USA to see the New Year in. We're really looking forward to what should be an exciting and encouraging time together.

Would you pray for these activities? Please also pray that Japanese youth here in the UK and Europe might truly grow in the Lord and play their part in building the Japanese Church. Thank you.

*Timothy Williams
JCL Network Partner, London*

and what do they do?

Ken and Yuko Chan never planned to live in Japan, but responded when they felt God calling them there. With no job to go to, the first year was difficult - then Ken was asked to become Pastor of Nara International Church. We asked them to tell us about their experiences, and about the challenges of church life in Japan.

Q. Could you tell us something about yourselves?

Ken grew up in the UK and Yuko in Japan. We met and married in London and then lived in Hong Kong for ten years, where Ken taught English at university. Our three daughters were born there. Then four years ago we moved to London so that Ken could attend seminary. It wasn't initially our intention to come to Japan, but we were moved by the great need for the gospel and the small number of Christians and moved out here two years ago. We have just completed our second move in Kyoto so our children are nearer school and we have more time for church work.



Ken, Yuko, Marie, Seira and Anna Chan

Q. How did you become involved with JCL?

We got to know JCL in 2005 and had opportunities to discuss the possibility of working together. Attending the JCL annual conference added to our knowledge of work in Japan, which we were considering by then. We are glad to have become JCL network partners. It's a blessing to be associated with an organisation with the same heart for the Japanese people, and to be supported in prayer by those who understand the Japanese well.

Q. What was it like moving to Japan?

Our first year was quite a challenge. For Ken, learning to live in a very different culture, and studying a difficult language were and still are great challenges. Even for Yuko, who had been away from Japan for twelve years, there have been new challenges living in Japan as a family for the first time. We had left London with no definite work lined up. We were praying for an opportunity to serve in an international church, as Ken's Japanese was very limited. A new school, new friends, food, weather,

parks and libraries all had to be got used to. But we have settled in gradually and are glad that the girls' Japanese has improved greatly. However, we now need to work much harder to maintain their English!

Q. How did you come to be working at Nara International Church?

Six months after we arrived in Japan, an old friend told Ken that Nara International Christian Church was looking for someone to replace their pastor who was returning to the US. Subsequently the church called Ken to be pastor and we have been serving there since May 2007. Although the church pays us a stipend, it's not enough to meet all our needs but, about the same time, God also provided a part-time teaching position at a local university, which supplements our income whilst still allowing enough time for church work. So not only have we been given the opportunity to serve at one of the few international churches in the area, but all our material needs have been met too. Praise God for his faithfulness!

Q. Have you noticed particular challenges facing the Church in Japan?

Fewer Japanese are interested in religion and younger people are going to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples less often than their parents. Some local Buddhist temples are struggling to survive. Although there is superficial interest in Christianity through the popularity of Christian-style weddings and Christmas celebrations, Christian churches are generally small. Our church has about 30 to 40 at Sunday services, comprising mostly Japanese with some from other nationalities. We have only about five men attending regularly and this gender imbalance is normal here. Some of the Japanese husbands were baptised over two years ago and used to attend but stopped coming some time ago. We have not yet been able to

meet them but are thankful that their wives and children are faithful. Please pray with us for these men.

Though seemingly well off in many respects, the reality is that Japan does have a great need. The divorce rate has risen, mothers struggle to raise children alone when their husbands are posted to

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Japan does have
great need . . . We
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God in Jesus

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distant cities, and there is a worrying level of suicides and suicidal tendencies among young people. As we get to know people, we see some of the problems that exist. We cannot help them in and of ourselves, but we can offer them the gift of God in Jesus.

Q. What can readers pray for?

We're holding a **"Family Bible Adventure"** outreach weekend on 25-26 October for local families. We'll have children's activities on the Saturday and invite the whole family to church on Sunday. Please pray that many will come and we'll connect with them well. Please also pray for church members to be more committed, to attend each week and contribute to the work of the church. Pray too for the challenging work of providing bilingual sermons, Sunday school teaching, weekly bulletins etc, and to be able to balance church work, English teaching, Japanese



Nara International Church members study and family life. Pray for our three daughters (Marie, Seira and Anna) as they undertake bilingual education, and for good friends.

*Ken & Yuko Chan
JCL Network Partners, Nara*

Serving tea, holding babies and changing hearts

When Yoshiko Kojima volunteered to take on running a Japanese mums & toddlers group in Milton Keynes in 2006 she found the job had its ups and downs. Her story is a testimony to the power of love, prayer and perseverance.

Taking over the running of a Japanese mums and toddlers group in 2006 was hard going at first. The group had already been meeting for six years, but the members seemed quite hostile towards me - probably fearing that I, as a Japanese pastor, would try to convert them. Indeed, I found that anytime I started to tell them a Bible story they began chatting loudly and ignored me. At a loss how to handle this situation, I prayed hard.

One day God reminded me of the servants who drew water at the wedding in Cana. If the mothers in our group didn't want to hear God's word but were eager for relaxed Japanese conversation, then our church should first

provide what they wanted - a nice, cozy atmosphere given with the love of God. So some of our church members and I worked hard serving tea, holding babies, playing, singing and doing crafts with their children. After the first year I began to see the mothers' attitudes change. They were more relaxed and less wary. Some have even joined a weekly Bible study at my house. They have been very surprised and glad to find that the Bible is a very practical guide book which is packed with God's wisdom for their lives. More recently I have found the mums express their thankfulness for the group by attending church activities such as praise services, our bazaar and Christmas concerts. Fifty to sixty mums and toddlers now come to the group – praise the Lord!

Looking back I can really see how God has worked through this group. Please pray with me for God's continued grace and guidance as we serve these non-Christian mothers and their families.

*Yoshiko Kojima
JCL Mission Partner, Milton Keynes*



*Up to sixty mums and children
now come to the group*



*Fun and games at the
mums & toddlers group*

Partnership in JCL's expanding ministry.

You are probably aware that JCL's ministry is funded mainly through the gifts of individuals and churches. However, did you know that, whilst our ministry and influence has expanded significantly, our underlying general income has barely risen since 2000? Some stories in this magazine feature areas in which our work has grown, such as the increasing number of network partners like Tim Williams and the Chans, and the organising of short-term mission trips to Japan. Looking ahead, our normal income levels are about £25,000 a year less than budgeted expenditure. Praise the Lord that we recently



received a legacy that covers this year's cash deficit. We are now asking the Lord to enlist more regular givers – as regular income helps us plan and manage our resources better, and because new income is clearly needed to meet future expenditure. A relatively small number of new regular givers could make all the difference. To illustrate, a combination of 100 more people giving just £10 a month and 20 more people giving £50 a month would meet the need. Do you think you might be able to play a part? If you would like to respond you could use the enclosed form.

News in Brief

● Japanese friends in, or returning to, Japan?

If you are familiar with ministry among overseas Japanese, you will know that those coming to faith abroad face many challenges when they return to Japan. In recent years groups have emerged to help returnees to continue and to grow in their faith. There have been several regional meetings for returnees in Japan, but a first ever nationwide retreat is planned for 20-22 March 2009 in Saitama, near Tokyo. It will include church and mission representatives from Japan and from overseas. Please pray that this event will be used by God to encourage many to press on in their faith and to seek to bring others to know him. Do you know someone who has returned to Japan who might find this retreat helpful? Then ask us for more details.

Also, if you have Japanese friends planning to return to Japan, do get in touch with us early on and we will try to connect them with suitable churches or Christian contacts in Japan. This kind of introduction can really help as many find it hard to fit into churches back home but benefit from being put in touch with those more familiar with returnee issues.

● Edinburgh one year on.

September 2008 saw the first anniversary of Japanese language Sunday services beginning in Edinburgh. Many Japanese enquirers have dropped in to find out more about the faith and there is a good team of non-Japanese helpers. It has also been a great encouragement to witness two baptisms. Please pray for a growing core of longer-term Japanese believers in Edinburgh and for more Japanese there to want to look into the Bible and to come to faith.

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JCL - Who are we?

We were founded as the Japan Evangelistic Band (or JEB) in 1903. Since then, through God's grace, JEB's work has led to the establishment of over 150 churches and the Kansai Bible College in Japan. In 1999 the mission caught a renewed vision and evolved into its current shape, adopting the new name of Japan Christian Link. The work in Japan is now directed independently by our Japanese colleagues, supported by JCL missionaries as required. From the UK we are both supporting the work in Japan and building our outreach to overseas Japanese. We are **interdenominational**, with many of the main Christian traditions represented, and we are also **inclusive**, seeking to work with other missions as well as working on our own. Our work is carried out by a mixture of full-time missionaries and part-time volunteers. *We want to help make a significant difference in the progress of the gospel among the Japanese people over the first half of this century.* We will seek to do this through educating, encouraging and equipping the Body of Christ, through a network of relationships so that, more and more, the good news of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed clearly, and disciples of Jesus Christ multiplied among the Japanese people, for His glory. (Matthew 28: 19-20)



Simon teaching an English class

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few things Matt and I came to see as the basics - performing English language hymns (often English and Japanese together, which works well), giving our testimonies through a translator, giving talks on Bible passages, taking part in morning prayer groups, and children's work. Twice this last one was as part of a 2 or 3 days children's camp - always tiring but rewarding. Other more unusual activities included baking an apple pie for a group of church leaders, skimming dead jelly fish from the sea and performing street juggling as part of an evangelism hour.

**I often felt
more served
than serving**

All of these things saw us learning just to trust God and left us impressed by the conviction of the Japanese Christians. Our thoughts were always sought about so many matters and it was wonderful but nerve wracking to be seen in such high regard! Although we spent at most a week in a single church, because we slept in the buildings and saw some of the same people constantly it was very easy to feel at home and get down to 'work'. The churches here have been the most welcoming places I've ever been, genuinely like a family and a living image of the church we read about in the Bible. Matt and I have both made good friendships which I'm sure will last. Our lives have been changed and we really pray that the churches we stopped in will feel a lasting effect, and that anything planted by our being there can be nurtured and grow.

I would encourage anyone at all thinking about doing something like this to just jump in and do it. A month of our lives isn't too much of a burden on us, and the churches here are so eager just to have some help, fresh thought and foreign visitors to entice newcomers into meetings. While teaching English classes it's been great to be able to talk freely to people about why we're Christians, and how Jesus can change lives. The message of Christ is still widely unknown here which is a blessing in a way - there's no cultural baggage like in the UK, and fewer people have reservations or bias about 'religion' and 'the Church'.

This month has been tiring, it's true, and hot, but Matt and I have both had a great time, and I for one have often felt more served than serving. It's always been sad to leave the places we've stayed, but the true value will be measured in the long term impact on people's hearts here. Please pray!

*Simon Clark
Ibaraki, Japan*

So how did the Japanese churches involved find the visit? Pastor Hiro Kudo of Kagato Church shares his thoughts.

Our church here in Kagato, Okayama hosted a summer mission visit by two young Christians, Matt and Simon, for a week in August. We were so encouraged to have this enthusiastic, Spirit-led pair with us.

We kept them very busy! However, despite the August heat, they worked with love and passion and we thank God for their contribution to our church's work. They encouraged us with their testimonies and songs, playing the piano, guitar and trumpet in two Sunday services, four home meetings and at our Childrens' summer Bible camp. They helped teach at church English classes, with Simon teaching the children and Matt the adults. After classes we had a Bible message. Simon spoke at an international evening and two Sunday schools. They showed us some fun English games too. We praise God that he brought some children who had never heard the gospel to the camp and that non-Christians also came to the English classes and home meetings.

We thank God for Simon and Matt's visit to Kagato and for what they did for the gospel. We could see their love and burden for the Japanese people and pray that God would use them in his service.

*Pastor Hiro Kudo
Kagato Church, Okayama*

The pair leading worship

