



The Cross in the **TRAGEDY**

The Japan 311 Disaster

14 Stories and Studies for
PERSONAL OR SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kevin Laverman

The Cross
in the
†RAGEDY

The Japan 311 Disaster

SAMPLE

14 Stories and Studies for
PERSONAL OR SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kevin Laverman

THE CROSS IN THE TRAGEDY

Copyright © 2012, 2013 by Kevin Laverman

Second edition 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the New International Version.

Names in the stories may have been changed to protect the privacy of those individuals.

Please contact us for additional copies or further information.
A form for ordering is available on our website:

WEB www.LavermansInJapan.com

EMAIL lavermansinjapan@mac.com

 **HIKARI** Publications

4-14-24-1 FUTAGO, TAKATSU KAWASAKI, JAPAN 213-0002

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the church in northern Japan, who, having survived the March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis triple tragedy, have worked tirelessly since to bring physical and emotional comfort, and the message of the cross to their hurting communities.

SAMPLE

PREFACE

This collection of short stories and studies from the 311 tragedy in Japan is borne out of my desire to share, preserve and look afresh with a spiritual lens at the events our family and many others experienced here in the days and weeks after March 11, 2011.

In so doing, I recognize the need to proceed with care. I do not wish to use an ongoing crisis in the lives of many to make a spiritual point, nor to suggest that survivors should have known these spiritual truths before or during the tragedy.

It is my conviction, however, that nothing is wasted by God. He often speaks around the edges of hardship to reveal himself, give spiritual perspective, and move us forward toward new hope. This book represents just a bit of how, in the course of processing the 311 tragedy, God gave me new glimpses into the gospel message and the Christian life that empowered me during relief work.

My hope for this resource is that it will be of encouragement to you in your own spiritual formation, that it will help you understand more of the context and need for mission work in Japan post-311, and that it will lead you to remember the Japanese people in prayer at this critical time in the nation's history. Now is the time to be re-energized in a mission vision for Japan! The harvest fields are truly ripe. Pray for harvest workers.

May Japan look to Jehovah-Rapha, their Healer, both now and forever. May He glorify himself in this country, even in tragedy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kevin Baumann". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kevin" and last name "Baumann" clearly legible.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

■ = Bible Study

◆ = Cultural Notes

DAY TITLE

1	Tsunami Stones	7
	■ Heavenly Warning Signs ◆ Tsunamis and Japan	
2	The Day Japan Stood Still.....	11
	■ All Shook Up? ◆ Suffering & Japanese Religion	
3	The Humbled Tsunami	15
	■ Under His Wings ◆ False Security?	
4	The Woman Who Made Room.....	19
	■ Seeing Others with Jesus Eyes ◆ Kizuna & Kodokushi	
5	Toilet Paper Panic.....	23
	■ Heaven's Bread Truck ◆ Masters of the Queue	
6	The Man Who Sailed His House.....	27
	■ God's Waiting Room ◆ Surviving 311	
7	Miracle in Kamaishi.....	31
	■ Spiritual Tendenko ◆ Got Your Hardhats, Kids?	
8	Going to the Rubble	35
	■ Down into the Rubble ◆ Remains of the Day	
9	The Heroic Fukushima Fifty.....	39
	■ Love Worth Sharing ◆ Duty, Honor, and Loyalty	
10	The Jesus People of Taro.....	43
	■ Becoming "Jesus People" ◆ Seaside Towns & the Gospel	
11	Temporary Living.....	47
	■ Finding Our True Home ◆ Heaven in Japanese Belief	
12	The Tree of Hope.....	51
	■ Feeling down? Look up! ◆ The Peace Symbol	
13	The Wandering Church	55
	■ Authentic "Churchi-anity" ◆ Rebooting the Church	
14	Dragonflies of Change	59
	■ From Glory to Glory ◆ Can Japan Change?	

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.
...Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."
Deuteronomy 30:15, 19b*

➔ WARMUP: What is your attitude like when you receive a warning?

Tsunami Stones

His family perished in the water along with hundreds of others. His beloved town was destroyed beyond recognition. His family home and grave markers were washed away. First the earthquake. Then the waves of water that crushed everything in their path. There was little warning of the tragedy that stormed ashore that day.

In the midst of his grief, the man resolves that generations to come must be spared of the pain and sorrow that he is going through. They must be warned of the danger of tsunamis! They must not build homes along the shore! The man devises a crude warning system. Together with others in the village, engraved marker stones are erected near the shoreline. The year is 1896 and the Meiji-Sanriku tsunami has just killed 22,066 Japanese.

Hundreds of these stones are found scattered along the coastline of Japan. Some are more than 600 years old. They range in height up to 10 feet. "High dwellings are the peace and harmony of our descendants," one reads. "Remember the calamity of the great tsunamis," another stone warns. "Do not build any homes below this point," an inscription on yet another advises.

In the hustle and bustle of modern Japan, many disregarded such good advice and built their communities right up along the water's edge. Perhaps they took comfort in the towering sea walls built in the 1960's and 70's after a couple of smaller tsunamis.



A man walks by a tsunami stone at right

Those who ignored the stones' advice to build up higher, lost everything on 311. In the town of Aneyoshi, however, things were very different. Tamishige Kimura, the village leader, said that the village first moved its homes uphill after the 1896 tsunami left only two survivors. The dozen or so households of Aneyoshi listened carefully to the advice of the century-old stone erected after that tsunami. On March 11, 2011, their homes and lives were spared from the disaster. The waves stopped a mere 300 feet away from the stone. Mr. Kimura said, "They [the survivors in 1896] knew the horrors of tsunamis, so they erected that stone to warn us."



A tsunami stone in Aneyoshi saved the day

Despite their survival, the people of Aneyoshi find it hard to rejoice. Many residents in neighboring towns were swept away. The Aneyoshi elderly say they regret not making more of an effort to pass down wisdom to younger people on the dangers of tsunamis. "That tsunami stone was a way to warn descendants for the next 100 years that another tsunami will definitely come," Mr. Kimura says.

God, who loves us infinitely and knows us completely, desires that we also be spared from personal disaster in life. He desires that we be spared not just from physical death, but from spiritual, emotional and relational death that poor choices and rejection of His ways can bring. His warnings are left for all to know, heed, and pass down to the next generation. The warnings in His Word are not raging outbursts from an angry God. They are gracious love calls that say, "I am for you. I want you to enjoy everything I have to give you. Listen to my wisdom for your life and live well!"



Are you really listening to Me?

- ➔ What "tsunami stones" has God put around me to give me gentle warning about how I should live? Am I paying attention to them?
- ➔ What is my attitude toward God when I receive those warnings? Do I sense that they come from the heart of One who loves me?

Heavenly Warning Signs

A small group leader's guide is available at www.LavermansInJapan.com/311leadersguide

- 1 Why do people give warnings? Why do you think we often do not obey good warnings?
- 2 What did God warn the Israelite people to do in Deuteronomy 30:1-3? How difficult was this warning (30:11-14)? What would happen if they disobeyed (30:16-18)? What promise of blessing did he give in the same verses? Why did God give them this warning (30:19)?

- 3 Read Jeremiah 7:1-28. What was the historic response of the nation of Israel to the warnings/promises God gave?

Do you see yourself in the Israelite people? How is the record of the nation of Israel in the Bible a type of "tsunami stone" for the church today for how we are to live? (See also Hebrews 3:12-19.)

- 4 What warnings from the Bible about how to obey and please God come to mind? Write down a few that you come up with.

Read Matthew 7:13-14 and Psalm 16:11 aloud slowly. We usually think about warnings in a negative way. Why does God warn us to change the way we live or believe, or, what is behind his warnings to us?

- 5 Write down a few ways that God's warnings are different from other warnings in this world. These verses may help you brainstorm.

- Psalm 139:1-3
- Psalm 19:7
- Psalm 24:5-6
- 1 John 5:2-3
- John 15:10-11
- 2 Peter 3:9

6 What promise does Jesus give in Luke 6:47-49 about living according to the warnings and promises of His Word?

7 Is there an area in your life that you sense God is warning you about for your own good through the words of others, the Bible, or his Spirit? Take a minute to reflect and humble yourself before God.

JAPAN NOTES

Tsunamis & Japan

Perhaps it is appropriate that the word we use for a seismic wave (tsunami) is Japanese in origin. Japan is well acquainted with tsunami disasters. Of the top ten largest tsunamis in modern history, six of them occurred along the coasts of Japan.

That long history with tsunamis is reflected in Japan's cultural work. Many are familiar with the famous woodblock print of a great wave appearing to crash down upon Mount Fuji. Japanese literature is filled with such disaster narratives of earthquakes, fires and tsunamis.

The Japanese share a close, yet turbulent relationship with the sea. The sea is a place of both great beauty and great heartache. It provides life, food and financial means, but it also brings death and destruction.

On 311, the residents of coastal towns had little more than 25 minutes after the earthquake before the first waves arrived, traveling at a speed of 550mph when they reached land. Although warning sirens blared shortly after the earthquake, many fatally misjudged the amount of time they would have to flee to higher ground. Live news coverage on the day of the disaster showed the tsunami waves approaching in the distance while people drove or walked about in the foreground, seemingly unaware that their life was in great danger.

“ Dear Father God, help the people of Japan...

...to recognize the danger their lives are in without you. So many are unaware of their need to receive forgiveness in your Son and leave the decision until too late. Please speak gentle warnings to them through the witness of the church, your Spirit, and your Word.

”

DAY 2

THEME

Strength for Days of Trouble

READ

Psalm 46

"He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken." Psalm 62:2

➔ WARMUP: What kinds of things "shake our world?"

The Day Japan Stood Still

It was the day when everything stopped. On March 11, 2011 at 2:46pm, some 80 miles off the coast of Japan, tectonic plates deep down on the ocean floor suddenly shift and grind against each other, triggering a 9.1 magnitude tremor. The earthquake is the largest in Japan's recorded history. It is massive enough to push the island of Japan 8 feet west, shift the axis of the earth 10 inches, and shorten a day by 1.8 microseconds.

People stop. Elevators stop. Phones stop. Trains stop. Clocks stop. Everything stops but the ground. For over 3 heart-pounding minutes the rolling and swaying continue. Those standing, either squat down or fall down. Those driving, struggle to come to a straight stop. For a moment everything is put on pause as the whole country lurches about, holding its breath, and wondering what to do next. Then, as if an unseen play button is pressed again, the pandemonium begins.

As the size of the shaking grows and continues into minute two and three, people collectively realize that *this* quake can not be waited out like most. Everyone scurries for safety. People all across the country, hands or bags over their head, hide under whatever is convenient. Some scramble and shriek out of the way of falling furniture, ceiling tiles, building facade and other matter. School children race outside with their panic-struck teachers and hardhats in



A clock stops at the moment of the earthquake

hand. Office workers try desperately to navigate their way down stairwells that seem to swirl beneath their feet like the floor of a fun house. Once outside, they look up as the skyscrapers creak and sway about like trees in a storm. News and emergency crews fly into action. Sirens go off and TVs blare warning alarms.

Earthquake response protocol calls for getting a cushion for your head, opening a door or window for escape, turning off the gas, and finding a doorway to stand in or table to crouch under. Too many tasks to remember during a singularly frightening event! Protocol goes out the window as more primal survival instincts kick in.



Duck and cover at a Tokyo department store

When the 3 minutes of shaking end, everything has changed for Japan. Fires would ravage buildings and refineries. A nuclear crisis would escalate out of control. A killer tsunami would be unleashed. 20,000 people would lose their lives. Many would lose everything else. The otherwise average day in Japan would become one to shake the soul of the country.

Isn't that the way disasters usually enter our lives? Like a bolt from the blue, when least expected, the medical report, the pink slip, the collection notice, the bad news in its many bad forms shakes our world. For a moment that seems paused in time, we hold our breath and wonder what to do. And perhaps in that moment, that brief stillness before we fly into panic and action, God can find room to speak. Not in the thundering earthquake or fire, but in the gentle whisper He reassures us that nothing has changed in the sovereign control of the universe, so *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10).



Who's in charge here anyway?

- ➔ Have my actions recently reflected that I know my "strength comes from quietness and trust" (Isaiah 30:15) in the middle of troubles?
- ➔ What do I need to turn down, turn off, or distance myself from in order to hear the quiet whispers of God, and rest in his sovereign control?

All Shook Up?

A small group leader's guide is available at www.LavermansInJapan.com/311leadersguide

- 1 How do you react when things are shaken up in your life? Has there been something recently that shook you unexpectedly?

- 2 What types of trouble does the psalmist find himself surrounded by in Psalm 46:2-3, 6, 9? Do these troubles continue even today?

In the midst of these “world-shaking” circumstances, what does the psalmist affirm in verses 1, 5 and 7 regarding:

- 1) Where God is?
- 2) What God is (imagery used)?

- 3 Read 46:10 in a couple of different versions. Do you understand this as a: Command? Promise? Action? Attitude? How is it all of these?

- 4 In Mark 4:35-41, what did the disciples and Jesus head right into (4:37)? Why do you think Jesus was able to sleep so peaceably through it? What similarities are there between the state of the sea and the state of the disciples' emotions?

What does Jesus point to as the source of their fear (4:40)?
Where was their faith to be focused in this unexpected calamity?

- 5 In 1 Kings 19:9-13, we find the prophet Elijah hiding in a cave. How do you picture him? What circumstances and emotions led him here?

How does God finally reveal himself to Elijah in 19:11-12? Why do you think God now uses this very individual, up-close method?

6 Why do you think we often miss the whispers of God? What are our usual expectations of how He works?

7 When troubles in life shake us up badly, what perspective from the above passages can be of help to still us? Read Psalm 27 aloud. Meditate on the whispers of God to you in this passage.

JAPAN NOTES

Suffering & Japanese Religion

Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara surprised many when he said, “The Japanese people must take advantage of this disaster to wash away their selfish greed. I really think this is divine punishment.” He later apologized, but the damage was done. People were shocked not just because he pinned blame on suffering victims, but because his statement was so incongruous with the beliefs of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan.

In Shinto, human beings become polluted by this world and must seek purification. But natural disasters are *not* punishment brought about by impurity. Nature and the gods simply do what they do. Nature does not regard humans to be at the center of the story; the spirits (the gods) are what matter. We are here by the mercy of the gods, but we are not their primary concern. We should not expect them to work on our behalf, nor spare us from tragedies that might occur.

In Buddhism, a self effort solution is proposed whereby one can transcend suffering. Buddhism is silent, however, concerning natural disasters. Geology and geography simply make tragedies an unavoidable part of life. What’s important is not the tragedy itself, but how one faces the tragedy with endurance and courage. This attitude is seen in the Japanese virtue of “*gaman*” or “putting up” with hard circumstances.

“ Dear Father God, you are not silent in times...

of tragedy, nor absent in times of grief. You do not act out of whimsy or disregard for man like the gods of this world. You delight in us, quiet us with your love, and rejoice over us with singing (Zephaniah 3:17). Lead the Japanese to know the depth of Your heart for them.

”

THIS IS A SAMPLE ONLY

**An additional 12 lessons
are included in the
complete print and digital book.**

SAMPLE

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is intended to be multi-purpose. Please consider how you might creatively use it to deepen your walk with God, and empower your vision and prayer for mission work.

① Personal Devotions

Why not take two-weeks for Japan? Use all 14 studies as a 10~15 minute daily devotional for yourself, or together with a friend.

- ✓ Read the Bible passage at the top of each study.
- ✓ Next, read the 311-related story in the study.
- ✓ Reflect on the heart-check questions.
- ✓ Finally, take time to pray for Japan. **

② Small Group Bible Study

How about using this book with your small group or Sunday School class? Use all 14 studies or select from among them.

- ✓ Use the warm-up question to get started in your group.
- ✓ Transition to the Bible section. Read together carefully.
- ✓ Next, read the 311-related story in the study.
- ✓ Use the Bible study questions to guide your discussion. *
- ✓ Finally, pray for Japan as a group. **

③ Church-wide Missions Education

This book may be helpful in a variety of ways to build mission awareness within your church. Provide it as a resource or use in a breakout group at a mission conference. Study it together with your church's mission committee. Give it to your short-term team preparing for missions/relief work in Japan. Use the short articles as departure points for more study and prayer concerning Japan.

* The questions in each study are carefully chosen to fit the theme and provide a natural flow of discussion. The small group leader/facilitator should prepare ahead of time by reviewing all questions and Bible references. There may be more material than can be covered in the time constraints of a small group session. The leader may eliminate questions for the sake of time. It may also be helpful to use commentaries, concordances or other Bible study tools to provide additional insight into the Bible passages being studied. A leader's guide of sample answers and notes for the studies is also available at: www.LavermansInJapan.com/311leadersguide

** Additional prayer needs for Japan and information about the country, people, ministry, and vision are available on our website: www.ReachingTheOther99.com

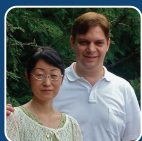
“Standing on the swaying ground, still the cross is brightly shining.” — JV Martin, 1923

When missionary JV Martin penned the words to “A Light on the Cross” in 1923, Japan had just experienced its darkest day. The Great Tokyo earthquake of September 1st had claimed the lives of over 142,000 people. Countless more had lost their homes and livelihood. In the darkness of the first night, the flickering flames of candles in the hands of survivors seemed to him to form the shape of a cross piercing the blackness around and despair within.

On March 11, 2011, 88 years later, the 9.1 magnitude earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis “triple tragedy” threw Japan into black despair again. The ensuing energy crisis plunged Japan into a literal darkness that seemed symbolic of the bleak mood of survivors. Yet for those who saw with eyes of faith, the cross shone ever brightly, a beacon of hope in the tragedy around. God always comes and stays with his people in their darkest moments.

“Many waters cannot quench love, nor rivers ever wash it away.” Song of Solomon 8:7

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kevin and Kaori Laverman are missionaries with WorldVenture in Japan where they've lived since 1999. They are currently planting a church, Denen Grace Chapel, in the Kawasaki area, while being a part of the ongoing relief effort in northern Japan. Kevin and Kaori are the parents of one son, Justen Keiji. In addition to their love for Japan, they also call Chicagoland their home.

The Lavermans welcome your visit to Japan and invite you to also connect with them online, sign up for their newsletter, learn more about their work, and pray for Japan in the name of Jesus.

www.lavermansinJapan.org



USD \$5.00 (JPY ¥500)