

# REACHING THE OTHER 99

church planting with you to reach the 99% in Japan

DECEMBER 2014 NEWS

## Kevin & Kaori Laverman CHURCH PLANTING IN KAWASAKI, JAPAN

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." Isaiah 9:2*

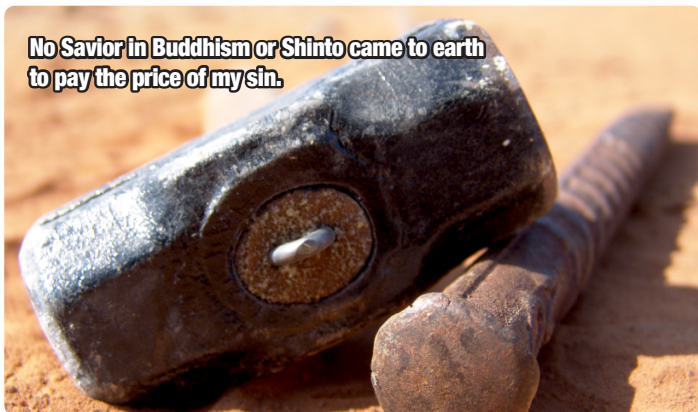
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## ➔ The Man with the Hammer

The idea of personal sin is hard to understand for Japanese, and so always an obstacle for us in communicating the gospel. But every so often the Holy Spirit speaks to a person in a unique and convicting way. Like Mr. T...

No Savior in Buddhism or Shinto came to earth to pay the price of my sin.



choosing to hold the hammer that pounded the nails. Have you ever thought like this?" L-o-n-g pause. Mr. T let out a soft groan and muttered, "That's intense." And I wondered if I had just jeopardized the relationship and two years of study. But I sensed the Spirit working. Mr. T wanted to meet again the following week.

The heartbeat of what we do in church planting work is in the many one-on-one, or two-on-two (as couples) Bible studies around our tiny living room table.

Kaori and I met with Mr. T for more than a year, systematically taking him through an evangelistic study. We were glad Mr. T was always eager to set the next date to study further, but disappointed that he didn't seem to grasp the import of things on his own personal life: "What connection do I have with a man on a cross thousands of years ago?" Understanding that his sin put Christ there, didn't seem to register. This is typical in Japan. Shinto and Buddhism have no concept of personal sin like Christianity.

Then a breakthrough. In October, I suggested what seemed almost cliché: "Even though you weren't at the cross, your face was represented in the crowd calling for his crucifixion. By choosing to ignore your need for Christ, you are

By the next study, Mr. T was ready. He had been struggling all week with the idea of holding a hammer against God, and was ready to let it go. As I led him, he confessed his need for Christ and received God's forgiveness. There at our living room table, another Japanese dropped the hammer, and God threw a party in heaven as a child came home. Thanks for praying and being a part of reaching Mr. T for Christ! ☺



What's our church plant doing here?  
Answer in the back top article.

### Winter Illumination (photo above)

In recent years, massive illumination "amusement parks" have become increasingly popular in Japan as a way to cheer up the dark winter months. This display with millions of lights is outside of Nagoya in central Japan.

## PRAY with us thru the week

**SUN** Pray for Kevin's evangelistic Bible studies with Mr. S, Mr. N, and Mr. T#2. Pray for our early discipleship studies with Mr. T (right article), Ms. O, and Miss H.

**MON** Pray for us as we finish up the 2014 financial year. Your partnership with us here is a constant source of encouragement. Thank you!

**TUE** Pray for us as we look for partnerships for a new church planting work in the area. We're considering a candidate location, but need God's clear direction, provision, and people to form a launch team.

**WED** Pray for salvation decisions from among the 20+ non-Christian members of our bi-weekly gospel music workshop. Two are interested in an beginners Bible study. Pray that others will want to join.

**THUR** Pray for the provision of a Japanese pastor for our church plant. We need God's man in place to enable us to move onto new church planting work. We are considering one candidate currently in seminary.

**FRI** Pray for healing of Kaori's finger joint pain. Pray for Justen to catch up with homeschooling studies. Pray for Kevin to maintain routines of diet, rest and exercise.



## ➔ The Church without Doors



Miyako tsunami survivors pose with their Bible calligraphy masterpieces.

*“Up until the 311 tragedy, most Japanese didn't even know a Christian. They didn't feel anything toward the church or Christianity period!” says a Miyako Community Church member when I asked her about the ongoing relief work. “The tsunami changed things. Now, many people around here can say they know a Christian!”*

Our team of six from our church plant, Denen Grace Chapel, again worked in the tsunami-struck area of Taro for a weekend last month, and can testify to Mrs. S's words. Now, through the work of literally hundreds of

Christian volunteer relief workers, many understand what Christianity is about: a neighbor there in their time of need with God's words and hands of hope.

I preached at the church on Sunday, giving Pastor Iwatsuka a needed break. Kaori directed our team in some special music. Attendance numbered maybe a dozen or so, typical size for a Japanese church. But that's not their real size:

We follow Pastor Iwatsuka to a cluster of temporary housing in Miyako. Pastor I greets the residents by name, and casually picks up conversations on things they had previously talked about. He knows them!



Mr. A, who spent his life aboard a fishing boat, shares some tall tales over lunch.

Meanwhile, we go door to door, distributing the small gifts (*photo on front*) we prepared, and inviting the residents to join our “mobile cafe” in the common room. There, our own Mrs. U has prepared a Bible calligraphy lesson. Residents trace simple Scripture verses like *“The joy of the Lord is my strength.”* We serve hot coffee. I share a short Bible message. We sing and pray together. Then we serve them lunch: taco rice and salad. The men are reluctant to come out, so we hand deliver the meal to some shut-ins.

We say our good byes. Everyone steals a hug from the American (myself). Then we go to another temporary housing area and do it all again.

Of the 60+ temporary housing areas around Miyako, the church has a ongoing presence in 26 of them! God has thrown away the doors of the church to provide it with perhaps the greatest opportunity for community engagement in Japan in the last 100 years. And this little church has seized it! ☞

**The full version of this report, including my interesting interaction with the Japanese police, is available on our website as a recent blog post.**

## LIFE IN JAPAN

### When it comes to Christmas, Japan “takes the cake”

When Japanese in Tokyo dream of a “white” Christmas, it can only be made of cream frosting...over yellow sponge cake...with red strawberries on top. For Japanese, strawberry shortcake is the essence of Christmas. Here in Kawasaki, the Christmas cake order forms from local bakeries fill our mailbox from late October. For those who dislike the long December 24th pickup lines, home delivery is possible. Tiny brand name shortcakes can set you back \$50 or more!

Blame it on Western influence. It's said that the founder of Fujiya Food Service, Fujii Rinemon, first got the idea during a Christmas visit to the States in the 1920's. Fujiya has sold the Christmas cakes ever since, although it's only been the last 20 years when they fully took root in Japan's Christmas psyche. Now, 75% of Japanese say they must eat Christmas cake!

Just think...if Fujii has visited a church instead of a cake shop, the Christmas story might be very different in Japan today. Missionaries like me often wonder why Japanese find the cake to be so compelling of a Christmas image, while the baby Jesus is so foreign

(I challenge you to come and find Christ anywhere at Christmas in Kawasaki).

Japanese have long been eager adopters. They pick and choose from other cultures those elements they enjoy, and discard the rest. But who would discard the baby Jesus for cheap white frosting? If only Japanese knew the real value of each. But then again, do we? American Christmas values may not be so far behind the white frosting of secular Japan.

My Christmas dream is that nativity sets will replace shortcake as Japan's new Christmas craze. My prayer is that you and I, too, will treasure the baby Christ much more than just the “frosted” fun this Christmas.



Christmas cake. If only Japan would “Taste and see that the LORD is good.”

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