

## Desperate prayers for the Japanese

Dan Nelson - pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

When I first arrived at Tokyo's Narita International Airport, I was exhausted and excited and completely unprepared for what I had gotten myself into. Having just spent the last day flying across the Pacific in the cheapest seat I could find anywhere, I felt dizzy trying to navigate my way through the terminal. - It was my first trip outside the United States and every little thing seemed different. We had stopped in Hawaii on the way but didn't even get out of the plane. And throughout the entire flight I was transfixed on the first few pages of a book on Japanese language that I had borrowed from the Ojai Library. Since I was going to be submersed in this foreign culture for the entire semester, I knew late fees and looks of disapproval would await me back at my favorite reading room but I had to focus forward. There was no turning around or changing my mind. Japan would be my home for the next three months.

Shelley and I were engaged to be married and I had outlined a career in the real estate development and resort business. Japanese funding was part of my financing plan and fluidity in the language and culture was an essential component in my objective. I was intent on becoming wealthy and successful in the way it was popularly defined, CEO of my own multinational conglomerate, and trekking the soil of the "Land of the Rising Sun" would be a step in this intended direction. I had no intention of falling in love with the Japanese people, nor any sense of divine purpose other than my raw ambition that seemed it was finally coming to fruition.

It was cold and rainy as I found my way to the transport that would take me downtown. In the lobby of a fancy hotel, I was to meet up with my first contact, my host sister, who after introducing herself, ushered me into a taxi and brought me home. After investing the entire flight attempting to learn how to adequately introduce myself in this foreign language, I hoped I was ready. But the anticipation, and weariness, mixed with the confusion in the storm as we tried to rush my bags out of the trunk and through the downpour to get inside, caused my brain to halt. I failed to remember to take off my shoes at the entry, and tracked mud right into the house. My embarrassment was soothed by the laughter of the two women who would become my mother and grandmother in a way that I had not expected.

Subsequent days and weeks became a torrent of new experiences. I quickly became proficient using chopsticks and was forced to eat things I never envisioned trying. After being given a bicycle and taught how to use the public transportation, I was mobile. It would take two hours each way to untangle the labyrinth of trains and commuting masses to get to class each day where we learned the language of survival. The things I got to do and the people I met were exhilarating. And yet, my most profound exploit would be the transformation of my heart.

I was not expecting to be adopted into the Akimoto family as a son and be loved by them.

And I had no intention to be used by God to introduce my sister to Jesus. My reasons for being in Japan were about myself, and my strategy for secular triumph. My passion changed and it would become an important marker in God's redirection of my life.

When Shelley and I moved there a year after our wedding, to become English teachers, our motivations were altogether different. We had immersed ourselves in the teachings of the Bible and our lives were impacted by it. Now many years later, Japan is on the news every day due to the recent tragedy that is impacting so many people. The earthquake and tsunami, and subsequent meltdown of the reactor cores of the affected nuclear power plants have gripped the planet. The lives that were lost and the dangers that are looming are consuming many prayers throughout the world. And, if it wasn't for a promise of God that I have access to his throne in prayer, I would feel completely and totally helpless.

I wanted you to know a bit of my story so that I could share my heart of desperate dependence upon God in hope for the Japanese people. My personal story of desiring to gain when God wanted to give his gift through me is resounding in my core today. I am glad to hear so many people praying for Japan, and while my personal testimony connects my soul to them, I have no resources to do anything more than pray. But maybe that is God's plan for me right now. I want to get there, and intervene, and make an impact, and bring a message of love and hope, but perhaps this is a perfect reminder for me about the difference between my intentions and God's methods. He may choose to send someone else and leave me here to pray. But, Jesus thought that prayer was a pretty powerful tool to change the world and I would be wise to be content in his example.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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### Sunday Worship:

**9:00 & 10:45am**

Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

### Mid-Week Study:

**7:00pm Thursday**

Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View