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Letter to a Japanese Returnee

Dear Tadashi,

It was sad to say goodbye to you at the airport today, maybe sadder for you alone on the flight home than for the rest of us who are still here together. We hope that this letter will bring encouragement to you and that you are reading this during your flight as we had planned. As you can see we included pictures of your friends from the "Sayonara party" last night. We hope these will help you remember to pray for each one of us as we pray for you.

The title of a book I am reading is, "The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends." I really like this title because it describes just what we have all been doing together in the fellowship this past year. I remember when you first joined our fellowship two years ago. You were probably a little nervous being around a group of "religious freaks" who were always talking about "God" and "Jesus." But we are so thankful that you kept coming back because, as you said, you experienced a sense of welcome in our group that you had never known before. As you know now, what you experienced was the love of Jesus!

The title of my book also reminds me that God has created us for fellowship with him but also, importantly, deep fellowship and community with one another in the faith. We know that finding such a community when you get home may be difficult. But I would encourage you to ask God to help you find like-minded, like-hearted followers of Christ who can encourage each other. It may take some time and it may be small at first—2 or 3—but Jesus promised us that even where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name He would be present there with us. And I frequently find comfort in Jesus promise to his disciples that he would never leave them, but be with them to the end of the age. We are his disciples, and it's not yet the end of the age, so we are totally covered by this promise too! We will pray that God will help you discover or build this "company of the committed" who can serve Jesus together in your community.

I am sure that many of your friends have reminded you not to forget the basics, the "fundamentals" of remaining strong in your walk with Christ. I am glad that you have already adopted the important habit of daily Bible reading. I personally find the One Year Bible reading schedule helpful. It gives me a balance of reading from the Old Testament, the Psalms, Proverbs and the New Testament every day. We have encouraged everyone in the fellowship to keep a prayer-journal, and if you haven't started this yet, consider this as a way to launch your prayer life as you begin your faith-journey in Japan. Communicating with your Heavenly Father—with praise, thanksgiving, requests, and remembering your family and friends—will be the best way to keep this relationship active and growing.

I remember that you told me about your biggest concerns about returning home: facing your family and friends, finding a good church, and living out your faith at work. (Did I forget, "finding a Christian spouse!") Each one of these topics needs a whole discussion, but let me share a couple of tips that may be of help to you.

In relation to your family my experienced Asian friend advises, “Go slow, keep low, don’t blow.” Think long term. Following Christ is “a long obedience in the same direction” and influencing our families for Christ also can take a long time. What your family needs to see, first of all, is the attitude and character of Christ in you, and then there will be opportunity to talk about the reasons for the hope that you have in Christ. Pray for them. Love them. Serve them. Let God prepare their hearts for the good news of Christ.

The above advice for dealing with families is not bad for handling your relationship with churches as well. Some churches are afraid of returnees who act like they “know-it-all” because they have lived and studied abroad. That’s far from reality, isn’t it? In a sense, they are far ahead of you in knowledge and experience in the area of “living as Christian in Japan.” Learn from them. When you are willing to learn from them, this communicates as humility, which is a fruit of the Spirit, alongside patience I just shared with you, showing Christ working in you. At the church you go to, this will make it easy for the pastor and Christians to get to know you even when they first perceived you as a “know-it-all”. It worked for my experienced Asian friend. He was accepted as “one of us” very soon. People at church listened to him. He was serving at the church in no time. That’s another thing. If you look for a church not only where you can be fed and nurtured, but where you can serve in a way that God has gifted you, then you will be on the right track.

In order to keep your faith at work and influence your colleagues for Christ you need to draw on all of the resources we have just mentioned—a consistent pursuit of personal spiritual disciplines, a tight group of Christian friends, a community where you are being built up in the faith and the heart of a servant. You can do your best work on the job when you remember that you are serving Christ who wants you to bless others. Your friends at work will eventually take notice and be asking you about your purpose in life.

I remember a very good advice from a wise friend, a missionary who served in Asia for many years. “If you want to influence others, sit on the same side and nudge, rather than sitting on the opposite side and point fingers.” I really like this tip because it is so true in cross-cultural situation, as well as within the same culture. This requires patience, humility and learning from them.

Tadashi, you have an exciting journey ahead. God is taking you on the most thrilling way to live—being on mission with Him. And He always goes before you to prepare the way. We all have the privilege of knowing and serving Him only by His grace. So don’t fear. Don’t lose courage. Remember, nothing can ever separate you from God’s love.

And enjoy your mom’s great cooking that you told me about!

Your brother in Christ,

Dan Brannen

Towards Growthful Re-entry

by Linda Edwards Olson

What is re-entry culture shock?

It is simply the transition into one's home culture after having lived for a time in another culture. It is often characterized by an accentuation of confrontation with the person's own identity and just how culturally bound he or she is.

What causes this re-entry time to be difficult for some?

Generally it is because the individual has changed or is changing in attitudes and values and comes back to an environment that has not changed in the same direction. (For long-termers the environment may have changed drastically from the environment they originally left. This is not usually true for summer short-termers.) The deeper these attitude and value changes are in the individual, the more likely that the transition period will be unsettling.

Specifically, some of the points of dissonance a returnee may experience may touch on the following areas:

- reaction to the affluence of one's own culture
- reaction to superficial values presented in the media
- adjusting to role changes or undefined roles; an ambiguous home situation
- minimal responsibility as compared to their short-term responsibility
- a disillusionment with one's church over their abundance and seeming lack of concern for the world
- a seeming lack of genuinely concerned friends who will and want to listen
- an inability to express or share the experience and resulting changes
- an awareness of habits or behaviors that were second nature before they left and now seem meaningless or disturbing as they come back into their culture

How do people handle this re-entry time?

There are basically 3 different reactions to this transition time:

- The Assimilators seem to slide right back into the home culture with little to no problem and appear almost to have forgotten the summer. These students may seem to have adjusted well but may have missed out on the greatest growth opportunity, for they do not seem to integrate the things they saw, learned and questioned into a new view of life and the world.

Afterward

This "Returnee Workbook 2" is created as supplemental material for the "Returnee Workbook." Each article was gathered from various resources and may not be specifically applicable to every returnee from overseas to Japan. However, we pray that each of the articles will serve as a guide during your returning process.

It has been 18 years since JCFN's ministry began in 1990. Over the years, an increasing number of Japanese have experienced life abroad; returnees are not rare anymore. The Internet has filled the distance between overseas and Japan. We have been able to use e-mail instead of phone calls or letters to follow-up on returnees. As globalization propels, cultures draw closer together. Not only does this phenomenon allow returnees to keep in touch with their overseas friends and host families, Christian brothers and sisters can encourage each other. This present time is perhaps the most blessed environment that we have ever experienced in history. In spite of this, returnees still feel loneliness, experience a gap between themselves and their family, society, and sense of values. Some of them have completely fallen apart from fellowship with other Christians and are faced with a crisis: losing their life's purpose in Jesus Christ.

There are ultimately two solutions to this problem. First of all, we need to truly understand salvation through Jesus Christ and redemption from sin so that we can establish a solid identity in God. We need to allow the values of God's Kingdom to flow through every aspect of our lives, reading the Word of God on a daily basis, praying, and obeying the Lord so that Christ will rule us in every inch of our beings. In doing so, we will be able to handle each problem such as cultural differences and relationship with others, with values based on biblical sense. Secondly, "let us not give up meeting together (Hebrew 10:25)" by remaining in fellowship in order to encourage and pray for one another. We cannot pursue Christian life alone. It requires deliberate efforts to connect to and remain a part of Christian fellowship. It is not an option, but a necessity, to be connected to an accountability group or a small group. If anyone thinks he can live without it, he is arrogant. We are created to walk together as we live out the Word of God by "one anothering."

We pray that the Lord will guide and support each of your walk after returning. If there is any way that we, as JCFN can support you, please contact us at anytime.

**"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."
(John 20:21)**

of meals? And let's weep with those who are weeping. What is important is your presence there as a family member.

In this way you can try to avoid the ritual of worshipping the dead as a god. If you explain, people may accept it more readily than you expect. You may, perhaps, be placed in a difficult position with the issue leading to a family conference. However, I think that how it begins is very important. If you leave things inconclusive, that will put you into the most difficult situation later. This is the crucial stage. You should resist at your own personal risk, just like Daniel and his friends did.

Since ancestor worship is a social ritual, social sanctions will be imposed against those who do not obey. It can be extremely severe, but we should encourage one another even if we do experience a setback. If the situation is very difficult, we can ask for prayer at church, and just like Daniel, let's survive tenaciously in a "gentile" society.

3. Stand on each person's conscience in faith like Paul

Another role model is Paul, who taught about God in Rome, a gentile society. His struggle to build a church in the large secular city, Corinth, comes through in his two letters addressed to the church there. All the meat sold at markets had been offered to a gentile god. Should we eat or not? Although Paul says we do not have to be so sensitive and we can eat, he still says he would not eat. That was for the conscience of the other disciples. He does not want any disciples to be upset by watching him, their teacher, eating.

Paul treasured the conscience of the believers in every respect. Do things openly if you believe it is good before God. If you feel guilty, you should stop it no matter what others do or say. Furthermore, eating the meat is acceptable for his own conscience in faith, but he still does not do so because of the conscience of young believers, as they may be upset by watching him eating. This may seem confusing, but this is his stance in his attitude of treasuring the conscience of each person.

At Buddhist funerals and memorial ceremonies, the offering of incense becomes the focal point. Offering incense has different meanings, such as killing the stench of death, or praying for happiness after death. However, it does involve worship of the dead. It is definitely a NO for us to do this on these occasions. In practice, some people do not go forward to offer incense at all, while others go forward and pray, so there are different options. We cannot say what is absolutely right.

In such a case, each person acts based on his conscience in faith, and we respect one another. That is Paul's fundamental rule.

Again as a summary, like Daniel, and like Paul, as a Christian in the "gentile" society, Japan, let each of us live with conviction.

- The Alienators seem to reject the home culture, although for short-termers this may not last very long. They may become very pessimistic and critical of the home culture, realizing that they too have been a part of it. They seem limited in their ability to see the range of social structures and their appropriateness and are "stuck" in their ability to create personal alternatives for life values. They may finally succumb to the home culture out of a need to belong somewhere. Again, this reaction does not afford a growthful re-entry time.
- The Integrator is the one who expects the dissonance he or she is experiencing although maybe not in each form it appears. They are able to identify the changes they have undergone or are still experiencing and do not demand immediate closure on them. They desire to see their short-term have a lasting impact on their life and the lives of others. This means that they will grapple with how to integrate the things they saw, learned and questioned into creative alternative choices.

How can I become an Integrator or help someone else become one and experience growthful re-entry?

There are no pat answers to this, but there are some helpful guidelines for you or the person you are helping:

- Upon initial re-entry, you may experience many physical changes: tiredness, apathy, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, etc. These are normal especially if a long flight has been sustained. Balanced diet, balanced sleep and balanced exercise should not be taken lightly. This will help to bring the body back in balance! (It will also help emotionally.)
- Unmet expectations: Since this is the major problem for the returnee, it is best discussed before the short-termer even goes out. If you can anticipate the changes as you come back you will be one step ahead. Try to identify what the sources of dissonance are now as you return. What values, attitudes are changing?
- Debrief with others who will listen and ask questions: What did you do? Whom did you meet? How did you live? What was the easiest? What was most difficult? What was funny? What was sad? What did you learn about yourself? The other culture? What did you learn about the church? About God? (Find one person who will spend time with you in this way.)
- If you kept a journal, go over one entry a day and ask God to teach you something new or remind you of something out of that entry. Continue to write in a journal with thoughts, feelings, insights and prayers.
- Pray - alone, with others, with a prayer partner; pray for the people you met, the church, yourself, the people with whom you want to share.

- Give yourself a spiritual checkup: Do I feel closer or more distant from God? What will help my love for Christ grow? A new Quiet Time? A few long walks and prayer? A day alone with the Lord? Be creative but be disciplined and do not forget the forgiving Father.
- Recall the successes and accomplishments of the short-term and develop a list of gifts and strengths that God gave and affirmed.
- Become a story teller. Learn to tell short stories from your short term that will speak quickly to those with whom you want to share.
- Learn how to answer not despise the question, "How was your summer?" Use a few descriptive words and ask if you can spend more time together sharing from both of your summers.

Is there life after the short term?

There most certainly is! And the ones who have the greatest impact upon others as a result are those who take the time to process and integrate their experience and draw up some plans for action as a result of it. Let us pray this year that all returning short-termers to campuses can by the power of the Holy Spirit integrate their short-term experiences into their life now and effect change in others for the mission of Christ's Church.

Adapted from Student Training in Missions Manual, 1992

JCFN Seminar: How to deal with ceremonial occasions in Japan " Like Daniel, Like Paul"

Shohei Yamato (Pastor, Kyoto Bible Church)
from JCFN Newsletter Equipper in August, 2007

This time, let's look at the reason why people say "Christians are cold-hearted" at Buddhist funerals or Buddhist memorial services. With that in mind, I would like to talk about being flexible and firm like Daniel and acting on the belief of himself like Paul.

1. The reason people say "Christians are cold-hearted"

Isn't it the case that we will be told that "Christians are cold-hearted" if we do not attend Buddhist funerals or Buddhist memorial services? Japanese Religion is based on ancestor worship, which is mixed with Buddhism. Ancestor worship has two pillars: feelings of compassion and grief for the loved ones or family members, and an unfounded fear of the dead person and their spirit. Conflicting emotions coexist, a sense of anxious fear which cannot be wiped out, while at the same time missing the deceased person.

As we want to keep God as our only God, we neither offer incense, nor attend the ceremony itself, in order to avoid worshiping a deceased family member. When we do so, Christians are accused of being cold-hearted people who do not show compassion and grief for their loved ones. We are trying not to worship from the fear of the dead person's spirit, but other Japanese consider that we are being cold towards our families.

In the first place, we have to understand the religious basis which Japanese "ancestor worship" has, which causes such misunderstandings.

2. Be flexible and firm like Daniel

Daniel became a captive of Babylonia, a foreign nation, as a young aristocrat of the tribe of Judah. Daniel lived flexibly in gentile society, did good work for successive kings in Babylon, Persia and Mede and held an important position.

However, when the king Darius ordered to worship his statue and tried to make him deny their faith in God itself, they resisted at the risk of their lives. He still prayed to God three times a day, standing firm on his faith.

Daniel who lived flexibly and firmly in his faith within gentile society, could be a role model for Christians in Japan. Buddhist funeral or memorial ceremonies have an aspect of expressing love for the deceased. The 5th Commandment is "honor your father and mother," so that is the action that we could take. Recently, the value of family members gathering together and shedding tears for the deceased is increasingly recognized as a necessary grief process, and part of recovery.

Instead of staying away from Buddhist funerals or memorial services, how about going there and doing something we can do, such as cleaning or taking care

5-3. Concept of calling

When we feel a “calling from God”, it should be to seek His will, to devote our talents to care for other people, and to seek salvation. Therefore, if our idea is to fulfill our own desires, it cannot be a “calling.”

5-4. Not ability but personality

Just as an airplane is only expected to take off and touch down, each person only has certain abilities which are expected of them. Good jobs get done in teams. So the personality traits of “trusting” and “being trusted” are important. When you work, you often think “it will be quicker if I do it by myself”. But if you do it by yourself, you will lose out on the good job the team would do, or lose their trust. Five co-workers who have 80% ability are better than one person who has 120% ability. You learn ability in company, while personality is something which grows day by day. It cannot be forced.

6. Maturation of sense of value

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves.” (Psalm 127:1-2)

6-1. The house built by the Lord

God’s blessing does not equal career success. Our jobs are a ministry for building up the kingdom of God, not our own houses. In Nehemiah’s time, when people stopped building the city wall and went back home to build up their own houses, work was held up. Nehemiah persuaded people to re-think their situation.

The whole question of your work is whether you are aiming “to build up the kingdom of God” or “to maintain ordinary life.” We need to choose one or the other. And this issue influences your whole life.

6-2. The Lord protects

The phrase, “the Lord protects” means “The Lord kept vigil” in Exodus chapter 12. When Moses escaped from Egypt with Israel, the Lord kept vigil. Because the Lord protects and keeps vigil over our job, our labor bears fruit.

6-3. Labor bears fruit

What do you want to achieve through the job you are looking for? What payment will you get from it? Let’s think about what the pay is, other than the salary. When you look at it like this you can confirm your understanding of work, and see if you are living as a disciple of Christ or not.

6-4. Believing in God

When you build up trust in personal relationships, you learn trust in God and obedience.

Getting ready for church in Japan

Rev. Hidenori Takahashi (Tachikawa Evangelical Free Church)
Based on the workshop at the Equipper Conference 2001

A. Key scriptures relating to church and fellowship

1. The Church is a place filled with the Holy Spirit

“(the church) ...which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Ephesians 1:23)

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

2. The Church is God’s family

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household” (Ephesians 2:19)

The family is the place where we can relax—but some might also say “Family is scary.” Many people carry scars from problems in family relationships. Even in the early church there were conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians. We cannot avoid also being influenced by the Japanese type of family-centered approach.

3. Jesus’ greatest command is to love one another.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

In the visible church, loving one another is a better form of evangelism than any other.

4. Not being able to love the brother whom you see is a danger to your faith.

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Faith is a very personal matter involving your relationship with God, but its consequence is inevitably expressed as love for your companions in faith. If this is not the case, we can conclude that something is not right in your relationship to God as well.

5. The great thing which remains for ever is love.

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

(1 Corinthians 13:13)

The goals of the life of faith is the new Jerusalem, the world where loving fellowship is made complete, where we will all shine with glory. So should the church not be a foretaste of this, where Americans and Japanese and Koreans can rejoice in each other's differences?

B. Things to consider when looking for a church.

1. Search using the connections of the person who has led you up to now. (Trust in God's wise provision).
2. Look carefully to see if the Word of God is presented without being mixed with anything else.
3. Avoid self-righteous churches which reject other churches and denominations.
4. There is no such thing as a church without problems, but is there an attitude of recognizing and actively working on problems?
5. Good teaching is most important, but you should also not ignore the need to match the individual personality God has given you.

C. Why are there so many denominations?

1. In Japan there are denominations from all over the world. In many cases this is not a matter of differences in teaching so much as a result of the process by which that church has arisen. The various missionary organizations became the basis of relationships out of which each particular denomination was born.
2. Every Christian who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord has already become a part of the universal Church, and it is not necessary to see the divisions in such a bad light.
3. Let us not forget that a denominational structure which grows too big can have serious drawbacks. It may be enough for each church to keep its individual character while forming relationships in a free way.
4. Most churches take a basic attitude of respecting others, and have a certain amount of fellowship; they do not reject one another. Those who do reject others may well be dangerous.

4. Understanding this secular world

4-1. Is Christianity acceptable in this secular world?

We sometimes hear even Christians saying “Christianity may not be acceptable in the secular world”. However, great companies such as Pioneer, Morinaga, and Yamato Transport, make a contribution to society through their business.

When Christians do something careless, they are seen as not being accepted in society. But that is based on the thought that the moral values and pressures in society are stronger than the moral values of the Christians. If a Christian says “I go by the ethics of society, not by the Word”, his or her faith fails to obey God's Word. Instead, we should ask “why don't they fulfill their responsibilities as a Christian?” If we obey God's Word sincerely, we should be careful to keep our promises.

4-2. God rules this world

“... you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.” (Daniel 4:25)

This is what Daniel said to his superior, King Nebuchadnezzar. Do we believe that God is present behind our superior in the company or our interviewer? When one person testified to his faith in a job-interview, the interviewer asked him, “Which would you choose if your faith and the company policy conflicted?” He hesitated for an instant, and said, “My faith.” He passed this interview. The non-Christian interviewer said later, “Many people lie for their own benefit, but you are great at maintaining your faith.”

4-3. Having terminal point of view

When the end of this world has come, the question will be what we value. The Sermon on the Mount is not about being “blessed” from the point of view of this world, but everything is turned upside down by the completion of the kingdom of God.

5. Building up the Kingdom of God through our jobs

5-1. Work is not self-fulfillment

Self-fulfillment is “expanding something inside to a maximum and making it work” by Maslow. However, this is not the biblical sense of value.

5-2. Give a “definition” of work

Your “definition” of work is your attitude to your work. What do I work for? It is different if a doctor works “to earn money” or “to save people.”

We see that the principle of working remains after Adam has sinned and work is cursed. Working became a little harder because of sin. You may not be promoted, there is a difficult superior in your office, or your salary is cut; yet even so God has given work into our hands. We are asked how we work in response to God. Let's check the New Testament.

3-4. The New Testament

3-4-1. Warning against idleness

"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12)

3-4-2. Purifying our motivation

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." (Ephesians 6:5-7)

3-5. Relationship between "what we want to do" and the biblical view of labor

About ten years ago, the value concept "my job equals what I want to do" dominated students' job-hunting. However, this concept cannot be drawn from the Bible. When you think deeply about "what I want to do" and "what I like to do", it includes sin. "What I want to do" may not be clean. "What I want to do" may be an starting point, but to accomplish it may not be the goal of your life. "My job equals what I want to do" is a kind of idol in the modern age. There is no prophet in the Bible who actually wanted to be a prophet.

In practice, this sense of value is changing nowadays. In Shuushoku journal of August 2003, the slogan for Nomura Securities is "Aren't you narrowing your flame by what you want to do?" An advertisement for Sony in summer 2005 said "Do you have your will?" There is another slogan, "The important things are a sense of responsibility and a feeling of trust." Doing what you want to do no longer applies nowadays. Slogans will change every ten years; we need to check what it is which most influences our thought and sense of value.

We need to think what we should do to respond to God's first command (trust and obedience), not go by the values of the secular world.

D. Distinguishing denominations: some useful facts (church history)

1. The main divisions of the Christian church are Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant. The same Bible is used in all of them, and the also the same basic confession of faith – for this, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are the shared standard.
2. Protestantism began originally as a protest against the Catholic Church. The basic philosophy is that the church is founded not on tradition but on the Bible. That means in effect that wherever there is a Bible, it is possible to form a church.
3. In the Reformation of the 16th century the Lutheran churches were born, mainly in Germany and Scandinavia. The leadership of Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland gave rise to the Reformed churches on the continent and the Presbyterian church mainly in Scotland. In England the Church of England (also called Anglican or Episcopal Church, in Japan Sei Ko Kai) was born.
4. The 16th century Reformation was closely connected to political movements; one reaction to this was the Anabaptist sect, from which today's Mennonite Brethren are derived. Meanwhile in Britain the Puritan movement, which focused on godly living, gained in strength; to avoid political oppression some emigrated to America and formed the Mayflower Covenant.
5. The freedom of religion granted in America in the 17th century meant that all kinds of Christian sects were permitted, and the situation took on the aspect of a supermarket of denominations. The Puritan stream gave rise to the Congregational churches, which valued the self-government of each individual church. Among these, however, were some who denied the validity of infant baptism and recognized only baptism with a conscious confession of faith; these became the Baptists.
6. In 18th century Britain the Methodist Church, which originally emphasized the experience of sanctification along with conversion, arose from the faith renewal movement of John Wesley; the Holiness churches and others derive from this, and the Nazarene Brethren can also be traced back to it. As a general tendency, in contrast to the Calvinist emphasis on God's lordship and election, these Christians put weight on the human freedom of choice.

7. In 19th century Europe after Napoleon, freedom of religion came to be recognized in most countries, and “free churches” began to separate from the national churches in many areas. From these movements derive such denominations as the Domei churches, the Japan Evangelical Church Association (JECA), the Evangelical Free Church, and the Covenant church movements. Denominations such as these set a high value on biblical faith, believers’ baptism, self-government of the individual church, and belief in the Second Coming.
8. The early 20th century saw the spread (mainly in America) of the Pentecostal movement, which emphasized the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues. In the later 20th century churches which emphasized “signs and wonders” in addition to speaking in tongues became known as the Charismatic movement, sometimes called Seirei-ha in Japanese.
9. The Protestant churches of Japan date from the Meiji Restoration. The great majority were formed out of the work of missionaries from America, and the strongest denominations were those which arose from the American Puritan movement, such as the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches. During the Second World War these churches were merged into one big unit, the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan). However, this was subject to influence from liberal theology (which originated in Germany, Japan’s ally in the war) and gave rise to some churches which do not acknowledge the Bible to be the infallible word of God.
10. Bible-based churches (which do believe the Bible to be God’s word without error) were planted primarily by missionary societies from Europe and America after the war, and are now linked in a loose fellowship called the JEA (Japan Evangelical Association). Such churches are broadly referred to as Evangelical. Meanwhile the Charismatic churches, arising from the Charismatic (Holy Spirit) movement of the later 20th century, are also very active and hold revival meetings in many parts of Japan.

This is from experienced Paul to young Timothy. It may be no exaggeration to say that your whole life will be built on the foundation which you are building now. What is your foundation? It is your self-awareness as a Christian. Are you influenced by people’s opinions (“How does he see me?”) or from yourself (“What a stupid person I am!”)? These are not important. We need to have self-awareness and identity as a Christian. That is our identity in Christ. It begins from the point of “my sin is forgiven” and “I am loved”.

When you work as a Christian, your identity is reflected in your work through the decisions you make on the job and direction you give to your subordinates. The point is not how you get the job but what you are looking for, what makes your life meaningful and happy. Do you think about obedience and belief in God, and God’s glory when you work?

3. Meaning of Work

3-1. The first command in the Bible

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:28)

These are God’s first words to us. It means that to work is to join in God’s work. We work because not we are “adult”, but because it is the mission given to us by God. With this in mind, we need to think about what we should do now before getting a job.

Study and friendship are examples. Is your non-Christian friend influenced by your life? Do you testify and communicate the gospel in your daily life? This is also “work” from God and we want to do it well, starting from now.

3-2. Specific jobs

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15)

Then what did people do specifically? The first thing is “tilling the land”. This can be expressed as work for the sake of growing something (things or people). The second is “protection”. This is about controlling and keeping things in order. These are forms of work which God entrusts to human beings.

3-3. Calling after corruption

“Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands.” (Genesis 9:1-2)

The meaning of work and the biblical view of labor

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“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.” (Psalm 127:1-2)

1. Fundamental rule of getting employed.

The historical background in which the Psalm above is thought to have been written is the time when the second temple was rebuilt after the Kingdom of Israel had been destroyed. Nehemiah, who lived in this era, had worked as a civil servant among the “Gentiles”, but God gave him a vision and called him to work to rebuild the city wall of Jerusalem.

The books written in the era of rebuilding the temple (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) are called the “Books of restoration”, and it is said to be a distinctive mark of this era that there are very few “miracles” such as those which happened frequently in the exodus and the New Testament, although God certainly did give guidance. They found God’s will in the circumstances of their daily lives.

What we learn from this is first of all, we can choose where we work or which way to go without amazing miracles or a Word from the Bible. We can go on with confidence that we can perceive His will in daily life.

2. Basic premise as a Christian

Next, there is something that we need to think about which is more important than which job we choose. It is to choose to obey Christ in our lives. There is no point in getting a job if you don’t start with believing, choosing, obeying, and trusting the Lord, building up the church, and devoting yourself to the Kingdom of God.

“In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:19)

E. How to regard the differences in emphasis of the churches and denominations

1. Genuine Christian churches all use the same Bible, so with regard to everyday matters in the life of faith there are no major doctrinal differences. For example, the Calvinists who emphasize God’s sovereignty in election, and the Wesleyans who focus on human free will, can be seen as two sides of the same coin, and there is much less dispute between them these days.
2. Even the Puritan and Methodist movements, which were so zealous at the beginning, have in many cases grown weaker over the years. They have even come to include churches which deny Christ’s virgin birth or resurrection as literal events. For this reason, in recent years, the key to distinguishing churches lies not so much in doctrinal history as in biblical faith. Thus the Lutherans, the Presbyterians (Calvinists), the Methodists, and the Baptists all include churches which are evangelical as well as others whose biblical faith is no longer clear.
3. Amongst the evangelical churches, faith in the Bible has become the supreme standard, with the result that they practise mutual respect for differences in the form of baptism, understanding of the Second Coming, structure of the denomination, or church government. It is not always possible to say which is the biblical model. We should, therefore, be slow to casually criticize other denominations.
4. In recent years there has been a lot of debate about the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the main evangelical churches do not in fact deny the supernatural work of the Spirit, and neither do the Charismatic churches try to run entirely on individual experience separated from the lordship of Christ. If we allow ourselves to focus only on the phenomena we see, rather than on the basic character we have in common, we will end up allowing Satan to trip us up.
5. You may find the differences in worship style and in the songs which are used a major factor for you; but just as worship styles in America or Europe have changed greatly over the past few decades, so the church in Japan is also changing a lot. Please remember that this is not a difference in essence. If there is flexibility in the church it will surely manage to change – you just need the patience to wait for it.

F. The American and Japanese Church

1. We must bear in mind that the church in America has some distinctive aspects within the long stream of church history. The background is that of respect for freedom of belief practised in a new land, so rather than see the church as a long-standing institution, there has come to be a tendency to see it as a meeting of individual people who hold the same religious views. One result may be the relative ease with which people accept one another's changes of church membership.
2. In Japan there is instead the tendency to equate one's faith life with one's church life. Hence some people only awaken to the reality of a one-to-one relationship with God when they go overseas; or others find the Japanese church too much of a closed fellowship when they return from time in America. Sometimes there are specialized words and expressions which are only used in that denomination.
3. At first some people may well feel that the American church is good, while the Japanese church is dark and closed-in; however we must not forget that all our earthly churches are influenced by the culture of the place they are in. We cannot sweepingly assume that the church in America is good, or that in Japan is undeveloped.
4. Japanese churches celebrate the Lord's Supper (Communion), and in most cases the qualification for receiving the bread and the cup is whether one is baptized or not. Likewise many churches distinguish clearly between members and non-members when it comes to works of service in the fellowship. We might say that the Japanese church distinguishes on the basis of a person's visible status rather than the reality of their invisible fellowship with God.

G. Rejoicing in Fellowship: a process

1. If you go to a Japanese church and tell them that you were led to faith and baptized in a church in America, many members of the Japanese church will invite you into fellowship expecting you to share their assumptions about Christian life. People who come to baptism in Japanese churches have often spent a year or more as seekers and have taken that church's culture on board. So there may be cases where you need to present yourself to the Japanese church as a beginner in faith.

2. On the other hand, it's not completely false to say that the Japanese church dislikes change and tends to be rather closed, so you mustn't lose the perspective that your presence in that church is as salt of the earth, or light of the world. God does have a plan in leading you to faith in America in order to cause the church in Japan to grow further. Just be aware that you will need patience on your part while your unique characteristics are accepted and understood in this particular church.
3. It may not be best to decide right away, "This is the church I should go to." You may need a period to consider your options in a flexible way. After that, when you have the Lord's assurance, I recommend you to enter into fellowship in that church and begin to take responsibility, determined not to change over some minor matter. Bear in mind that it will take time before your opinion comes to be accepted in the Japanese church.

Summary and recommendation

The center of God's will is to love God and to love our neighbor. (Matthew 22:37-39). The "ten words" (ten commandments) show how to put this into practice. The command to "Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8, Deut. 5:12) is a link between these two kinds of love. To consecrate time once a week for worshipping God and for meeting as the people of God is the very heart of the Christian life.

God has saved you in order to create a people of God: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." (Ex. 6:7, Rev. 21:3) The church in Japan too is an indispensable part of Christ's body. Now God has added you to His people here in America so that He can send you to Japan as his precious treasure.

There will be all sorts of temptations from the world and attacks from Satan, but by the Holy Spirit we will confess: "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Heb. 10:39) Therefore, whatever happens, we can come back to the Word: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith"!