



Dr. Paul Kooistra

MISSIONS IS A DANGEROUS BUSINESS. IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

Recently I visited the island nation of Vanuatu. It was a bit more rugged than I am accustomed to. Drinking water was collected from rainwater; there was no electricity or refrigeration; and malaria was quite prevalent. Yet during my visit I was reminded that the first missionaries who arrived in these islands were eaten before the sun went down.

Today, however, the population is largely Christian because of the legendary work of missionaries such as John Patton and others who were willing to risk their very lives for the gospel. The conversion of the people of Vanuatu was in direct proportion to the hardships the missionaries faced and the suffering they endured. The reason for this is clear—to care little for yourself and more for others, especially when the cost is great, is not natural human behavior. Such actions point others to Christ.

Joseph Damien, a missionary who went to work with lepers on the Hawaiian island of Molokai in 1873, had very little success is the beginning. He poured his life into his work, and poured his heart out to the lepers. But it was to no avail! Dejected, he decided to leave the work and return to Belgium. As he prepared to leave, he looked down at his hands and noticed some mysterious

white spots, and he knew exactly what was happening to his body. He had contracted leprosy. He returned to the leper colony to continue his work. Within a matter of hours everyone knew. Hundreds of them gathered outside his hut—they understood his uncertainty about the future. This was the beginning of a very fruitful ministry within the leprosy colony. He had paid the price—he was one of them.

The Bible is clear that the gospel cannot be understood by natural man. People are saved by hearing the Word of God, but the Word of God must be attended by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. One of the means the Holy Spirit uses to enlighten the hearts of people is suffering. First and foremost it is the suffering of Christ that is used to open the hearts of people to their need of saving grace. John Newton got it exactly right in the second verse of the great hymn, "Amazing Grace," when he wrote, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." Not so long ago the Holy Spirit used the movie *The Passion of the Christ* to reveal to some the reality of their need and the blessing of saving grace that is available to those who give themselves to Christ. There is hardly a more powerful image of the gravity of

man's lostness or the magnitude and extent of God's love than Christ crucified.

The fact that suffering is a part of almost all missionary work is an extension of the revealing work of the Holy Spirit. While it is true that the suffering we experience has no redeeming merit, our response to suffering is a powerful witness to Christ and the gospel of grace. Is this not part of the reason Christians are encouraged to count the joy of suffering? Not only is suffering instructive in our own lives, but it is a powerful tool in proclaiming the gospel. Suffering goes with the territory of missions. We should not be surprised by it. We should not be stopped by it. It is actually a blessing from God and may mark a Holy Spirit breakthrough in our ministry.

Let us take up our cross daily and follow Christ.

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Michael and Pearl Oh, together with their three daughters, serve as long-term MTW missionaries in Nagoya, Japan.

Against All Odds

A pastor attempts the "impossible" in Japan

By Michael Oh

My father's name was not always Sung Kyu Oh. As a child growing up under the Japanese occupation of Korea, he was told by the Japanese Imperial Army that his name was to be Hideo Matsuyama, a Japanese name. If he spoke Korean or used his Korean name, he would be beaten.

As I studied at Harvard about some of the atrocities

committed against Koreans and other Asians during the years of Japanese imperialism, I also had to deal with the temptation of anger or even hatred. Instead, the Lord allowed me to view and understand these things in light of His grace and my own former enmity in my relationship with God before Christ.

My father does not harbor resentment toward the Japanese people he had been taught to hate. Likewise, the fire of my anger was transformed and fed into a passionate love for the Japanese.

A Legacy of Faith

I am the fifth generation Christian on my father's side. My

life is a part of a legacy of faith that started with my grandfather's grandmother, who was among the first Koreans to respond to the gospel back in the 1800's. Despite this tradition, self-centeredness, vain ambition, insecurity, and a rebellious heart marked my youth. Everything came easily to me, and I quickly rose to the top of whatever arena I entered. >



Eventually however, I became overwhelmed with a tremendous fear of failure. Having reached the top, I knew there was only one way to go—down.

The Lord used this fear, as well as my desperate search for love, to bring me to true

faith by the end of my high school years. The change was transformational, and for the first time in my life, I had a passion to use the gifts the Lord had given to me fully without fear and wholly for his glory. After spending much of my college years ministering to those around me, I

began to pray more and more about serving in the mission field. My "call" was a personal decision to obey the command to build God's kingdom to the ends of the earth. As Oswald J. Smith said, "We talk of the second coming; half the world has never heard of the first."

Freedom from Fear

Despite God's continued and faithful work in my life, fear of failure still haunted me, making me overly cautious and afraid of any level of risk. Shortly before going to seminary, the Lord brought me freedom from these fears. The trajectory of my life changed radically from basing decisions on moving towards physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual comfort to seizing every possible opportunity to

bring God the greatest possible glory in every area of my life.

Once I began to understand that in God's economy and under His sovereignty, there is no such thing as "risk," I was able to live without fear. What is the worst that can happen—my death? Even then we simply enter into glory. And so the Lord continued to lead me down the path that has brought me to this day. I remember the impact that Jim Elliot's quote had on my life at that time: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

The Call to Japan

While serving as a short-term missionary in Japan in the late '90s, my constant curiosity and prayer was to discover the greatest need for the Japanese church and identify

what ministry could most effectively help reach Japan. It was from that search that the Lord led me to establish Christ Bible Seminary. The challenge before us is great. It is a path that I would never have chosen had I never known Christ in salvation and sanctification. The human "risks" are real, as is the "impossibility" of this project. But this quote from Hudson Taylor speaks to my heart about the ridiculous difficulty: "How often do we attempt work for God to the limit of our incompetence rather than to the limit of God's omnipotence?"

The outlook for spiritual revival through the gospel in Japan, considered by some as the most difficult mission field in the world, is bleak. As a theologian, however, I am entirely optimistic and certain of seeing Japan come to know the Lord. The redeemed in Revelation are from, "every tribe, language, people, and nation." Therefore, I have a biblical confidence that the Japanese, who have never known a time in their history when the church was strong, sizable, and multiplying, will have a day when it will finally be reached by the gospel. ■

◀ *Christ Bible Seminary will meet on the second floor of the newly completed Nissin Christ Center, a project of MTW's Nagoya church planting team.*

Teaching Pastors to FISH in Japan

By Susan Fikse

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Although this well-known proverb originates in the West, Rev. Michael Oh applies the principle in Japan, where just a fraction of a percent of the country's population professes Christian faith. His vision of equipping Japanese pastors to reach their own people coalesced on April 4 of this year, when Christ Bible Seminary opened its doors in Nagoya.

With seminaries commonplace in the U.S., it is easy to miss the significance of this new Japanese training ground. In a country where 80 percent of pastors are in their 50s or older,

Not only is Christ Bible Seminary one of very few evangelical training institutions in the country, it employs unique methods new to Japanese seminary students. "In order to qualify for graduation, students must be able to demonstrate or prove their learning through a graduation portfolio that displays their excellence in Biblical knowledge, ministry excellence, teaching, preaching, discipleship, cultural engagement, and development of Christ-like character," explains Rev. Oh.

As the seminary builds a new "fishing" industry in Japan, Rev. Oh values support from experienced fishers. "The Lord has provided an excellent support network for us, allowing us to form strategic partnerships with seminaries and churches in the U.S.," said Rev. Oh. Covenant Theological Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary are both partners and will provide visiting faculty. Rev. Oh has also established an advisory board of US churches, including Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, Korean United Church of Philadelphia, First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Miss., and Sarang Community Church of Anaheim, Calif.

Just as support for the seminary comes from beyond Japan's borders, so the reach and vision of the seminary stretches throughout Asia. Rev. Oh has plans to expand the ministry into tsunami-hit regions and other Asian nations by inviting future leaders to study at Christ Bible Seminary. One student from Myanmar is already enrolled and

another has arrived from South Korea. As the Japanese learn to reach their own people, Rev. Oh hopes they will also teach the world to fish. He pleads, "Please pray that the Lord would use Christ Bible Seminary to spiritually impact Japan and the world."

To learn more about Christ Bible Seminary and its financial support needs, please check the box on page 15.

