

Rebuilding Lives

Seeing God in the aftermath of the tsunami



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About

Island ECC sent a team to Ishinomaki, Japan 6 months after the tsunami and earthquake on March 11, 2011. This blog is about the 12 members who journeyed in faith and how they found God transforming Japan in the aftermath of the tsunami. Our prayer as you read this is to tell first-hand some of what we have seen and ask that you would be moved to **keep Japan in prayer and ask for God to redeem and save the lost.**

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The March 11th earthquake and tsunami

Posted on September 6, 2011

No other country is as prepared or equipped as Japan when it comes to earthquakes and tsunamis. Yet when the Tohoku earthquake struck on March 11, 2011 with a 9.0 magnitude, their preparations and advanced technology did not spare them from the subsequent disaster that followed and haunted television screens of those of us who watched in horror at nature's destruction around the world.



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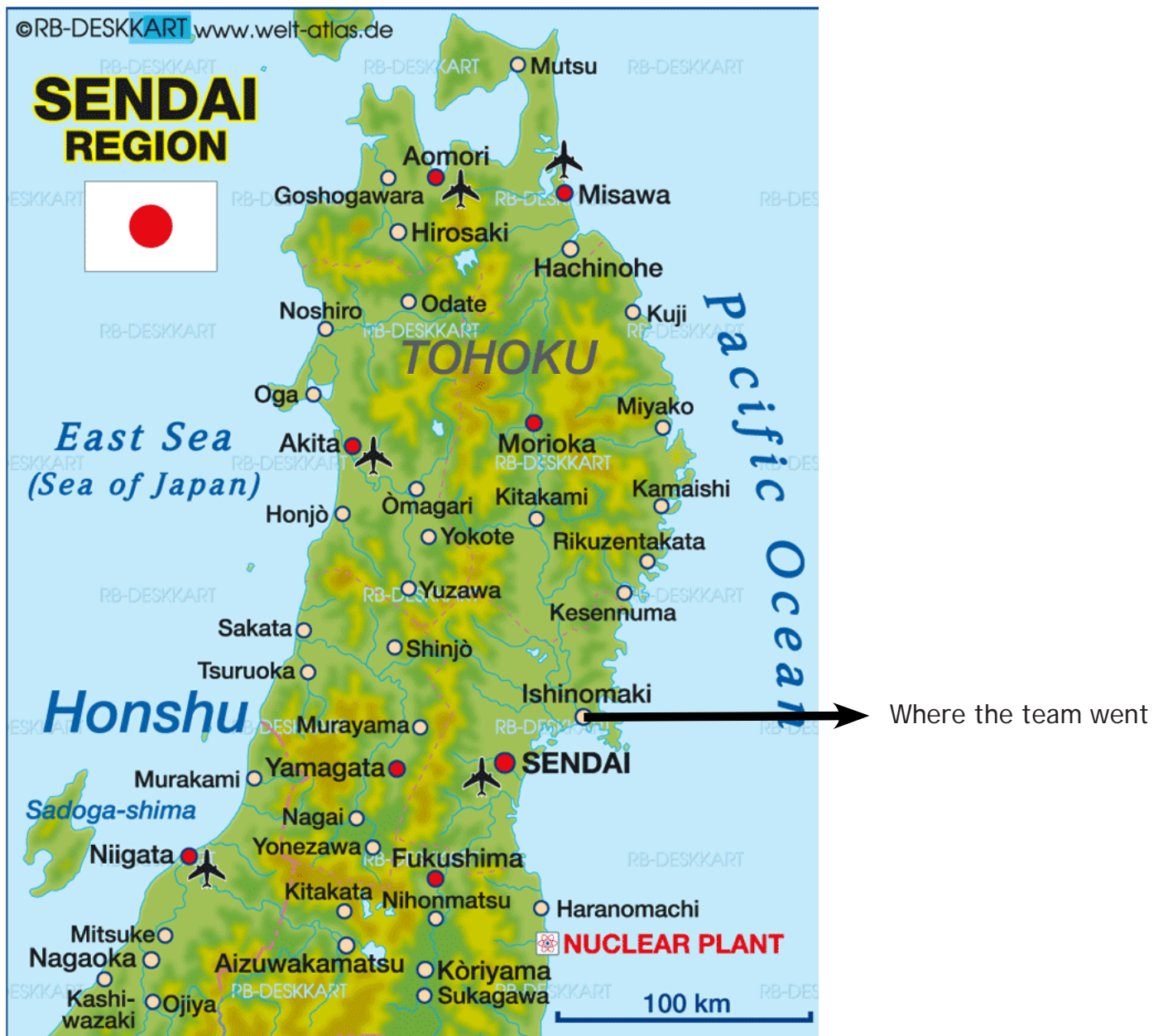
Where did we go?

Posted on September 7, 2011

The size of the tsunami affected area spans a long 500km up and down the coast of North Tohoku. Our team chose to go to Ishinomaki, a city located in the Miyagi prefecture because Ishinomaki is one of the larger cities along the coastal line and also one of the more severely damaged.

A tsunami about 10 meters high traveled 600 meters inland and destroyed around 80% of the 700 houses in the coastal whaling port of Ayukawa and district of Kadonowaki. Approximately 46% of the city was inundated by the tsunami. One elementary school, Okawa Elementary, was completely destroyed, killing 74 of 108 students and 10 of 13 teachers and staff. As of 17 June 2011, a total of 3,097 deaths had been confirmed in Ishinomaki due to the tsunami, with 2,770 unaccounted for. About 29,000 Ishinomaki residents lost their homes in the disaster.

Even as the team drove around the city, we could see different degrees of damage and from speaking to the local missionaries, residents are only just starting to talk about the disaster and their loss 6 months after.



-- Ishinomaki on the map

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God's way is higher than ours

Posted by Tina Wah



When God called me to join this Japan Mission Trip last minute, surprisingly I could leave my 2 young children, my husband and my business behind without any worry. This was the most precious birthday gift and wedding anniversary gift from GOD to me. Thank God for the privilege I had to serve Him through this trip.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.

‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’ - Isaiah 55:8-9

There are many tragedies, disasters and unfortunate events happening around the world that I had never understood the reason why God let them happen and let it happen again and again. One time I heard the verse of Isaiah 55:8-9 in a pastor's sermon while talking about a related topic; it really impacted me deeply. The pastor said that God does not make these bad things happen to us but God lets it happen. The reason is to give us a chance to reflect what we have done wrongly to cause the tragedies, then what we as a Christian should do through this in Him. If we do nothing, His lesson to us is wasted.

In this trip I learnt again that I cannot stop Tsunami attacks, I cannot stop earthquakes and I cannot stop wars. However I can serve people in crisis through God, I can deliver God's message to them and I can share the serving experience with people I know when I return. God's way and His thoughts are much higher than ours. I trust that He must have His reason for letting bad things happen. I should not ask what His reason is because I would never understand; but what I should do is to serve people in Him. There are still many recoveries in Tohoko area waiting to be done. May God call more people to extend their help and care to the Japanese in Tohoko. Most importantly may the gospel be spread wider in Japan.

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The perfect HR director

Posted by Michelle Wong



Goggles defogged? CHECK

Mask? CHECK

Gloves? CHECK



I was all set to go...but it wasn't down the freshly powdered slopes of Niseko that I ski every winter. And my fogged-up goggles? They weren't due to the cold, snowy weather. The mask I was wearing wasn't to prevent wind burn and my protective gloves certainly weren't Gortex, but they were good enough to tear out dry wall. I was all set to do some demolition work!

In September, I went on my first missions trip to Japan. When I was told that the main task, during our time in Ishinomaki, was to demolish the homes damaged by the March 11 tsunami, I was a bit concerned. As one who suffers from asthma and needs to puff daily, I was worried about how the dust and particles would affect my breathing. However, throughout the trip God showed me how he knows my needs and takes care of me as his precious child. He used me in wonderful ways and showed me what could be done with a willing and obedient heart. I will share one of my experiences.

After our first full day of tearing out floorboards, plywood, dry wall, insulation, and nails, our leader, Flo was planning the following day's activities with Virginia, a missionary with Help Tohoku. Flo was asked to nominate two members to sew and paint in the Help Tohoku headquarters and I happened to be standing there, so I volunteered immediately! Sewing and painting? Both are right up my alley! So when day 2 came upon us, I was ready to tape off, prime and start rolling on the paint. But God had an even better plan. And if you've been on a missions trip before, you'll know how plans don't always remain as such.



-- On the way back from buying breakfast at the 7-eleven

While I waited for instructions in the Help Tohoku house, I realized we wouldn't actually get to do any sewing or painting that day. In fact, Lorna, who was heading up this project was still in the planning stages. Thus we sat down and started brainstorming. An American country home was the new look they were going for. Think a mashup of Laura Ashley, Ralph Lauren and Martha Stewart. Florals, gingham and checks; colors, quilts and fresh flowers! I was in my element and right away had ideas and visions of what the place could look like! This was my type of project; decorating and designing on a budget. After the brainstorming came the shopping (also right up my alley). We visited large Home Depot type stores and shopped for all sorts of decor items, from paint to plants! Through this time I had the opportunity to hear about Lorna's outreach work, understand the challenges of Christianity in Japan and spend time in prayer. It was such a beautiful day of blessings.



-- Singing Amazing Grace at the cafe outreach inside Help Tohoku house to locals

When we got back to the Help Tohoku house, my teammates shared how day two's demolition went. It was way more intense than day 1; dustier and definitely not asthma friendly. I was thankful God allowed me to be used in a different way and was reminded how He's the ultimate and most perfect HR director. He knows my strengths and weaknesses and placed me in the situation where I would be better utilized. He spared me from a potential asthma attack and allowed me a deeper understanding of the work He's doing in Japan.

Ishouni Ganbarou

Posted by Candice Yeung



Last September, I went to Japan to embark my 1st ever mission trip with IECC partnering with other local Christian organisations mid last month. We were there for a week. Me and a few others stayed a few days more in Tokyo before returning to HK. It really didn't feel like a week, it was more like we'd been there for a year or something. We all saw the disaster on TV before and it was huge, but not as huge as you go and see it yourselves. It was intense.

Before I moved to HK, I had been a regular member of a Japanese bilingual church in Sydney and was also baptised there. So Japan is a country that is always close to my heart. So when the disaster happened, I really wanted to partner with some local churches in Tokyo and see what we can do together. I knew that by just saying "ganbarou" ("You can overcome") is not enough, but we need to "ishouni ganbarou" ("To overcome together") with the love and hope from God to rebuild a better Tohoku than ever before. I am so glad that God has blessed us with a team of 12 with 4 Japanese natives and a few of us who also can speak quite good Japanese to serve Japan and its people as a body of Christ.

Prior to my trip, my parents were pretty upset that I was going to Japan and told me that there is nothing that I could do for the tsunami and earthquake affected areas in Sendai of Japan. Yet His call on my life to Japan for a short missionary trip was irrevocable and an act to help to grow my faith in Him. Amidst my busyness with my life in HK, He made the impossible to be possible for me to serve Him and others.

On the way to Tokyo, I did something really random by opening the bible in a really random way, and God gave me an encouragement in Isaiah 60. He was basically saying to me that we as a missionary team should work as one body of Christ, even though most of us lack missionary trip experiences, but His voice would be our comfort and guiding light for each of our steps ahead in a little town called Watanoha Koganehama. We were there to encourage, serve and pray for one another as we unite with one heart together with other teams to work for His glory.



-- Getting up at 5am and seeing sunrise on the road trip to Ishinomaki

We arrived at Ishinomaki on 11th Sept, exactly 6 mths after the 11th March tsunami-earthquake disaster. I couldn't sleep the night before we arrived there, as I was really excited about the trip and the sound cicadas outside of our overnight accommodation was making me so nostalgic.

We woke up really early and started our 5am road trip (about 432km). The trip took 5-6 hours, which gave me enough schhhweet heavenly sleeping time to recuperate before we arrived at one of the hardest hit areas called Ishinomaki, which is the city where we went to stay at. It has a population of 160,000, and a large death or missing toll of up to 4000 people. Almost 50% of the city was ruined by the tsunami, leaving lots of damaged buildings and homes and with some just simply beyond repair.



-- Worshipping at Ishinomaki Igirisuto Church

On the day we arrived at Ishinomaki, we got the chance to worship at a local small church called Ishinomaki Igirisuto (Christian) Church which could only accommodate about 20 people or so but we were told that they had people who aren't Christians from around the town who also attended the Easter service - the 1st service after the tsunami. There were people standing outside the church to attend that Easter service. For me and my team, it was a true blessing to worship with the locals, as some only became followers of Christ through the relief efforts from this church.

Our days were spent at a small town called Watanoha Koganehama, situated only 10mins from the sea, where the tsunami came up to the ceiling of the 1st floor of the houses. We worked on 3 houses (and Samaritan's Purse aim to repair 300 before winter comes) and stayed at two of the half wrecked houses. We were experiencing what the locals had to deal with everyday in living conditions such as no air-con, no water, no electricity and bathrooms. We first built a temporary tents for all the volunteers for their gatherings before we started our demolition work for the houses. We would go there for morning devotions, our breakfasts and for breaks between our work.

Our daily routine would mostly be demolition such as knocking down walls, taking out floors and nails and removing sea mud and debris from underneath the floors. Then other teams would do the bleaching section before passing the houses to professional carpenters to refurbish the homes. Amazingly we got to work with the owners and tsunami survivors of one of the houses that we worked on. Their spirit amazed me as they worked alongside with us to demolish their 1st floor during that day. At the end of our day, the owners gave us some icy cold popsicle to thank us for our work. It was the most loving gesture that we could ask for. Though it was a simple gesture, it was the most heartfelt and delicious popsicle that I would ever have in my life.

On our 2nd day there, we were so privileged to be able to have dinner at one of our teammate's friend's home at Ishinomaki, which was located 2km away from the sea. They were still affected by the tsunami and all of us listened patiently as the father of the family retold his intense stories of survival. We were very blessed that night, we had a taxi driver whom charged us for free and drove us everywhere and waited for us in between places the whole night. We invited him to join us for dinner but he kindly denied it.

Other than the demolition work, some of us took part in speaking with the locals at the open cafe to build up our friendships with the local community.



-- Eating the ice popsicle the owner of the house gave us during break time

It was my 4th time in Japan and in between our days at Koganehama, we experienced some after-shocks actually 3 nights in a row. But I couldn't feel the first one as I was too deep asleep, LOL!

We had such a funny team on our last night, me and two other girls discovered someone left the light on in our bedroom and the light attracted too many bugs into our room. So the whole night people would hear us turning the vacuum on and off to clean up the bugs in our room. I could only imagine us as the Ghostbusters of Bugs. The three of us also shared our testimonies with each other and prayed for each other afterwards. It was such a great little accountability moment. Our hosts who have been there since the tsunami happened also shared their inspiring testimonies with us too.

On our last day at Ishinomaki, we did prayer walking at a ground zero level of the next town Onagawa and Central Ishinomaki. These places are located right next to the sea and the tsunami came as high as 7 floors height - nothing is literally left standing there. Our time there was the most heart broken moment of our trip and no words can begin to describe what we saw or how at a loss we were to pray for places like that.

On the day we left, we passed on our work to the Singapore team and other teams to do the bleaching before the professional carpenters start doing their work. We were still helping on bits and pieces, like removing rubbles from the front of the houses and then putting back normal rocks to ensure that the place to look as normal as possible and with someone started planting flowers next to that area. It was lots of hard labour work during those few days but there is still an incredible amount of work yet to be done when we look around at all the other half wrecked houses. What we did was barely a drop in the bucket.



-- The next town of Onagawa, where everything in sight was flattened





-- Sleeping in the 2nd floor of the house we were demolishing

Everything seems like yesterday and what I experienced remain close to my heart. I'll definitely continue to go back there to invest in God's work at Ishinomaki. I believe that will have the greatest impact on the Kingdom, and look for more creative ways of supporting and sharing the light and love of Jesus Christ with the local communities at Ishinomaki. And eventually, the bucket will begin to fill up again.

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A deeper understanding of helplessness

Posted by [Enoch Yuen](#)



This trip has given me a deeper understanding of helplessness. The first kind of helplessness, which is also the most direct one, is the immediate effect of tsunami. The impact was quick and massive. There was simply no escape. The second kind of helplessness, which is more gradual yet equally profound, is learnt helplessness after the tsunami. A local man shared with us that the process of going through the aftermath of tsunami has been like "one plus, two minuses". What he meant was that he and his friends had been trying to cheer themselves up and do things together to overcome the adversity. Yet the joy that it brought did not last long. Soon after that, they were facing even tougher challenges. This basically is a downward spiral.



-- "Ganbarou" which means "keep going!" sometimes just isn't enough

This prolonged battle has greatly challenged the Japanese' core belief that they could overcome everything if they have strong enough willpower and efforts. Our leaders have asked us not to use the common phrase ganbare to encourage the locals to try harder. This is because many of them have believed that they had tried their very best yet the results were still futile. That has led to a lot of depression cases; and indeed, some have committed suicide after they had buried their loved ones. Yet, this is exactly the first step for them to know God ---- to let go of their control and to let God, who is almighty and loves them so much, to sit in the driving seat.

At a more personal level, God has called me to learn to go deeper and excel in things that I do. I admire the dedication and professionalism of the missionaries from North America. Many of them could speak perfect Japanese. In contrast, I only knew a few basic greetings that I learnt from the level 1 Japanese course, so my role was mainly limited to physical work. Surely I know that the trip was still useful as I could come back and share the stories with people around me. And I know by no means we can compare ourselves with the long-term missionaries in terms of familiarity of the host country's culture and language. Having said that, I could not help but ask myself that if I say I have a heart for the country and people there, would I be willing to spend more time and effort to equip myself so that when I return next time, I could serve Him better? For this reason, I am still trying hard to study Japanese, even though it is not very fun at all to do weekly assignments and take a quarterly exam!!!! But deep in my heart, I hope when I join the STO to Japan next time, I could communicate with the locals and even pray for them in Japanese.



-- Worshipping at the local church and singing "As the deer" in Japanese. Awesome



-- Top: Satoshi and Isaac, 2 of the local missionaries. Bottom: Koji and Enoch

Seeing God's work everyday

Posted by Angela and Henry Hung



Japan is a special place for me and I am tied to it since I was a kid. When I was in high school, I went to Japan as my first overseas trip, I started to learn Japanese when I was 15 and I love Japanese songs, movies, manga (comics), model and TV games. During my university study, I worked in Japan as a trainee and after I graduated, I worked in a few Japanese companies. After I got married, Japan has been the most favorite country for me and my wife to travel during holidays. For some reason, we feel like “going home” every time when we visit there.



-- Many homes we passed as we drove through Ishinomaki looked like this.

I have developed many relationships with the people and places in Japan but I had no clue that these experiences are related to God's plan until the afternoon of March 11. On that day, I was having a late sushi lunch with my colleagues and we were discussing an upcoming vacation to Hokkaido. I couldn't believe the horrible and un-describable scene that I saw on the internet. The next thing I did was to send emails to my Japan friends to check whether they were safe. As the disaster evolved over time, the unprecedented impact and casualties was going up everyday. Even worst, the nuclear incident in Fukushima caused more uncertainty and fear on top of the delicate situation. My wife and I prayed for the people there and asked God “What can we do?” and “What should we do?” We felt that it's time that if we get a chance to goto Japan again, it should not be for fun only. We knew Japan has a lot of needs and demand on volunteers was high. We also learnt from our Japanese friends and colleagues that they were going to Northeastern Japan to help out on various clean up activities. But our faith were so small that we couldn't believe we could go there because of our busy work schedule and potential family objections.

Then in the last week of August when we saw the Northeastern Japan mission trip announcement on the church bulletin, we had a feeling that this was the trip that God wants us to go. If this is true, we trusted God will lead us to overcome any objections and difficulties. God guided us to move forward with our first step without worrying about all the limitations in our minds. We went through the registration process and started to share with brothers and sisters about the trip and eagerly asked for their prayer support.



-- Taking out wood and talking with the home owner during a break

We got lots of positive feedbacks from them and the last obstacle was to share the trip with our families. We were quite hesitated about this, as we knew our parents might feel very worried. However, God sent one of our sisters to remind us that to become a member in a mission trip is an honor to God; therefore we should not worry about telling the truth. Her sharing has strengthened our minds to start talking to our parents. Surprisingly, my parents and elder sister were very supportive and they even shared with me some news clips about the situation there. However, when we spoke to Angela's parent, although her mom was acceptable but her father was extremely worried with the situation there and was strongly against our trip. During the conversation, God gave us a clam mind and we did not argue with him even though my father-in-law was very emotional. After the call, we were very frustrated and wondered why God did not help to soften her father's heart. We even called the trip organizer to ask about the possibility of an exit plan. We were told that we have 36 hours to decide.

After some prayers, we decided to ask more brothers and sisters to pray for this. We still strongly believed that if God prepared the trip for us, He will make the way. That evening, Angela called her cousin, her uncle and aunt to share about the trip and surprisingly all of them were very supportive. The next 24 hours were miracle as Angela's relatives spoke to her father in different occasions unintentionally. They helped to explain the objective of our trip and addressed his concerns around radiation. Her father's stress level was released significantly and did not object to our trip anymore. Praise the Lord! This was our first mission trip and we realized that we started to learn from God as soon as we registered. Our blessings started much earlier than the actual trip. God led us to experience Him if we keep our faith and action together.

-- Angela and Tina outside the house we worked on and slept in



Our regular daily working schedule is usually full of meetings and tasks. Over the years, we have learnt to rely on ourselves and to control our own schedules. This mission trip was a learning ground for us to let go of our planning, for God will prepare all things. We met many people during the trip, who helped us through various means. God has planned everything for us such as where to brush our teeth, where to bath, where to charge our phones, how to demolish gypsum wall, how to use the electric saw, how to remove the wooden floor, what to eat in every meal and where to sleep at night. God's blessings is always abundant and we enjoyed very much to release our mind and leave our burden to Him completely, without using our well trained forward thinking.

On the second day of the mission trip, after a full day of work, we went to the public bath and then we had an amazing dinner prepared by a local family. The father of the family shared with us how they survived through the Tsunami and the struggles inside his heart. It was such a blessing for us to get the opportunity to listen to him and to build relationship with this family.

On the last morning of the trip, we drove to Onagawa and the coastal line along Ishinomaki to understand the situation of the hardest hit area. These towns were totally destroyed by the Tsunami and basically nothing was left behind. The visual impacts on our minds were significant! Even though the incident happened 6 months ago, our souls cried when we prayed together in the middle of one of the destroyed site. Lots of lives and properties were lost. We prayed that God would heal them and help them through this dark period.



-- The amazing meal and hospitality we received from a local family



In the afternoon, we had a bento lunch outside the volunteer center and we prayed for the community. During prayer time, I was asked to join a coffee time event organized by the help center. Once a week, they would open up the volunteer center to offer free drinks and cakes for the locals. During this time, I had a chance to listen to the local people's sharing. I even had an opportunity to sing and dance in front of them with other mission trip team members. One of the Japanese women told me that she has not laughed since March 11 and this was a fun day for her indeed. Their feedbacks were very encouraging and we could clearly see that God's love is shared by different means through His people, which is out of our imagination.

We enjoyed this trip so much. We could see God's work everyday and would definitely want to go back in the future. Not only the locals could feel the love of God but also at the end, we were the ones who received the most from God!



-- Breakfast with the team

God needed me just as I am

Posted by Fukuko Walker



When I first heard that IECC is planning a mission trip to Japan, I became interested immediately, because I am Japanese and I've been looking for an opportunity to do something to help those people affected by the Tsunami and earthquake disaster on 3/11. But I was hesitating for few days even though there was not much time to decide until deadline because I had never participated in any mission trips before. I was afraid of lot of things, such as radiation problems caused by the Fukushima nuclear plants. Ishinomaki city is only about 110 km away from the failed plants and I was hearing all kinds of bad news every day so I was worried.

I was also clueless about what to do or what to expect on a mission trip, so that made me very nervous not knowing what to do. I was afraid that I may be totally useless for the team and the people of Ishinomaki and become a total disappointment to God. I have no particular skills or gifts; at least that's how I felt, just an ordinary stay-at-home mom with two children. So what can I possibly offer? Not much really, other than the Japanese skills as a native speaker. I thought, "What if it turns out to be a total waste of time and money? It is not cheap to go there, you know! What if my children get sick or hurt while I'm gone? Not just a couple of days but a whole week!!" Those were the fears and worries I had before joining the trip.

But when I look back at the time when I was hesitating, I now understand that Satan was trying to discourage me by quietly whispering all these lies.

It turned out the trip was totally worth every minute and all the money I spent. I was able to develop wonderful friendships with my team members which I think is definitely one of my favorite parts of this trip. Of course, the labor was hard and I was very exhausted on the 2nd day. Yet the people we met in Ishinomaki, despite my fears, not only they were not offended by our visit, but totally grateful and touched by our actions to come all the way from Hong Kong to help their needs.

Many of them felt that they have been completely forgotten and abandoned by the rest of Japan, much less the rest of the world as most media doesn't cover the news much anymore even though it's only been six months. People quickly move on with their busy lives and forget about them. But the truth is there's still so much work to be done, and people are now just starting to open up to talk about that horrible incident. The numbers of volunteers are becoming less and less, so they are actually welcoming any types of visitors, regardless of purposes or agendas, duration of stay, because they are starting to feel desperate that they are getting forgotten by the rest of the world.

And my children were not hurt or sick while I was gone, in fact they were very healthy and very happy to enjoy the peaceful, quiet time without fussy mom. I remember the day when I came back to Hong Kong and met my son at the bus stop for his school bus, he saw me from distance and said "Mom, are you back already? I thought you'll be back on Saturday! It is only Thursday! Why are you back so soon?" So not only they were just fine, they had a great time while I was gone! So again the deceitful lie from Satan that my kids will be so sad and traumatized turned out to be totally wrong, though I have a strange mixed feeling about this.

Before I joined the trip I thought the mission trip will be just hard and painful, I never thought that it will be so fulfilling and rewarding. I now clearly know that God needed me just as I am, the ordinary housewife. Even though I thought I have nothing to offer, God had a bigger picture. I just didn't understand it until I experienced it myself.

So I'd like to do it again if a next opportunity comes around hopefully together with my husband next time, and I recommend you also give it a try if you have many fears and doubts like me. You might be surprised how God can use you beyond imagination.



A shining light

Posted by Florence Chiu



-- Sunset...a light shining in the darkness

Japan was a place I was fascinated with even from when I was young. I grew up watching Japanese cartoons, reading manga and even studying Japanese in high school and university. What I thought to be an interest and hobby turned out to be the first seeds God planted in my life for this country, for this people.

On Mar 12th 2011, when the images of the tsunami were repeated over and over again, I thought to myself “Not another disaster...!” It was more a response focused on why disasters are happening so often.....Sichuan, Qinghai, New Zealand...than really a response of compassion for the Japanese. After the tsunami, I did not immediately think of what I can do or had a desire to go and help. Instead life carried on as it always did with me occasionally noticing the ongoing news regarding the nuclear plant and tsunami hit areas. It wasn’t until our church collected a disaster relief love offering especially for Japan and when I started receiving all these emails regarding this or that person to connect to in Japan did I really start asking God “Is there something you want me to do?” and, “Is there something you want Island ECC as a church to do?” At that point, we still weren’t really thinking about sending a short term outreach team there. We focused our efforts on finding the right partners on the ground we can trust and channeling the funds towards those ministries. It wasn’t until God gave me an opportunity to go on a vision trip in May and when I saw with my own eyes the devastation that my heart started to break for the people in Japan. It was also the first time I met Japanese Christians in Japan and learnt that there were less than 1% believers in one of the world’s wealthiest and most powerful countries. That makes Japan one of the most unreached nations in the world.

My heart broke not only because I saw such extreme extents of physical destruction but also because I saw the immense spiritual emptiness in their lives. People who would take pride in relying on their own strength and the ability to stand up again in the face of suffering and disaster. In the past when I had travelled to Japan for study or leisure, I did not spend time in thinking much about their spiritual state. To be in a nation that has so much, it is so easy to merely be a consumer of good food and entertainment than to go to serve and witness for Christ. Perhaps this would never have been much of a consideration in my life if this disaster did not happen.

As it turns out, God had already planned this trip out for us. He gave me a co-leader, a team member to help with logistics, a perfectly sized team with a majority of Japanese speakers (of which 4 were native Japanese!), partners on the ground that were all in fact linked to my first vision trip, great weather and the clearance to go from family members. Even though this trip was put together in such a short time, His timing and provision was perfect. We even avoided the typhoon that struck the week after we left and left the area we were serving in flooded. It was beautiful to see different Christian organizations working together in that area and being known by locals as “the Christians who have been helping”. It was humbling and such an encouragement to hear the testimonies of ordinary Christians in and outside of Japan who have all somewhere along the way made a decision to move into that area for a period of time to serve and be a light in the darkness. Some are foreigners who grew up in Japan and spoke fluent Japanese, some are families who were serving in other parts of Japan and was called to move, some are fresh out of college from the States, and some are local Japanese Christians from other cities who heard God’s call and responded. When we were there, there was a team of Japanese pastors, a team from the States, a team from Singapore, and our team from Hong Kong. They stayed anywhere between half a day to a week and there were times when we would be working on a site just by ourselves or times when we would be joined by any of those teams and worked side by side knowing that we were one team as brothers and sisters in Christ.



-- Fellowship with the Singapore team, local missionaries and other volunteers

The tsunami affected area spanned an area of 500km, affecting hundreds of towns and cities along the coastal line of Tohoku. For one of our team members’ friends to happen to be living in the very area we were working in (a very small town) was nothing short of God’s divine appointment. Her friend ended up working with us on the houses and we were invited to delicious dinner by her family and had the privilege of hearing her dad share with us their family’s experience in the tsunami. His daughter later told us that it was the first time she had heard her father open up to talk about what happened.

God gave us opportunities to hear the testimonies of local missionaries who were called individually to this place. It humbled me to hear of the leaps of faith some took as they responded to God's call to go. When we spoke to local residents, it dawned on me how long this process of healing and rebuilding will take. For many residents, they are still struggling half a year later to even begin talking about it. Some wonder if they should return to a place they grew up in and have so many memories of, but now with the additional memories of those who died and the fear that lingers. I know that it will take years for grief to run its course in these people's lives and as I heard of the decline in the number of volunteers, the rising concern over radiation, I wondered in my heart how one can show them hope and love.

I do not doubt that God orchestrated this trip in how perfect everything fell into place and that in turn gave me great comfort that God is at work in Japan. I was encouraged by the beauty of Christians working together. I was challenged by the faith of those who chose to respond to His call. No doubt the question I continue to ask God is what would you have me do? Perhaps it is a question God placed in my heart so that my heart will slowly be transformed, remembering a nation that normally would not even register in my mind as a place to be prayed for. Perhaps this will continue to be a question until one day God chooses to reveal more of His will to me. Nevertheless, I know I have been blessed. Blessed to know a God who is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. A God who shines hope into dark places and calls us by name.



-- Our team and local staff - the body of Christ



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How you get involved

Posted on November 20, 2011

There may be many of us who see Japan as a place to enjoy a good holiday with good food, a nice onsen and some shopping. Some of us who travel frequently for work might see Tokyo as a business center you would pass in and out of from time to time. You may have met some Japanese friends or colleagues or have an interest in the culture or products.

Whatever category of people you might fall into of the above, you can start by asking God to show you how to pray for this nation and to see Japan from His eyes and heart, not just as a tourist destination or place of work or entertainment.

Island ECC is planning and praying about sending another team to Japan in the first half of the coming year but we do not have dates confirmed yet. Please keep your eyes and ears open for further announcements and opportunities.

[Sign me up!](#)



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Pray!

Posted on November 20, 2011

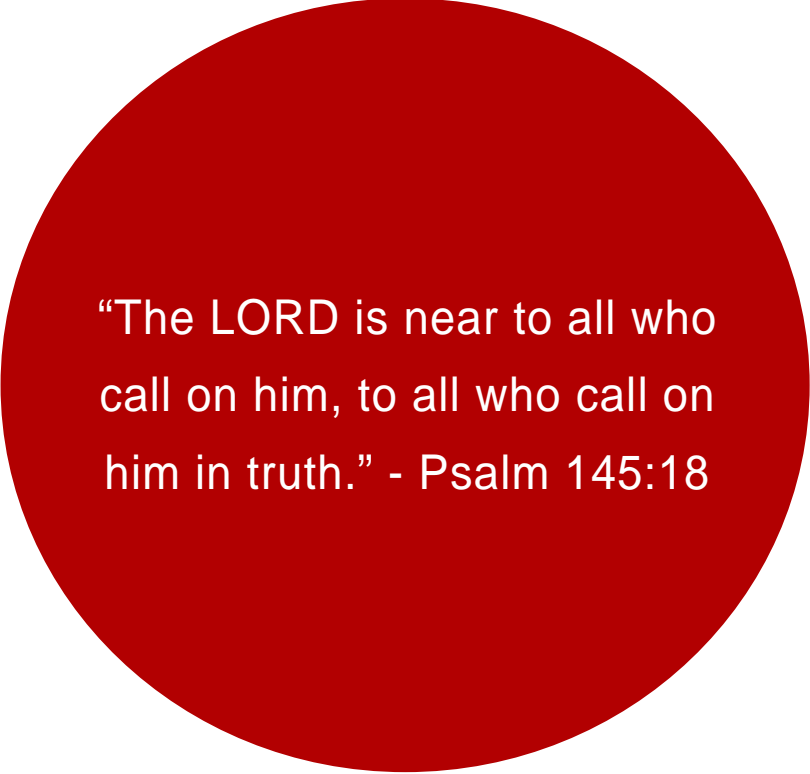
Please pray with us for Japan and continue to lift up a nation that is so materially abundant but spiritually poor.

- Pray for the people in the disaster area to know that they are not alone or forgotten. Pray for friendships and relationships to be built with the local Christians in each area
- There is still a huge need for volunteers. Pray for God to send more believers to Japan as volunteers, short term workers or long term missionaries. Pray that as a body, we can show Christ's love through words and action
- Pray for hearts to be open to the gospel and for God to comfort and heal the people's pain and loss.
- Pray for strength, perseverance and joy for missionaries and local Christians working on the ground.



“You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.
Hear my prayer, LORD;
listen to my cry for mercy.
When I am in distress, I call to you,
because you answer me.” - Psalm 86:5-7

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“The LORD is near to all who
call on him, to all who call on
him in truth.” - Psalm 145:18