

## Why Japan? The Case for Missions

Several months ago I was asked by a volunteer short-term worker why Japan was so important compared to Darfur or other needy places. My answer was simple. People without the salvation of Jesus face eternal punishment regardless of where or who they are. This is why missionaries have gone to the ends of the earth, not to civilize people, but to introduce them to the Savior Jesus Christ. But because Japan seems so together and advanced it often does not receive the mission interest it well deserves. In many human ways Japan is not to be pitied, but we must have the compassion of Christ for all Japanese for several important and strategic reasons.

### **Japan is an unreached people group**

There are only 7,832 churches in Japan for a country of over 127 million people. That means one church for every 16,222 people. These churches average only 36 people for Sunday worship. From a basic missions perspective it is impossible that churches of that size and number can finish the task of sharing the Good News with everyone in Japan without missionary assistance from outside. This is why Dr. Ralph Winter considers Japan still an unreached people group. There is a tremendous need for churches here, some estimate we need about 127,000 more to make a dent and cause moderate social change. There are now over 20 cities still without a church!

### **Japan is needy and becoming needier**

The great Japanese post-war economic experiment has failed, which is leading to untold disintegration in every area of society. Suicide rates in Japan, affecting even school age children, young adults and the elderly, are the highest in the world. The divorce rate has climbed rapidly in the last several years. Many marriages do not last their first year! Abortions continue to run over twice the rate of the US. Reported abuse of many kinds including bullying is on the rise. Japan struggles with alcoholism. Japan is known for the unique psychological disorder, *Hikikomori* which is known essentially only in Japan affecting over 1.2 million people. This disorder is a tremendous social fear forcing people to truly shut themselves off from society for over 6 months at a time. These social realities coupled with the largest aging society on the planet means these issues will only be compounded in the future. Normally people are not drawn to pity the Japanese but these facts reveal that compassion is what they need for an “ideal society” that has failed.

### **Japan has wide-reaching influence**

The lifestyle, customs, entertainment, and technology of Japan continue to exert international influence. Along with these cultural influences comes the influence of the Japanese on global culture in general accompanied with ethics, morals, values, and worldview. Japan is also a leader in Asia, home to over 60% of the world's people. Key historical persons in Japan who have been Christians have had large influence

nationwide, regionally, as well as worldwide. Japan must be evangelized to use this global and regional influence.

## **Japan presents unique challenges**

These challenges, not found in many other countries, add to the difficulty of evangelism and church planting in Japan.

- Japan, in spite its small geographical size, has a large population (127 million) which is nearly all non-Christian (over 99%). Of the ten most populated countries in the world, Japan as number 10, has the least percentage of Christians (0.43%). Japan has a lower percentage of Christians than some Moslem countries.
- Japan is one of the world's most urbanized countries. As the world becomes more urbanized and globalized, reaching urban people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a key to the future of missions. In 2008, about one half of the world's population is urban; by 2030 almost 2/3rds will be urban. There is much to learn from Japan.
- Japan, though actually not one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has an extremely large middle class. These people often are materialistic and feel self-sufficient without a need for God.
- Japan is the most expensive country to live in the world. This limits financial resources for evangelism and church development.
- Japan is the most aged society in the world and with the lowest birthrate in the world. This brings a host of issues which are different from most of the world. This is and will continue to affect evangelism and church leadership development.
- Japan is one of the most educated and literate countries in the world. This coupled with high internet use as well as the world's largest wireless cell phone network means reaching Japanese with the gospel is challenging and must be sophisticated.
- Japan is a country of organized religion of Buddhism and Shintoism. Shintoism is unique to Japan, giving Japan a unique worldview. Personal spiritual beliefs are often combined with secularism.
- Japan is one of the few countries in the world to have experienced the use of weapons of mass destruction by religious terrorists. The 1995 Tokyo subway nerve gas attack has promoted a social climate which is more suspicious of organized religions. At the same time, Gallup and other survey organizations have found a remarkable openness of Japanese to Christ and Christianity, especially among young people.

## **Japan is strategic for global mission**

There are many countries in which you could invest resources for multiplying disciples, leaders and churches, but few will become viable mission sending countries, at least in the near future. Japan already has over 500 overseas missionaries. That is one missionary for about every 500 people who attend church! That number of missionaries could swell if the numbers of churches and attendees would grow. Japan has the economic, educational, and spiritual resources to send a great number of skilled missionaries. Through international business connections and tourism, Japanese are now widely welcomed in many countries, some places inaccessible by Americans. Working in Japan can have direct global impact in missions.