The background of the book cover is a photograph of a lush autumn landscape. In the foreground, a paved path or driveway is covered with fallen leaves in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. To the left, a white birch tree stands with its characteristic white bark and dark, peeling areas. A large tree with vibrant orange and yellow leaves dominates the upper right. In the distance, a small, rustic wooden building with a gabled roof and a porch is visible, surrounded by more trees and foliage.

# GOD'S FOOTPRINT IN THE MEDIA

A Daily Devotional

Neil Verwey

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By

Neil Verwey

## God's Footprint in the Media A Daily Devotional

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To all who may read this book – ***may you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen*** (2 Peter 3:18, NIV).

Neil Verwey

# Introduction

I am a storyteller in everything I speak, write and preach. I believe that I am in good company because Jesus told stories!

Great communicators in the Scriptures such as Jesus, the prophets and the apostles often used stories and events happening around them to help people understand how they should think or act. They understood how to use illustrations as a powerful tool to inspire, guide and communicate truth.

Did Jesus commend the unjust steward for what he did? No! He took an idea that was prevalent at the time and used it as an illustration. Jesus seemed to be asking, “If the world is smart in these things, how come you are missing out on doing things that are right for the right reason?”

I therefore use stories from the media as illustrations, even if I do not agree with what is happening, because I can still glean powerful lessons from them.

I read newspapers every day for many reasons, but one reason is to be blessed by the ordinary and the extraordinary.

I want to see God in everything! I have come to see the media as an instrument that helps me to reflect the glory of God. I am amazed to see how clearly parables come across in the media.

This book contains 365 such stories. I trust that some of them will bless you deeply.

Neil Verwey

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JANUARY

JANUARY 1

## ***PROVISION FOR THE NEGLIGENT***

The Japanese go in for New Year's cards instead of Christmas cards. On New Year's morning, the mail carrier delivers millions of cards in neat bundles to the doors of all the households in Japan – not a day early or a day late, but exactly on New Year's Day.

If you forget to mail a New Year's card to your friend, there is a solution. It is not the done thing to phone your friends on New Year's Day or to visit them in person, but Japanese custom makes provision for the negligent.

In the entrance to their home, your friend has probably placed a tray for name cards. Therefore, you can go to your friend's house and deliver your name card and your greeting without disturbing the family activities. Then you have done your duty.

Is that how we sometimes treat God? Do we forget Him and treat Him just as if we are fast name card visitors, or do we gladly spend all 365 days in His presence?

***One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple*** (Ps. 27:4, NIV).

Here is an expression used in the Bible numerous times to refer to something very important in the Christian life: “One thing . . .”

***You still lack one thing***, said Jesus to the self-righteous rich young ruler (Luke 18:22). ***One thing is needed***, He explained to busy Martha when she criticized her sister (Luke 10:42). ***One thing I know***, exclaimed the man who had received his sight by the power of Christ (John 9:25).

Vast numbers of Christians bob up and down in a sea of activity without realizing that the secret of progress is to concentrate on ***one thing***.

## JANUARY 2

### ***FOOD FOR THOUGHT***

The New Year is the greatest festival in Japan. The entire nation celebrates it, yet it is an intensely personal family affair.

Family members share the many ‘firsts’ of the New Year such as the first sunrise, the first shrine visit and the first meal.

No cooking is done for three days! Dishes are prepared in advance and served from beautifully decorated multi-tiered trays. The dishes celebrating the New Year have special meanings.

*Datemaki*, sweet rolled omelet, symbolizes many auspicious days ahead.

*Kazunoko*, herring roe, symbolizes fertility and is eaten to fulfill a desire for many children in the family.

*Kuromame*, black soybeans, typify good health and longevity.

*Tazukuri* are small dried sardines cooked in soy sauce. Historically, fish were used to fertilize rice paddies. Eating them symbolizes a prayer for an abundant harvest.

*Renkon* is lotus root. Its many holes depict the ease in seeing through things and perceiving a bright future ahead.

To let the overworked stomach rest, *nanakusa-gayu*, a seven-herb rice soup, is prepared on the 7th and 15th day of January.

*Source: The Internet*

Each year for centuries, the Japanese have held their New Year feasts, but very few know of the greatest imminent festival of all time. It will be far beyond even their wildest imaginations. It will be the day of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb of God.

***“God will bless everyone who is invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” The angel also said, “These things that God has said are true”*** (Rev. 19:9, CEV).

Have you reserved your seat at this banquet of all banquets?

JANUARY 3

## **'ONLY ONE LIFE' PROJECT**

*Everyone has Only One Life* is a project prompted by a message from a middle school girl fighting a chronic disease.

Poets have been holding readings across the nation to introduce the girl's message to the general public in Japan, asking them to finish the sentence that begins with "Because everyone has only one life . . ."

From among many responses, I mention a few:

"Because everyone has only one life, let's laugh joyfully every day," a high school student replied.

A mother whose son committed suicide finished the sentence as follows, ". . . let's live! Live! Everybody live! I want to live, too."

A book containing about sixty of the best messages is in print, with the hope that it will inspire people to love life.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Everybody wants to live, but many refuse to think of the inevitability of death!

***People have to die once. After that, God will judge them*** (Heb. 9:27, NIV).

We have a choice of how we want to live, but we are all destined to die and then to face the consequences of how we lived on earth! We are all accountable to the One who gives us life that is, at its best, as short as a flashing dream.

Then we have to appear before the heavenly judgment seat to take responsibility for our earthly living habits.

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last. — C. T. Studd*

Let us live each day as if it were our last day on earth.

JANUARY 4

## ***HEADING FOR THE HILLS***

A widespread new millennium computer systems problem, the Y2K, was expected to hit during the changeover from the year 1999 to the year 2000.

Some traditional leisure spots in the mountains of Japan were presented as places of refuge from possible consequences of the Y2K computer bug.

The destination for these skittish New Year travelers were traditional inns set in the mountains of Japan. Well stocked with food and equipped with power generators, they served as ideal places to weather any troubles that might have hit technology dependent Japan.

During those days of uncertainty, The Hot Springs Inn Association offered 'Relaxation and Reassurance' travel packages. Inn owners anticipated that at least a few of their guests might be summoned back to their workplaces during the holidays to deal with Y2K related crises.

To console any such unfortunates, they planned to send them off with boxed meal kits containing noodles, glutinous rice cakes, bottled water and even a cooking fuel cartridge.

For people who were worried about the possibility of troubles at midnight on December 31, 1999 when computer clocks would turn back to the year 1900, a stay in a mountain spa was just the ticket to calm their nerves.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

It is consoling to know that whatever happens, we of the family circle of God need not have any fears, for God looks after us.

***Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*** (Is. 41:10, NIV).

Claim this promise from God for the year ahead!

JANUARY 5

## ***FROGS AND RATS FOR PROTEIN***

In July 1944, when the U.S. Army landed on Guam, Sergeant Yokoi of the Japanese Imperial Army ran away in terror into the jungle.

For the next 28 years, he lived in his man-made cave in the undergrowth to avoid detection. He ate coconuts, mangoes, frogs and rats. As he was a tailor by trade, he was able to weave clothing from tree bark. He kept track of time by observing the cycles of the moon.

He knew the war was over, but remained in hiding out of fear. However, in January 1972, at 56, Sergeant Yokoi finally gave himself up.

He was taken to a hospital where the doctors wanted to X-ray him. Unfamiliar with modern medical equipment, he told them, “If you want to kill me, do it quickly!”

Mr. Yokoi returned to Japan to a flag-waving welcome, but he was a reluctant hero.

“I have a gun from the Emperor, and I have brought it back,” he said with deep remorse, “I am ashamed that I have come home alive.”

The post-war generation did not show much sympathy for his grief in letting the Emperor of Japan down.

*Source: Newspapers & Britannica*

Yokoi knew that the war was over, but for 28 years, he was too fearful to surrender.

Fear can also paralyze us and cause us to miss the plan of God for our lives. God urges us in His Word NOT to fear.

***Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation***  
(Is. 12:2, NIV).

Let us fearlessly trust our God for every day ahead of us.

JANUARY 6

## ***ASHES INTO BEADS***

A South Korean has developed a new technology to transform the ashes of the deceased into decorative ceramic beads.

The cremated remains are heated to 2,000 °C, and then the drops of lava-like liquid are shaped into little balls. The colors of the beads vary from jade to sky blue.

In South Korea, it would be unthinkable to bring the ashes of the deceased home in an urn and put them on the god shelf; or scatter the loved one's ashes over water or in the air, as they easily do in Japan.

With this new invention, families in South Korea can take the beads with them wherever they want to go.

"They can keep them at their home, temples or funeral houses," said Kim Sang Guk, who developed the beads after six years of research. "The beads have no smell, they don't perish, and they shine beautifully."

You may say, "What a morbid subject!" Not so! In a different sense, this is a glorious subject.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

God promises to make Christians shine with the brilliance of the firmament as we continue to be faithful in doing His will on earth. This is a miracle so magnificent that in our frailty we cannot grasp the immensity of it.

***Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky. Those who lead many others to do what is right will be like the stars for ever and ever*** (Dan. 12:3, NIrV).

We are looking forward to better things than beads; but we must teach others through our example of godly living, and point them in the right direction.

We who are wise will shine with the brilliance of the sun – more fantastic than the star-spangled sky on a cloudless night.

JANUARY 7

## ***JESUS IN MY SHOES***

A mean-spirited woman worked as a house cleaner in the house of an atheist innkeeper. The two of them often exchanged angry words in frustration and added to each other's misery. One day God saved the obnoxious house cleaner and she could not hide her joy. Every day anger, difficulties and frustration were transformed into joy. The atheist innkeeper watched closely as days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Every day the house cleaner shared her joy through her actions.

One day the innkeeper became furious at all her joy and began to belittle the house cleaner and her relationship with Jesus. He hated her for being happy. Finally, he decided to confront her and get all this joy stuff out on the table. He said to her, "You say you're saved and I can see your joy, but how can you be so sure, and what does being saved mean?"

She was shocked that the atheist innkeeper was interested and felt woefully inadequate to answer his questions but said, "To me, it feels as though I am standing in Jesus' shoes, and He is standing in mine." A theologian could not have put it better.

The innkeeper heard what she said and stomped off shaking his head. Two days later, he returned to the house cleaner and said, "I heard what you said about the shoes of Jesus and I see the joy in your heart. I want to experience this too – I want to know this Jesus."

*Source: Christian-Cyber-Ministries (Bill Mantel)*

***He himself carried our sins in his body on the cross. He did so that we would die as far as sins are concerned. Then we would lead godly lives. His wounds have made you whole***

(1 Peter 2:24, NIV).

Jesus willingly died as our substitute, so that we can be finished with sin and live the right way.

JANUARY 8

## ***ROBOT PETS***

Sony Corporation has unleashed a robot dog with sensors in its paws and an antenna-like tail. The dog recognizes its surroundings by way of built-in sensors. It acts independently while playing with a ball, and can be taken for a walk. It can tell the difference between a friendly pat and a scolding smack through a sensor in its head.

It expresses its ‘feelings’ by changing the color of its eyes, growing friendly or grumpy according to the treatment it gets, and wagging its tail to let you know it is happy.

This dog does not need expensive shots or food, and it is already housebroken.

Researchers have also come up with a life-size robotic kitty. With the world’s first artificial brain, it responds to certain stimuli with cat-like actions such as purring. If you pull its tail, it scratches you. It can recognize up to 10 people, and has the ability to recognize speech and chat back to you with its vocabulary of 20,000 phrases.

*Source: The Internet*

The Japanese are just like the Athenians of old!

***All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas***  
(Acts 17:21, NIV).

Be that as it may, humankind can never come close to duplicating the intricate creation of dogs or cats.

God creates in a fashion we can never truly imitate.

***He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted***  
(Job 9:10, NIV).

Let us worship the Creator of all in the universe!

JANUARY 9

## ***MUSCLE CELLS REPAIRING HEARTS***

A medical team at Osaka University Hospital in Japan has succeeded in restoring function to the heart of a patient with severe cardiac disease using muscle cells taken from one of his own thighs.

The patient, in his 50s, is now able to walk unaided. It is probably the first time in history that a patient waiting for an organ transplant has been successfully treated using his own cells.

The team removed 10g of muscle tissue from the patient's thigh. From this they extracted myoblast cells, which are the main building blocks of muscle fibers. They cultivated the cells, formed them into sheets, and wrapped the diseased heart with its layers.

The patient's heart's functions, including pulse rate and quantity of blood pumped, all improved rapidly so that 98 days later, he is able to lead a normal daily life.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

God uses doctors as instruments of healing.

***Jesus said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”*** (Matt. 9:12, NKJV).

Jesus wanted to teach a much deeper lesson to the 'holier-than-thou' Pharisees, who watched as He was sat and ate with sinners. He went on to say to them:

***“Go and learn what this means: for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”*** (Matt. 9:13, NKJV).

Are you, like the Pharisees, spiritually sick? Jesus, our Physician, came into the world to heal you.

Confess your need to Him and you will receive mercy.

JANUARY 10

## ***CELL PHONES BECOMING E-WALLETS***

Purses and wallets are increasingly losing out to cell phones.

An increasing number of new mobile phone users not only shop at convenience stores and other retailers, but also pay taxi and train fares with their phones. Some even convert their phones to function as credit cards.

More than 9 million cell phones in Japan are equipped with e-wallet functions and about 28,000 shops nationwide use the system, more than double that of a year ago.

People can also use cell phones to buy drinks from vending machines – it takes just half a second to get a drink.

In taxis, the service saves both drivers' and passengers' time when it comes to paying fares. Phone companies plan to introduce a system to let users make seat reservations and buy train or airline tickets via the Internet, enabling them to go through gates without the need for a ticket.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I am so glad that for the most important connection in life, we do not need cell phones, nor do we need to pay a cent.

***If you are thirsty, come and drink water! If you don't have any money, come, eat what you want! Drink wine and milk without paying a cent*** (Is. 55:1-2, CEV).

Yes, even if you are penniless, you can obtain the choicest of spiritual foods and blessings free of charge.

You can NEVER pay for anything God has for you.

Everything He so abundantly gives to you is free – including salvation.

***For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*** (Rom. 6:23, TLB).

JANUARY 11

## ***AFTER SEVEN YEARS***

For many years, Mr. Nakajima was an influential member of a yakuza gang. After turning to Christ, he befriended seven other gangsters-turned-pastors, and together they formed a band to help the needy.

Nakajima entered one of the nation's most notorious yakuza crime syndicates at age 19. Initiation into official membership involved getting two tattoo designs on his left shoulder and arm.

His main talent and task was blackmailing corporations.

Nakajima gradually rose to a level of affluence in which he easily spent the equivalent of \$16,000 (USA) in a single night without thinking twice.

He became a drug addict. In a drug-induced haze, he almost killed one of his colleagues. Searching for a way out and an end to his addiction, he turned to the church.

"I confessed my wrongdoings one by one," Nakajima said.

Physical pain followed which was so intense that he screamed out for someone to kill him. In agony, he lost consciousness for three days. When he came to, he realized that he had obtained peace.

"All my sins were forgiven, and for the first time I began to experience joy," he said. "For 7 years, my wife had been praying for me to stop womanizing, drinking, smoking, and taking drugs." Finally, God answered her prayers.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Today, he is still helping people who are as desperate as he once was. Our God is a miracle-working God.

***Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise*** (Jer. 17:14, NKJV).

God alone can heal! God alone can save!

JANUARY 12

## ***CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT***

Osamu Mizutani is likely one of the busiest schoolteachers in Japan. When he comes home at night, he checks his e-mail, which might contain as many as 350 messages.

Mizutani associates with about 5,000 young people who aimlessly mill around the streets of the entertainment districts, or who ask him for help by phone or Internet. After replying to as many of the messages as he can, he heads out on his nightly rounds in Yokohama's entertainment districts, looking for children who need help.

"These children are hanging around at night because they have been driven out of the 'daytime world' and feel obliged to stay in the 'nighttime world,'" Mizutani said. "They are deeply troubled and hurt, and chemicals are their only friends. They are utterly lonely and need adults who will listen and care."

Mizutani is so busy helping children that he recently had to quit teaching.

Last year, Mizutani gave 423 lectures. Over the last 22 months, he has received more than 183,000 e-mails from about 100,000 children or parents seeking his advice.

*Source: The Internet*

***Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. They loved darkness because what they did was evil. Everyone who does evil things hates the light. They will not come into the light. They are afraid that what they do will be seen. But anyone who lives by the truth comes into the light. He does this so that it will be easy to see that what he has done is with God's help***

(John 3:19-21, NIV).

God is waiting for those who go astray to come to Him in repentance.

JANUARY 13

## ***COMPUTER GAMES CAN BE DESTRUCTIVE***

Mr. Lee Seop, a skinny young man with glasses, wore a gray polyester uniform as a repairman of industrial boilers.

After work, he would take off his uniform and head to a nearby internet cafe. There, the 28-year-old entered a far more enticing virtual world, populated by saber-toothed dragons and purple-haired women in metallic bodices.

The evenings stretched into nights and the nights into the dawning of the next day. One night, after a 50-hour binge playing an online game called *World of Warcraft*, Lee collapsed.

“He died of heart failure brought on by exhaustion and dehydration,” said Dr. Park Woo. “He so earnestly concentrated on his games that he forgot to eat and sleep.”

South Korea boasts of being the most wired country in the world. Over three-quarters of its households have broadband connections. With this cyberspace presence, South Koreans provide the rest of the world with a scary glimpse of the future.

The last weeks of Lee’s life were spent largely in internet cafes that are open round-the-clock and are homes away from home for many South Koreans.

*Source: LA Times*

How tragic it is not to have the faintest idea of Jesus and to live and die without Him.

***In those days you were living utterly apart  
from Christ; you were enemies of God's  
children, and he had promised you no help.  
You were lost, without God, without hope***

(Eph. 2:12, TLB).

Jesus is the solution, but many people are not even interested in finding a solution to life’s problems until it is too late!

What is your choice?

JANUARY 14

### ***DOG SAVES MAN FROM BEAR***

When Kazue Mikami picked up an abandoned dog and named her Nana, he never thought that one day she might possibly save his life.

One day, as Mr. Mikami and Nana descended Mt. Onajika in Japan, a bear suddenly attacked him. The bear bit him in the leg so that he feared for his life.

Nana began barking at the bear, distracting it and enticing it to chase her into the forest.

After going to a hospital for treatment, Mikami searched from place to place, but could not find Nana. He presumed that she had died on his behalf.

Seven days later, a farmer phoned Mikami, saying that he had found a stray dog. Mikami raced out to the farm, where a delighted Nana greeted him with a hearty wag of her tail before dropping down at his feet, utterly exhausted.

The veterinarian gave Nana a clean bill of health. She had suffered little more than one kilogram loss in weight.

Nana's reward for her life-saving heroics was a can of dog food with more calories than Mikami would normally permit.

*Source: Mainichi News*

Nana's love for her master saved him, maybe even from death, and reminds us of the great love of Jesus who died for us to save us from eternal death.

***You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*** (Rom. 5:6-8, NIV).

Do not reject the great love Christ has for you!

JANUARY 15

## ***TRAIN DOOR FLIES OPEN***

An 11-carriage train was speeding along on one of the Tokyo lines of the Japan Railway, carrying about 3,000 people during the morning rush hour. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a door swung wide open. The driver slammed on the emergency brakes. Fortunately, no one was injured.

Operation of the train was suspended, and 15 other trains were delayed for up to 19 minutes, inconveniencing about 48,000 passengers.

*Source: Mainichi News*

There is a door that will not simply swing open. Jesus, the Creator of the universe stands in front of the door of your heart, waiting for you to open it.

***Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me***

(Rev. 3:20, NIV).

Incredible as it might sound, Christ, the eternal and living God is standing at the door of your heart. He is knocking and waiting for you to invite Him into your heart and life.

As Jesus is a Gentleman, He will never force His way in. Besides, the door only has a handle on the inside! You are the only one that can open that door and invite the Lord of lords and the King of kings to come in and be your Companion through life.

When He enters, He will clean up your life. Then day and night, you will have sweet fellowship with Him.

***Sprinkle me with the cleansing blood and I shall be clean again. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow*** (Ps. 51:7, TLB).

Do not reject His holy overtures!

JANUARY 16

## ***RELATION BREAK-UPPERS***

Nowadays, with war in the minds and on the lips of many around us, we should realize how important good relations are between nations and between individuals.

Unfortunately, there are those who live for one purpose alone which is to destroy good relations.

'Relation break-uppers' (*wakaresaseya*) is a business that thrives in Japan.

For the right price, operatives will dump your girlfriend for you, lose your husband, drive away that mistress or fire a longtime employee.

They are literally 'break-uppers' and specialize in destroying relationships.

Each *wakaresaseya* company has several operatives skilled at playing the roles of flight attendants, powerful officials or respectable homemakers.

The person whom a client hopes to banish is often enticed into a trap through a seemingly chance meeting in a restaurant, at a party or on a flight.

A moment of weakness captured by a camera hidden in a cigarette box or behind a lapel is enough to change any thinking.

Though breaking up is hard to do, the firms boast 95 percent success rates!

*Source: The Globe and Mail*

As Christians, we are 'build-uppers' of wholesome relationships. Keep in mind the words of Jesus about good relations.

***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*** (Matt. 5:9, NKJV).

May God help you heal relationships whenever and wherever possible.

JANUARY 17

## ***ONE-COIN HUSBAND***

Unlike the usual method in Western countries, Japanese wives traditionally handle family finances, collecting their husbands' paychecks and doling out pocket money to their husbands and children.

The term 'one-coin husband' has come to describe hapless office workers who must get by on a daily allowance of a single 500 yen coin from their wives.

Some companies are hoping to tap into the cash and deposits held by the women in Japanese households, as they likely constitute the world's biggest pool of private savings.

"We have held a lot of seminars or events in the past where most attendees were male," said a Nikko spokesperson. "We thought that it was time to get the women out to our seminars."

About 370 women applied for the 80 seats available at the two sessions held that month.

It was the first investment seminar for homemakers.

"Private investors are the ones who have cash and savings, and an increasing number of housewives invest in stocks.

This is an excellent opportunity to offer meaningful information for them."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

In the Bible, we read about a wife of noble character.

She is worth much more than anything money can obtain.

***A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life*** (Prov. 31:10-12, NIV).

For human beings, whatever our capacity here on earth, a godly attitude as described in God's Word is the only way to excellence.

JANUARY 18

## ***THE SWEETEST PUMPKIN***

Mr. Oyamada has developed a variant of a wild pumpkin that is comparable to a pineapple in sweetness.

He applied to the Agriculture Ministry to register the new variety. If the application is approved, he will be able to commercialize it. He has named the wild pumpkin, *Nanbu-Ichiro* and arranged for local farmers to start growing it.

“It is great to protect original species that are surviving in the wild,” he said, noting that they can be turned into new foodstuffs.

The new variety of pumpkin, which measures about 35cm long and weighs one kilogram, has a sugar density three times that of the more widely consumed varieties. It can be eaten raw or made into juice without the addition of sugar.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Sweetness is a very enjoyable experience, but there is something more pleasing: a mortal human being can eat heavenly food.

***Let everyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches: Everyone who is victorious shall eat of the hidden manna, the secret nourishment from heaven***  
(Rev. 2:17, TLB).

Bread is a lively emblem of Christ’s body and a striking symbol of the hidden manna. It is the sustenance given to those who are conquering sin by the help of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Bread from heaven, the unseen source of the believer’s nutrition and strength.

To everyone that defeats evil, God will grant magnificent hidden food.

So, ***don’t let evil get the upper hand, but conquer evil by doing good*** (Rom. 12:21, TLB).

JANUARY 19

## ***TRANSFORMATION IN AN ELEVATOR***

In the days before automatic elevators, there was a woman who worked as an elevator operator at a large university in Japan.

She could think of no work more monotonous than operating an elevator all day long. She was miserable and grumbled every time someone spoke to her.

One day it occurred to her that she could influence young students to a brighter way of seeing life, but to do so, she would have to change her own attitude towards life.

The next day she started with a smile on her face. It was extremely difficult for her, but by sheer willpower, she was determined to cheer up whoever rode in her elevator.

As the years went by, people sought her advice more and more. Many received help from her because of her bright attitude and her optimistic view of life. She became known as a ‘Solver of Problems.’

She gained fame because she changed her attitude and made a point of always looking toward the bright side of life for those who stepped into her elevator.

Many years later, when she died, thousand of people attended her funeral.

Scripture encourages us to change our mental and spiritual attitude because it dictates our lifestyle.

***Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else*** (1 Thess. 5:15, NIV).

Your attitude determines your actions for good or for bad, and has a profound influence on those that you are closely associated with every day.

Always look for the best in yourself and others, and positively seek to bring it out.

JANUARY 20

## ***MUSIC FROM FLOWERS***

Have you ever listened to the music emitted by flowers?

Let's Corp. in Nagoya, Japan has recently invented *ka-on*, meaning 'flower sound'. It turns the petals and leaves of ordinary plants into audio speakers. The company sells many thousands of *ka-on* sets via the Internet and other means.

The therapeutic power of flowers takes on new meaning. This Japanese gadget turns plants into audio speakers, making the petals and leaves tremble with good vibrations.

The machine consists of a donut-shaped magnet and coil at the base of a vase that hooks up to a CD player, stereo or TV set.

If you place the flowers into the vase and turn on the *ka-on* with its magnet and coil, it will relay the sound vibrations up the stems through the plant's water tubes. You can then clearly hear the music emanate from the petals. If you touch a leaf, you will feel gentle vibrations.

Unlike regular speakers, which send sound in one direction, *ka-on* shoots it in all directions, filling an entire room with music in a natural ambience. It is ideal for flower arrangements on tables at weddings, reception desks at hospitals, and for decorating restaurants.

*Source: Associated Press*

*Ka-on* is great, but Jesus is the Flower of all flowers!

***I am like a rose on the coast of Sharon. I am  
like a lily in the valleys***

(Song of Solomon 2:1, NIrV).

Jesus is not like a rose locked up in a garden. He calls Himself the Rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys to express access for the whole world to His sweetness and beauty.

Let's enjoy Jesus to the full and adorn ourselves with Him.

JANUARY 21

## ***SKIPPING ROPE IN THE AIR***

Yuya Kiuchi, a 23-year-old from Ashiya City, won first prize in a national rope-skipping tournament in Japan. Eighty people, from primary school students to adults in their 60s, competed.

Kiuchi won his third straight prize with his successful quintuple and quadruple jumping. He has no equal in skipping, and holds the top rank in the International Skipping Federation.

He leaps from a springboard to soar as high as 1.5 meters while finishing a sextuple jump, staying in the air for 1.2 seconds. A sextuple means the jump rope passes beneath his feet six times each time he jumps. He is the only person in the world to accomplish this acrobatic feat successfully.

“I feel good when I jump against gravity and come down to earth lightly,” says Kiuchi. His affinity for jumping rope increased after the Great Hanshin Earthquake seven years before. His house was destroyed and he was injured when a piece of glass pierced his right wrist. Despite the disaster, he was able to cheer up victims of the earthquake with his skipping skills.

He is happy to visit schools to demonstrate his prowess. When he picks up a skipping rope, children gather around him, their eyes glittering with excitement.

“I’ll come across my next goal while I’m skipping rope,” Kiuchi said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

As followers of Christ, we have great goals in view. Christian life is not passive and trapped in what happened in our past. We never stop pressing on.

***Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!***

(Is. 43:18-19, NIV)

The more we learn of Christ, the more we realize how much more ground there is to cover.

JANUARY 22

## ***CELL PHONE ADDICTION***

Three high school girls and a boy are sitting together eating hamburgers at a restaurant. They are not talking to each other – a common sight in Japan nowadays. Eating with one hand and holding a mobile phone with the other, they sit silently tapping out messages and sending them to other friends.

Professor Kato defines the symptoms of mobile phone addiction: being irritated all day when accidentally leaving one's phone at home; taking a phone everywhere, even to the bathroom; and promptly responding to text messages.

Maiko, a 20-year-old college student, said she often continues to send messages to her friends with her mobile phone until the battery goes dead.

"I use my mobile phone from the moment I wake up until I go to bed – during classes too, of course," Maiko said with a laugh.

Once when her account was running too high, her parents temporarily cancelled her service as punishment. She felt incredibly lonely and she kept rereading old mail stored on her disconnected phone.

"It is as if their cell phones were the center of their lives," Mr. Kobayashi, the principal of one high school said. "It is a strange sight to see the whole class tapping on their phones during breaks without talking to each other. I think it is unhealthy and dangerous to be so dependent on such an impersonal communication tool."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***Don't you know that you can be slaves of sin  
and die, or you can be obedient slaves of God  
and be acceptable to him*** (Rom. 6:16, CEV).

This is also true of mobile phones! Cell phones are great servants, but terrible masters.

JANUARY 23

## ***SHINTO VIRTUAL PRAYERS***

During the New Year's season in Japan, millions visit the temples, but many do not want to make these yearly visits anymore and choose to pray by Internet instead.

Online sales of lucky charms and virtual visits to Shinto shrines beg the question of the priests as to whether such services are legitimate. Part of their problem is that this trend could lead to great economic loss for them.

Virtual visitors can find the shrine's website and fill in a form with their name and address and other details, as well as their wishes, then simply click 'Please make my wish come true.'

They send their information to the shrine by e-mail and the priests will pray for them free of charge.

However, some shrines charge a fee after receiving such e-mails from virtual visitors and sell charms for protection.

The Tokyo-based association of Shinto shrines issued an admonition: "No Shinto god exists on the Internet."

They supervise shrines at about 80,000 locations across the nation.

*Source: Reuters and Yomiuri News*

***Some people worship the worthless statues of their gods. They turn away from the grace You want to give them. But I will sacrifice a thank offering to You. And I will sing a song of thanks. I will do what I have promised. Lord, you are the one who saves*** (Jonah 2:8-9, NIV).

When Jonah was in the belly of a fish, he came to his senses and prayed this prayer to God.

May the Lord help us not to abandon our loyalty to Him, and keep us from serving hollow modern gods such as symbols of power, pleasure, possessions or prestige.

JANUARY 24

## ***ETERNAL YOUTH***

Dr. Katsuya Takasu regards his body as a vehicle to carry his mind around. Therefore, what he does to his face is ‘just like fixing an old jalopy.’ Cosmetic surgeon Takasu not only does surgery, but has it done. He gave instructions from the operating table as a senior colleague performed face, forehead and eyelid surgery, and hair transplantation on him.

He had cheek fat removed by a French doctor and an ‘aggressive’ chemical peel-off of facial skin done by an Israeli surgeon.

To top it all off, he had a cutting-edge jaw lift performed by a Brazilian surgeon who put 12 gold wires in his jaw.

In the space of those 12 months, he came to look 15 years younger. At 56, Takasu’s complexion is as smooth as the proverbial baby’s bottom, with no trace of sagging visible.

Not that he has stopped there. Takasu regularly has fearsome-sounding chemicals such as botulinum toxin and hyaluronic acid injected into his face to remove wrinkles.

“Am I scared of aging? Certainly, because my body is becoming worn out while my inner self has never gotten old,” Takasu admits with a wrinkle-free smile. “Trying to escape the effects of aging is rather like desperately running up a descending escalator.”

*Source: Japan Times*

***O Lord, you alone are my hope; I've trusted you from childhood. Yes, you have been with me from birth and have helped me constantly —no wonder I am always praising you!***

(Ps. 71:5, TLB)

A godly disposition does not need to disappear when old age is catching up with us.

May our beauty shine from the inside.

JANUARY 25

## ***SAFETY PIN JEWELRY***

Way back in 1849, an American invented safety pins, but in 2002, Kawata-Ferguson from Tokyo, Japan, made them into pieces of jewelry, although she did not originally plan to do so.

“One day I was invited to a party. Having no special clothes to wear, I wondered what to do,” she said. “I removed the original decoration from a necklace chain and arranged safety pins in its place.

“Putting the safety pin jewelry on, my ordinary sweater glowed, even becoming a conversation piece at the party.” She was overjoyed.

“In Japan, kimonos are very decorative themselves, so I never really wore jewelry,” she said. “The admiration for my simple safety pin jewelry from my friends took me by surprise.” Asked to make similar jewelry for her friends, she started creating one piece after another.

She found pure enjoyment in working with safety pins. Once, she used 126,000 safety pins to make a number of long chains, which she hung from the ceiling of an entrance hall in a famous building. This piece is still on display.

Her range of interest in safety pins is varied, but for the rest of her life she plans to wear safety pin jewelry.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Outward beauty may depend on jewelry, but inward beauty shines brighter than any trinket.

***Your beauty should not come from outward adornment. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight*** (1 Peter 3:3-4, NIV).

If inner beauty is of such great value in the sight of God, isn't it something worth achieving?

JANUARY 26

## **A WRINKLE ERASER**

“People want to look good on TV phones, even without make-up,” Prof. Arakawa said. “Senior citizens will look younger on videos and video phones. Just think what a facelift this could be for them.”

As a husband and wife research team, Prof. and Mrs. Arakawa have developed electronic software that automatically removes wrinkles and skin blemishes from photographic images of people’s faces on computer screens.

The Arakawa team’s software plays the role of a filter leveling off variations in images.

When digitalized images are processed, wrinkles, spots or eczema patches immediately disappear.

The software user can adjust the degree of filtering required.

*Source: Asahi News*

However, is it really important what our faces look like? *Hito wa mikake ni yoranu mono* is a Japanese proverb suggesting that appearances are often deceiving.

We should be more interested in what we look like on the inside where no one can see us.

*Do not judge a tree by its bark – French Proverb.*

Of more importance than the crinkles in our face is the concern we ought to have about how the all-knowing God sees us.

God made it very clear to King Solomon, and to us, of how He observes us in our deepest being.

***The LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever*** (1 Chr. 28:9, NIV).

So, do not ignore your Creator.

Dedicate your life wholeheartedly to serve Him!

JANUARY 27

## ***800KM IN THE NIGHT***

On one of my visits to South Korea, I heard the story of a blind sorcerer, named Whang Pum Oh. He found God and completely broke away from his evil ways. The Bible became the most important part of his life and he desired to spend his whole life studying it.

Out of oil drums, he cut two thousand little squares for the consonants of the Korean alphabet. Two thousand wooden pieces represented the vowels.

While someone read the gospel of John to him, he strung them on to a string. By this method, he memorized the first six chapters of John.

Then, he heard of Braille. Gropingly, he covered 800km in the dark to a school for the blind. He arrived with dust and sweat on his small-poxed face.

Within a month, he learned enough Braille to read the Bible. He groped his way back to his home and eventually memorized the whole of the New Testament.

Whang Pum Oh became one of the happiest of Christians. Although he is already in heaven, some still vividly remember his particular joy and delight in the Bible.

***Your words are what sustain me; they are food to my hungry soul. They bring joy to my sorrowing heart and delight me. How proud I am to bear your name, O Lord*** (Jer. 15:16, TLB).

Reading the Word of God brings untold joy to the hearts of those of the family of God.

***Your laws are my joyous treasure forever***  
(Ps. 119:111, TLB).

Yes, the Bible is the source of lasting joy and happiness!

JANUARY 28

## ***ARTIFICIAL WEATHER MODIFIERS***

Weather officials kept rain away from the ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics by the use of artificial rain suppression equipment as 15,000 performers' and over 91,000 spectators gathered for this event. Weather officials fired over 1,000 rockets, to ensure good weather at the Olympic sight.

"Ours is the largest artificial weather controlling program in the world," Mr. Wang, the Director of the Weather Modification Department of China said. They employ more than 32,000 people, 7,100 anti-aircraft guns, 4,991 special rocket launchers and 30-odd aircraft across the country.

When a drought threatens farms and orchards, farmers assemble, not to pray to Buddha for rain, but to grab rocket launchers and 37 mm anti-aircraft guns and begin shooting rockets into the sky. Their targets are wisps of passing cloud that they aim to 'seed' with silver-iodide particles around which moisture can then collect and become heavy enough to fall.

Between 1999 and 2006, 250 billion tons of rain were artificially created, enough to fill the Yellow River several times over.

This sadly resulted in five thirsty cities in Henan province accused each other of 'cloud theft' for their efforts to trigger chemically induced showers, over their own territories.

*Source: Correspondents and Internet Reports*

We need to pray fervently for spiritual showers from heaven for us and for our children!

***For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants*** (Is. 44:3, NIV).

Spiritual showers do not come automatically – we have to pray for them earnestly.

JANUARY 29

## ***TYPHOON BRINGS BLESSING***

The most destructive typhoon ever to hit Japan was 1959's Typhoon No. 15. It generated wind speeds of more than 112mph (180km/h) and claimed 5,098 lives.

In later years, when a similar typhoon approached Japan, the media warned that its 124mph (200km/h) winds would be so powerful that they could easily take off the top stories of houses.

Many Christians prayed and before it reached land, the eye of the typhoon, for some unfathomable reason, divided and therefore was kept at sea for a longer time. By the time it made landfall, it had spent the greater part of its strength. In many parts of Japan, it was nothing worse than a severe tropical storm. Thousands of people that were evacuated to nearby town halls and schools could safely return home.

Very few people were killed and injured, although it played havoc with Japan's power supplies, and many transport services by land, sea and air were shut down.

The biggest trial for some was the heavy rains – from 150 to 750mm. Once again, the blessing was that the water shortage in Japan was alleviated.

In this country, if it does not rain for 3 weeks the newspapers cry out about a terrible drought. For the first time in five years, the Japanese were again trying to make rain, but they needed clouds to do so, and clouds they could not make.

Is it not wonderful to think that even a terrifying typhoon can bring blessing, eh?

God transforms calamities into blessings. We Christians know that very well.

***Here is what I want you to know. What has happened to me has really helped to spread the good news*** (Phil. 1:12, NIrV).

Problems and difficulties in real life are painful, but they can become opportunities for spiritual growth.

JANUARY 30

## ***OXYGEN NOW ON THE MENU***

A customer inhales concentrated oxygen through a mask at a coffee shop in Osaka, Japan. Many workers from nearby companies also drop in to ‘top up.’

At the Kobe oxygen bar, ‘O2 Support,’ canisters of oxygen are in supply. Lying down in lounges, customers have an inhaler strapped to their mouths, through which lavender or peach-scented oxygen is pumped in. The customer dons special goggles with small inside lights that blink on and off, all the while having their feet massaged.

“As I took in the oxygen, I felt as if vibrant fresh air was penetrating each of the cells of my body,” a customer remarked. “I almost succumbed to an overwhelming drowsiness.”

In ‘The O2 Factory Relaxation Shop,’ customers sit on easy chairs, place their feet in water and breathe in enriched oxygen. The room is filled with ‘vitamins from the air.’ An increased oxygen level in the body allegedly enhances the circulation of the blood, thus preventing the skin from aging.

Oxygen is now the focus of intense interest in several industries for its potential health and beauty benefits. Many believe it is an antidote to problems caused by air pollution. Similar oxygen ‘stores’ are now popular in the United States where they are known as oxygen bars.

*Source: Mainichi & Yomiuri News*

Without even thinking about it, we inhale oxygen that God supplies for us. Nevertheless, it is good to remember that every breath we take comes from our Creator.

***The God who made the world and everything  
in it, he himself gives all men life and breath  
and everything else*** (Acts 17:24, 25, NIV).

Let us acknowledge God with every breath we take.

JANUARY 31

## ***FAR AWAY FLOWER BEDS***

Several newspapers report that increasingly young Japanese working women, most of them in their twenties, go to foreign countries to study gardening, as their interest in gardening – even on apartment balconies – has grown. They spend up to a month with a family overseas that owns a garden.

The program gives participants an opportunity to study gardening at its place of origin, and they may even have an opportunity to design a garden, which most Japanese have never experienced.

On returning to Japan, they cannot duplicate the big gardens they have seen because they do not have the space. However, the knowledge gained helps them to brighten the tone of their limited space, such as a verandah or a room.

They bring greenery into their lives by decorating their relatively limited living quarters. They say that ‘gardening’ in their inadequate space enriches their lives.

It struck me recently to see how very much God is interested in gardens. He made the most beautiful garden ever known to man.

***Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed*** (Gen. 2:8, NIV).

Man ruined his opportunity in that garden but God in His mercy offers to cultivate a new garden within us.

***You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail*** (Is. 58:11, NIV).

May we be a beautiful garden flooded with the grace and mercy of God!

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 1

## ***HEAVEN'S PASSPORT***

Since the beginning of the 21st century, doing good deeds has become a fad of teenage girls in Japan. They collect stickers in a *Heaven's Passport*. Each sticker represents a good deed done. They earn a sticker for their Heaven's Passports whenever they do something like pick up garbage, give up their train seats to senior citizens, or do their own laundry.

A *Heaven's Passport* looks the same as a real passport, right down to the bearer's photograph. On the first page, girls write down their wishes. When a girl has collected 100 stickers, the wishes inscribed in her passport are supposed to come true.

Nao, 16, a second-year student at a high school in Tokyo, opens her schoolbooks. Her *Heaven's Passport* is also on her desk – bearing her wish to fall in love.

When her teacher asks a question, no one answers. In an attempt to 'save' the teacher, Nao raises her hand. Another good deed done! Immediately she pastes a sticker in her passport.

The night before, she slapped another sticker into her passport because she returned home just in time to make her 22:30 curfew. This qualifies as a good deed.

The Osaka-based maker has already sold 100,000 *Heaven's Passports*. In some regions, demand has been so high that supply cannot keep up.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

There is a real heaven, but you can never reach that wonderful place by a decent number of good deeds.

***God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it*** (Eph. 2:8-9, NIrV).

Salvation is a gift from God; you cannot take any credit for it.

FEBRUARY 2

## ***NEMO, THE GUIDE DOG***

Professor Takemae of the Tokyo Keizai University Japan, suddenly heard his guide dog, Nemo, whimper. Nemo died that day in his master's university office. The professor was very sad.

The guide dog would often sit at the base of a podium while his master was lecturing, and must have had a very interesting life. Takemae wrote a book about Nemo, who lived to be 12 years and 10 months old.

The professor went blind in his early 50s and used a cane for the first 10 years, but it was difficult for him to walk on the street. Then someone introduced him to Nemo, who from that point on guided him to the university every day.

Walking with Nemo also enabled him to interact with people around him.

"Many people started to talk to me and help me, perhaps because they are dog lovers," he said.

Sometimes Takemae was not allowed to enter shops and restaurants or use transportation with Nemo. He took the matter up with parliament members. In May 2002, a new law was enacted prohibiting the banning of service dogs from public and private facilities such as department stores.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It must be terrible to be blind and move around in utter darkness, but how much more terrible it is to be spiritually blind and not recognize Jesus Christ as our spiritual light source.

When we receive new life from Jesus Christ, He opens our eyes to see amazing things!

***All I know is that I used to be blind, but now I can see*** (John 9:25, CEV).

Jesus is the only one who allows radiant light to stream into the eyes of those who are spiritually blind.

FEBRUARY 3

## ***PROFESSOR SPLASH***

On July 25, 2007, ‘Professor Splash’ was invited to Tokyo, Japan for a televised special of his newest dive attempt. Guinness World Records verified his successful dive as the highest shallow dive. He dove 10.70m (35 feet) into 30cm (12 inches) of water in a kiddy pool.

Darren Taylor, otherwise known as ‘Professor Splash’, said his technique is to skip across the water when he makes contact with it.

“They thought I was going to die,” he said. “I get that a lot.” He usually gets the breath knocked out of him.

“It’s scary,” he said. “Really, it’s like a train wreck. Nevertheless, my job is to scare people. That’s what I do.”

*Source: creekwood@comcast.net*

It is amazing what people do to get their names recorded in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Li Jianhua (China) holds the world record for pulling a car the longest distance with his ear.

Japan’s Megumi Suzuki’s name is recorded in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the record number of 152 jump-rope skips in only 30 seconds.

There is however, a much more important book in which all of us should want our names included.

***If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*** (Rev. 20:15, NIV).

To have our names recorded in the Book of Life we do not have to perform death-defying stunts, but we do have to submit to the Savior who defied death. By His death, burial, and resurrection, He opened the way for us to live eternally with Him in heaven.

Is your name entered into the Lamb’s Book of Life?

FEBRUARY 4

## ***LONE VIGIL AT SCHOOL GATE***

Every morning at 07:30, 81-year-old Mr. Kitayama stands guard at the gate of the primary school near his house in Kobe, Japan.

“Good morning, granddad,” the children greet him.

“You’re all like my own grandchildren,” Kitayama replies.

The *Great Hanshin Earthquake* in 1995 smashed Kitayama’s house, killing his 69-year-old wife as she was trapped under the rubble. When she died, he cried out, “Why did you leave me?” He managed to survive the nightmare through the kindness of many people.

Some neighborhood children were also hurt. Kitayama realized that protecting children was the way he could repay the kindness that had been shown to him.

Some children give him “high fives,” taking his hands and observing, “Your hands are cold, granddad.” Kitayama received letters from about 40 fifth-graders, expressing their gratitude to him, with messages such as “Thank you for watching over us,” and “I want to stay as brave as you even if something sad happens.”

“There was a time when I had nothing to live for, but now, watching over the children is my purpose in life,” he said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***Children’s children are the crown of old men***

(Prov. 17:6, NKJV).

As a member of the family of God, we should all be motivated to have a God-glorifying purpose in life.

***Your work is produced by your faith. Your service is the result of your love. Your strength to continue comes from your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*** (1 Thess. 1:3, NIrV).

God and those you help appreciate your loving deeds.

FEBRUARY 5

## ***CYCLING AFTER A DREAM***

At age 26, Chiho Sakamoto filed a request to his superiors to be allowed to go around the world by bicycle. He is a 32-year-old manager at a children's clothing company. He received permission, even earning a base salary for which his only obligation was to submit a monthly business travelogue to the company, which technically made his journey a job assignment.

During his 51 months of travels from 1995 to 2000, Sakamoto made countless friends.

In New Guinea, he contracted malaria. A local doctor nursed him back to health, even doing his laundry until he recovered. As he rested, worried villagers often visited him to shake his hand and to pay their respects.

In Chile, Sakamoto suffered from altitude sickness so severely that he was unable to move. A man in a truck stopped to help him, giving him aspirin, juice to drink, and a ride to a village where he received further treatment. The man turned out to be the governor of Chile's second-largest state!

During his travels, he visited 43 countries, covering 55,000km. Upon his return, he was greeted by a large banner reading, "Welcome home!"

"Anyone can change his life, depending on how he goes about it," Mr. Sakamoto told his friends and colleagues.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We can certainly change our lives by making the right choices. Like Joshua of the Bible, we can make the right choice for the future of our family.

***Choose for yourselves right now whom you will serve, but as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord*** (Josh. 24:15, NIV).

Choosing the Lord is a choice no one will ever regret.

FEBRUARY 6

## ***UPGRADING NIGHTSTICKS***

The National Police Agency of Japan has issued longer nightsticks to their police officers.

This was considered necessary in the face of a sharp increase in the number of cases in which criminals have attacked officers and obstructed them from carrying out their duty, it was considered necessary.

The nightsticks were upgraded from 53cm long fixed length models to retractable ones that are 65cm when fully extended. They allow officers to keep a greater distance from the suspects they confront. Moreover, the diameter of the new nightstick's tip is 19mm as compared with the 12mm tip of the previous sticks.

The grips of the new sticks are made of polyester to prevent them from slipping from officers' hands.

*Source: Mainichi News*

Bigger sticks might be essential for the NPA of Japan, but human beings need to sweep their lives clean of evildoing before God.

***Wash your hands. Make yourselves clean. Get  
your evil actions out of my sight! Stop doing  
what is wrong! Learn to do what is right!***

(Is. 1:16-17, NIrV)

Oh, for more people who would say ‘NO’ to evil and say ‘YES’ to God!

The question is not what is expedient, popular, honorable, lucrative, or pleasant, but what is right.

In our own strength, we cannot do right. However noble our aspirations, however pure and high our convictions, attempting to do what is right is like chasing an elusive dream. Only with the Holy Spirit of God operating in our lives is it possible.

Let's trust Him for glorious victory in every area of our lives!

FEBRUARY 7

## **CRAZY ABOUT MUSASHI**

Miyamoto Musashi was a famous Japanese swordsman who lived some 300 years ago.

According to historical accounts, he was the strongest man in Japan and is a popular figure even today. He is well known as a *kensei* – ‘a holy sword fighter’.

He started fighting at the age of 13 and developed the method of fighting with two swords. He was always keen to take on opponents tougher than himself in order to improve his skills.

Musashi fought more than 60 times in his life, yet he never lost. Once he even took on 70 opponents one after the other.

Recently the story of Musashi has featured in numerous movies, novels and TV shows.

Why, after so many years, has he suddenly become so popular again?

“Japan is in a very gloomy mood at the moment and people are looking for a hero with spirit and individualism like Musashi,” said a leading commentator in Japan.

*Source: Japankids Web Page*

What we need in Japan is not the sword of Musashi, but the Sword of the Messiah!

***For the word of God is alive and active.  
Sharper than any double-edged sword, it  
penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit,  
joints and marrow . . . Everything is  
uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of  
Him to whom we must give account***

(Heb. 4:12-13, NIV).

God’s words are as incisive as a razor-sharp dagger, cutting swiftly and deeply into our innermost thoughts and desires, laying us open to listen and to obey. Let’s allow the living and active Word of God to discover and change the center of our very being.

FEBRUARY 8

## ***MEET THE NEW ME***

There are increasing numbers of people who have a secret desire to become different – a new radiant self.

Studios that help people to realize this ambition have become all the rage in Japan. Curiously enough, their clientele comprises not only women wishing to become beautiful, but also men looking to transform themselves.

Male customers often have their complexions refined with foundation and their eyebrows trimmed.

The ages of the customers vary widely, with some in their twenties and others in their sixties.

Customers can bring along magazine clippings of their favorite actors or models and ask to have their faces made up like the photos.

There are also photographic studios for people who want to record their makeovers for eternity. A beautician touches up a customer's make-up and hairstyle and then takes professional pictures for an additional fee; customers can even have wrinkles and blemishes erased on screen.

Today the Japanese emphasize individuality. Perhaps this has given many people the desire to discover a new self, different from the person they are.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Becoming a different person can be good, if the change is genuine. Make-up cannot really change anyone.

Paul wrote that he was wonderfully changed into a different person. We need to follow his example.

***But God was kind! He made me what I am,  
and His wonderful kindness wasn't wasted***

(1 Cor. 15:10, CEV).

Do not try to do it yourself – ask God, the Changer-of-the-inner-self, to change you eternally to be good and righteous.

FEBRUARY 9

## **VITAMIN C GARMENTS**

In 2001, when the economy of Japan took a sharp downturn and many people were quite dismal, manufacturers wondered how to do away with the gloom. One of the many new inventions in Japan at that time was under garments containing a substance that becomes vitamin C when absorbed into the body. They were so popular that demand outstripped supply. Vitamin C blouses, shirts and pajamas also sold at a brisk pace.

They all continue to be highly sought-after items thanks to the news coverage in newspapers, magazines and television.

Day by day, people wearing them can easily absorb a substance through their skin from the clothes, which is then transformed into vitamin C in the body.

According to the manufacturer, its effect remains even after the owners wash their clothes several dozen times.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

What next?

Anyhow, we are so happy to know that God clothes us with eternal life-giving robes.

***We take great delight in the LORD. We are joyful because we belong to our God. He has dressed us with salvation as if it were our clothes. He has put robes of godliness on us. We are like a groom who is dressed up for his wedding. We are like a bride who decorates herself with her jewels*** (Is. 61:10, NIV).

The filthy rags of sin will not be tolerated in heaven.

Only the Creator-God can supply the right kind of wardrobe for His children.

How wonderful to be clothed by the Almighty!

FEBRUARY 10

## ***MECHANICAL PETS FOR LONELINESS***

“I didn’t meet anybody today!” An elderly man in Japan wrote day after day in his diary until he died.

Neighbors discovered his decomposing body long after.

How sad that he did not have family or anyone to care for him.

There are many desperately lonely people out there.

“I don’t want to end up like that,” the grey-headed Komiyama said. When the opportunity to have a mechanical companion came up, she jumped for it.

She lives in a rickety house in an old-fashioned neighborhood in Osaka. When she gets home from shopping, her ‘pet’, a chocolate-brown wombat, chirps: “Welcome home!”

It took her a while to get used to the high-pitched voice of her companion when it said something like, “Isn’t it a nice day?” but now she would not like to be without him.

This mechanical pet flutters its eyes when Komiyama enters the room and giggles if she scratches its fuzzy little head.

It tells her what the weather is like outside. It also reminds her to take her medicine. Furthermore, it even serenades her.

*Source: Japanese newspapers*

There are many kinds of mechanical pets for seniors. For Mrs. Komiyama, a mechanical companion is a guard against the dreadful loneliness many elderly Japanese must endure.

How we long to tell Komiyama and so many other lonely people about a God who comforts like no other.

***As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you*** (Is. 66:13, NIV).

How can we feel lonely if we have such a marvelous promise from the living God to His people?

FEBRUARY 11

## **CATERPILLAR-LIKE ELECTRIC CAR**

Professor Hiroshi Shimizu, lecturer at Keio University has developed a prototype eight-wheel electric automobile that can carry eight passengers.

Shimizu said that the green, caterpillar-like automobile is environmentally friendlier and cheaper to manufacture than similar gasoline-powered cars.

Even though long distance traveling is normally a weak point of electric cars, this car, called the *KAZ*, can travel about 300km after a mere hour of recharging.

Since the car is equipped with a motor at the side of each tire, transmission devices are not required. With lithium-ion batteries installed in the space thus freed up, the automobile is spacious inside and runs smoothly.

The professor has persuaded his Italian backers to continue financing the project. The *KAZ* is already on display at some international motor shows.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Shimizu is utterly committed to the project of having his electrical car running on the roads of the world; he does not stray from his ambition.

Similarly, we should be utterly dedicated to spiritually walking with God, and not wander away into lesser directions. He must be the center of all we do and say.

***I worship you with all my heart. Don't let me walk away from your commands***

(Ps. 119:10, CEV).

May we be single-minded in our devotion to the God of the universe, to have a genuine trust in Him and His promises and not to wander away from His instructions.

This means unquestioned obedience to God and His instructions!

FEBRUARY 12

## ***HUMAN-POWERED ELECTRONICS***

New methods for powering up portable equipment with energy sources such as solar rays and human motion are becoming more practical. Hand-held computing devices are now regular communications tools, so these forms of power supply are necessary to generate electricity even while outdoors.

Noriyasu Kunori uses his mountain bike in Japan to power his electronic equipment. By mounting a rear-wheel light generator and a solar panel on his bike, he is able to produce sufficient energy to power such items as cell phones, mobile computers, and digital cameras.

Since energy obtained from his bike is stored in a battery, there is no need for him to spin his wheels every time he wants to use his mobile tools. Two hours of pedaling stores four AA batteries' worth of energy – enough to power a lightweight computer.

Kunori, who is 33, uses his power-generating bike almost daily in his work, not only to pedal to assignments but also to send data.

Once in wintertime, he pedaled 340km (210 miles) in northern Japan through cold and snow, communicating live the entire journey thanks to the electricity generated by his bike.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Kunori communicates with his firm, friends and loved ones under almost any circumstance. Isn't it wonderful to know that wherever we are and whatever kind of troubled circumstances we may be experiencing, we can always communicate with our God?

***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble*** (Ps. 46:12, NIV).

With gladness converse with our awesome God!

FEBRUARY 13

## ***A DOG TRANSLATOR***

Man has always had trouble understanding exactly what his ‘best friend’ is trying to say.

A new gadget called a *Bow-Lingual* attempts to reduce the lingual divide between dog and owner. The hand-held electronic device has been on the scene since 2002 and it claims to gauge a dog’s mood by listening to its bark.

The invention, released in Japan, uses a microphone on the dog’s collar to record its bark. A voiceprint beamed to the owner’s ‘emotion pager’ shows how the dog feels.

In order to express a dog’s feelings, the console uses about 200 phrases or words grouped in six different emotional categories: fun, frustration, menace, sorrow, demand and self-expression.

A ‘Home Alone Mode’ allows the system to transmit for up to 12 hours while the owner is away.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Man may have trouble understanding his dog, but a greater problem is that he has trouble understanding the things of God!

***We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the LORD and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God*** (Col. 1:9-10, NIV).

We need wisdom and understanding in spiritual things lest we become strangers to God.

If we have knowledge of God’s will, with the wisdom and understanding that His Spirit gives to us, we will be in tune to his desire and purpose for our lives!

FEBRUARY 14

## ***BOW-WOW GIVE ME CHOW-CHOW***

"I knew Harry was probably feeling lonely, but to actually read his feeling in words really had an affect on me," Mrs. Egawa says while petting Harry, her 6-year-old Alaskan malamute.

She got in touch with Harry's 'feelings' when she obtained a *Bow-Lingual*, an electronic dog-to-human translator.

She was desperate to communicate with the 37kg Harry, who she describes as having a violent temper.

When she told her husband that she was considering buying the product, he thought she was crazy.

In Japan the product became a hit. The manufacturer sold about 150,000 units in the first year. Many retailers ran out of stock.

Each *Bow-Lingual* unit comes with a microphone, which can be attached to a dog collar. The microphone sends signals to a receiver, which processes barking sounds into text.

Though extremely satisfied with *Bow-Lingual*, the Egawas do not take the device too seriously. In the meantime an even more wonderful thing has happened.

"Because of *Bow-Lingual* and the way it offers understanding into Harry's feelings, my husband and I have started to communicate more," Mrs. Egawa said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It was a good outcome of the *Bow-Lingual* purchase that the Egawas themselves are making an effort to understand each other again. Maybe the Japanese will soon invent a device to foster communication between spouses, eh?

***Do two walk together unless they have agreed  
to do so? (Amos 3:3, NIV)***

Good communication with those who are close to us brings happiness into our daily lives.

FEBRUARY 15

## ***40,000 NECKTIES***

A bewildering array of ties greets visitors to the *Watanabe Tie Shop*.

There are plain ties, striped ties, designer ties and some very bizarre ties hanging from hooks along the walls. In all, the store stocks some 40,000 different ties at any one time, but the store specializes in making special order ties for its customers.

“We can prepare as many as 100 ties should a customer request it, and have them ready in one day,” said Mr. Watanabe, the 49-year-old owner of the shop.

He can whip up a tie with a company logo or school emblem almost as quick as one can attach a clip-on.

Watanabe once received an order for an enormously big tie for a Christmas decoration. The material required to make the huge bow tie was equivalent to about 270 normal ties.

He learned from his father how to make patterned knitted ties; and his father learned the secret from his grandfather. Thus the current Watanabe represents the third generation to carry on the family business.

*Source: Mainichi News*

Are you passing something valuable on to your friends and the coming generations? Paul of the New Testament encouraged his contacts and us to do so.

***We loved you so much that we were happy to share with you God's good news. We were also happy to share our lives with you. You had become very special to us***

(1 Thess. 2:8, NIV).

Let's communicate something worthwhile to our acquaintances, even if it means a great sacrifice.

You never know how far it might spread and whom else it might influence for the good!

FEBRUARY 16

## **HIGH-SPEED HAND**

In October 2002, a research team at Tokyo University proudly announced that a super high-speed robotic hand was capable of catching a ball.

This wonderful robotic hand device tracks and catches a ball dropped from the height of 1m without difficulty, even though the ball is traveling at about 4m/s when caught.

Its high-speed sensors and motor enable it to follow the object, analyze its movement, and then catch it with two fingers.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Although manufacturers of electronic components are now using similar improved robotic hands, their speed and flexibility can never be compared to human hands.

The design of any part of our body is too wonderfully complex for man to comprehend fully. Scientists will never be able to brag about perfectly duplicating any part of it.

There is something far greater to brag about – if we qualify.

***“But here is what the one who brags should boast about. He should brag that he has understanding and knows me. I want him to know that I am the Lord. No matter what I do on earth, I am always kind, fair and right. And I take delight in that,” announces the Lord***  
***(Jer. 9:24, NIV).***

Let us make our boast in the Lord our God! He is the meat and the drink of our souls. He supplies all our necessities. In this life, our cup yields royal luxuries and He is our inheritance in the life to come.

***My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice (Ps. 34:2, NIV).***

Only a tongue affected by the heart of God can express this!

FEBRUARY 17

## ***MAKE-UP FOR TODDLERS***

Maiko Ae strolls down the aisles of a store in search of just the right lipstick and the right nail polish. She is 4 years old. Finally, her mother purchases the cosmetics after some persistent pestering.

“I’m not opposed to it if she wears them when she’s around her friends,” her mother says, “I think she prefers the make-up to toys.” Ten kinds of lipsticks and bottles of nail polish for children are on display in the store.

Some stores have noted declining sales of toys for girls. However, sales of children’s cosmetics have more than made up for the loss.

One toy manufacturer, Bandai Co., introduced a beauty series for children aged between three and six. The company markets the merchandise not as toys, but as cosmetics. In 6 months, they have sold 1 million items, including lipsticks, hand lotion, powder and nail polish.

*Source: Asahi News*

A loving character gives a light to the face beyond the reach of the best cosmetics in the world.

A carefully decorated exterior is artificial and cold unless inner beauty from the heart shines through.

***When you look into water, you see a likeness of your face. When you look into your heart, you see what you are really like***

(Prov. 27:19, NIV).

Just as a pool of water mirrors your face, so the face mirrors your heart, while the heart in turn reflects your character.

Left to ourselves, our lives are empty, colorless, and without meaning. Only when touched by the glory of God is inner beauty revealed.

God brings us into existence, and changes us to reflect His glory.

FEBRUARY 18

## ***SENDING YOUR NAME TO MARS***

If you ever dreamed of traveling to another planet, you can now do the next best thing – an inscription of your name can make the journey for you.

The Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISS) launched *Planet B*, Japan's first satellite to Mars. It carried metal plates engraved with people's names.

Not that it is a new idea.

The *Cassini* spacecraft to Saturn, launched by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the United States in 1998, also carried a list of people's names to the outer reaches of the solar system – on a digital video disk (DVD).

The disk aboard *Cassini* contains 610,000 names from roughly 80 countries.

*Source: ISAS*

What seems so tragic is that so few people are interested in the most special journey there is – far beyond whatever can be achieved by the most sophisticated means of outer space travel – to the heaven that God created for those who have their names inscribed in the Book of Life.

***We are citizens of heaven. And we can hardly wait for a Savior from there. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has the power to bring everything under his control. By his power he will change our earthly bodies. They will become like his glorious body***

(Phil. 3:20-21, NIV).

For those who walk with Christ, it is not a dream of traveling to other planets that grips us, but a far better dream. In reality, Christ will whisk us into heaven itself.

When our time comes, Jesus will carry us far beyond the cosmos, right into the residence of Almighty God.

He has prepared for us a place too awesome for words.

FEBRUARY 19

## ***SEAWEED PLANTATIONS***

Research institutes in Japan are studying the viability of building a gargantuan seaweed plantation in the Pacific Ocean to absorb carbon dioxide and produce bio-fuel. The plan is to place 100 floating fishing nets in the Pacific Ocean, each measuring 10km by 10km. Seaweed such as *sea grape* that can reach a length of 20m in a year will grow from the nets.

Biofuel does not add extra carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. When it is burned it just returns the carbon dioxide the growing plants captured by photosynthesis. In this sense, the fuel holds a very great advantage over fossil fuels.

Another benefit of the nets is that seaweed harbors abundant plankton that attracts fish looking for spawning grounds. This in turn will increase fish stocks.

“Absorbing carbon dioxide is only a small function the seaweed will serve. By growing seaweed, we can make nature richer,” Professor Masahiro Notoya remarked. “We want to plan a bright future for mankind.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Let us never forget that the brightest future for humankind is in the pages of the Bible!

***He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge*** (2 Peter 1:4-5, NIV).

The end of this world will be too terrible to contemplate, but there is a bright hope awaiting those who escape destruction by belief in Jesus Christ.

FEBRUARY 20

## ***REMOTE CONTROLLED HOMES***

Connecting home appliances to the Internet makes it possible to remotely control and check on the status of numerous appliances while away from home.

Using a laptop computer or mobile phone, one can check the contents of refrigerators and turn on house lights while out shopping.

Already widely practiced for several years are methods to verify whether seniors living alone are drinking tea regularly (a sign that they are fine) by remotely checking data from their electric hot-water pots on cell phones or computer screens.

The Internet microwave was the first pioneering step towards a new industry. One can easily cook 400 dishes by following cooking instructions taken from the Web along with automatic microwaving data.

All the necessary information, from the list of ingredients to the cooking instructions is displayed on the microwave's liquid crystal panel. After preparing the ingredients according to these directions, the user simply puts the food into the microwave. The downloaded processing data guides the cooking automatically.

*Source: Japanese newspapers*

I cannot fathom what homes will be like in the future, but I do know that they will not come close to what we will enjoy in our heavenly home.

***There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly*** (John 14:2, TLB).

Let's make sure of our mansion in heaven, where we will be privileged to live in full fellowship with God!

FEBRUARY 21

## ***LEARN FROM THIEVES***

The police in Japan have set up crime-prevention measures based on interviews with convicted burglars.

For example, burglars said they are discouraged from plying their craft if homeowners keep a watchful eye on their neighborhoods. They also said that houses that have garbage outside on non-collection days are easy targets.

Burglars said they usually ring the doorbell to see if the occupants are at home and they take note of houses without lights switched on after sunset.

Any accumulation of newspapers in the mailbox is a good indication that the house has been empty for a while.

These thieves agree that they would give up trying to break into a house if it took more than five minutes due to the presence of secondary locks on doors or windows.

The officers said that homeowners should not hide valuables in refrigerators, as burglars often help themselves to food and drink while committing crimes.

The police also suggest that homeowners find more original hiding places than Buddhist altars.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We live in an awful world where a good God can make a difference.

***He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need***

(Eph. 4:28, NIV).

This happens when thieves find God.

God loves the thief as much as He loves all the useful people of the world.

God can transform thieves whenever they want to follow Him.

FEBRUARY 22

## ***A DOG AT SCHOOL***

Kumiko Inazumi, a 12-year-old wheelchair-bound student, went to school accompanied by Musashi, a male Labrador retriever. She became the first student in Japan to be aided by a service dog in class.

While Kumiko was painting a woodcut with watercolors in the art class, Musashi lay on the floor, looking up at her from time to time.

Kumiko met Musashi for the first time in April 2002, at an institution in Kyoto for training service dogs. Although Kumiko was not fond of dogs, she soon took to the quiet and well-behaved Musashi. She trained with him two to three times a week, practicing boarding trains and planes before they came to school together.

Her school's principal, Mr. Morikawa, was pleased to have the canine on the institution's grounds.

"With Musashi around, Kumiko has brightened up and attends school more often," her school principal said. "Also, Musashi helps other students to realize how important it is to assist others and show sympathy."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Musashi is devoted in helping Kumiko and inspires others to do so too. Here is also a lesson for us to learn.

***Blessed is the one who cares about weak people. When he is in trouble, the LORD saves him. The LORD will guard him and keep him alive. He will bless him in the land***  
(Ps. 41:1-2, NIV).

Blessings come to you if you care for those who struggle and are down in the dumps.

Let's be compassionate and kind and brighten up the less fortunate around us.

FEBRUARY 23

## ***SEEKING GOOD FORTUNE***

Paper prayers for passing tests are seen hanging from trees at many Shinto shrines during examination times in Japan. Students seek divine assistance and snap up hosts of new good-luck items that symbolize resistance to failure. The most popular of these goods are stationery items. Stores are jam packed with students about to take their final exams. 'Failure-free' pencils and erasers quickly sell out.

Another item that is a symbol of tenacity is the Akita apple. In 1991, a devastating typhoon wreaked havoc on the apple crops of Japan, but the apple orchards in Akita survived! Farmers commemorate the 'apples that refused to fall' with an annual event. They also present apples inscribed with the words 'prayer for a successful exam' to test-takers. Students buy these apples, or at least get hold of an Akita apple symbol on a pencil or eraser.

Another 'failure-free' charm is a train ticket, sold at Miyamoto Musashi Station, named after the legendary swordsman who never lost a duel in his life. After these tickets went on sale with the phrase 'success with exams' printed on them, the station received a flood of orders and inquiries.

*Source: Japanese newspapers*

What length students will go to for a failure-free life! Why not pray to God?

***I am poor and needy. May the Lord be concerned about me. You are the One who helps me and saves me. My God, please don't wait any longer*** (Ps. 40:17, NIrV).

Notice, it does not say that God will help every one that calls on Him for good results with their examinations – especially if they did not study!

Nevertheless, God is a tested help in times of real trouble.

FEBRUARY 24

## ***FATHERLESS, DUE TO SUICIDES***

The number of fatherless children has increased rapidly in Japan due to the rise of suicides among unemployed men. The fathers lost their jobs because of the prolonged economic slump.

In Japan, suicides leave 30 children a day fatherless.

One high school student said she felt she had driven her father to suicide over money worries after telling him that she wanted to go to university. Her father poured gasoline on himself and burned to death in the family garden. She said she would never forget how she and her mother desperately and vainly tried to extinguish the flames.

Another high school student is distraught because his father hung himself after his company went bankrupt. This father apparently hoped the mother could pay off the family debt with his life insurance benefits. However, the insurance was not enough to clear the debt and the mother still has to pay it off in dribs and drabs. The son said he was so ashamed of his father's suicide that he did not want to talk to other people.

The problem is so bad that the government is stepping in with schemes to try to alleviate the situation.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We want to cry out to the families that are hurting and to all the children who are without fathers and tell of the hope for those who put their trust in the true living God. Believe what the Bible says about Him!

***He is a father to the fatherless*** (Ps. 68:5, TLB).

***But you see the trouble and the distress, and you will do something. The poor can count on you, and so can orphans*** (Ps. 10:14, CEV).

God does not let anyone down who truly seeks to please Him.

FEBRUARY 25

## ***SPRAY-ON STOCKINGS***

Japan's cash registers are busy with sales of one of the latest wonder products: spray-on silk stockings.

It might mean women will never again have to worry about runs in their stockings.

"This product is really easy to use; it dries very quickly – you just have to spread it over your skin," explained Mr. Seki, a cosmetics manager at a Sony Plaza store. "It's perfect for Japan's summer season, when regular stockings are too hot. We're selling several hundred bottles a month – people are coming from all over Japan to buy them."

*Air Stockings* are a fine silky aerosol spray simply sprayed on to the legs. Air-Stockings are also waterproof, so they can be worn safely in the rainy season.

It is almost like wearing regular silk stockings. With soap and a bit of scrubbing, they can be washed off in the shower.

"*Air Stockings* are the best thing since the invention of ever-lasting lipstick," says Miss Ishihara, a fashion critic.

*Source: Japan News Network*

How people can be so concerned about outward things and forget matters of the heart is beyond my comprehension!

More important than all the things we wear on the outside is trusting God daily to produce new life within us. It will alter our lives for better, forever.

***We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day*** (2 Cor. 4:16, NKJV).

For the believer in Christ, not a day goes by without God unfolding His awe-inspiring grace.

It is abundantly worthwhile to belong to Christ!

FEBRUARY 26

## ***ROBOT SUIT FOR CLIMBING MOUNTAINS***

A Japanese wheelchair-bound man, Mr. Uchida, attempted to conquer a 4,164-meter-tall peak in the Swiss Alps in August 2006.

He was carried on the back of his friend who wore a robotic exoskeleton that amplifies the wearer's physical strength.

Uchida, 43, of Komimachi, Japan, broke his neck in a traffic accident in 1983. It left him paralyzed but he felt challenged to attempt the ascent of Mt. Breithorn, on the Swiss-Italian border.

He saw a television report about a powered suit developed by a team from Tsukuba University. *Robot Suit HAL* can detect faint electric signals from muscle movements and amplify the wearer's strength. The device is designed to help aged or physically disabled people to lift heavy objects.

Uchida's friend, a physiotherapist named Mr. Matsumoto, 28 wore the suit with Uchida on his back, carrying him up the mountain. They did not actually reach the top, but they were thrilled at their attempt to conquer the formidable Mt. Breithorn.

"Twenty years ago, I could hardly imagine that such an idea could ever have been realized," Uchida said. "I feel as though I have lived through it all."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

What an example of tenacity for us who are spiritually minded! If we are in Christ, we are also burden-carriers for the needy and suffering people we touch as we go through life.

***Carry each other's heavy loads. If you do, you will give the law of Christ its full meaning***  
(Gal. 6:2, NIV).

As we help each other, sharing each other's troubles and problems, we are following one of the commands of our great Burden-bearer, Jesus.

FEBRUARY 27

## ***THE MOTEL STOP FOR WILD GEESE***

When traveling in Canada on a tour of deputation meetings, the Lord certainly taught me many precious lessons.

One early morning, as I was jogging in Edmonton, Canada, I stopped in my tracks in amazement as I looked overhead and saw a large flock of migrating wild geese on their way back to Alaska from their winter habitat in the warmer southern parts of the USA. I could hear them joyfully talking to each other in ‘goose language’.

On the Internet, I discovered that Edmonton is one of their ‘motel stops’. On the large lakes there, they have a chance to feed, rest and recuperate, before they undertake the rest of the long, arduous journey back to Alaska.

No one knows how these birds guide themselves. Good sight and hearing alone cannot explain how they travel so unerringly for thousands of miles.

A few days later, quite early in the morning, while jogging and gingerly moving on a slippery and icy road, I suddenly came across a coyote. I watched as he foraged for food. When I spoke to him, he ran for dear life – he had never heard Japanese before. Our host told me that coyotes often cover 15 to 20 miles a day in search of food.

I praise the Lord for looking after me every moment of every day!

***For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him*** (2 Chr. 16:9, NKJV).

It pays to obey God.

He will be alert to your problems, because He knows of the minutest details of your life.

***Blessed are those whose strength is in you***  
(Ps. 84:5, NIV).

FEBRUARY 28

## ***WATCHING BY ELECTRONIC EYE***

After finishing her housework, Mrs. Inagaki takes a rest on the sofa in the dining room.

Wondering how her 3-year-old daughter, Rina is doing, she starts up her personal computer and logs on to the day-care center's Internet telecast service. She can clearly see Rina on her screen so she zooms in on her.

It is lunchtime at the center. At home, Rina never eats all of her food, so Mrs. Inagaki is surprised to see that at the day-care center Rina is eating it all up, talking animatedly and having fun with her friends.

"I enjoy watching my daughter on the computer," Mrs. Inagaki said. "I see facial expressions she has never shown at home."

Fathers who are posted overseas also enjoy this service. Some of them miss their children so much that they cannot concentrate on their jobs unless they can watch them on their office computers.

Grandparents also use the service to keep up with their grandchildren.

The service is also popular with pet-sitting services. Owners can watch their pets via the Internet from anywhere in the world.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Even if we are not conscious of it, we too are under constant and perfect surveillance by the Creator of the universe.

***The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping  
watch on the wicked and the good***

(Prov. 15:3, NIV).

What a comfort to know that God is everywhere. At this moment, He is looking at you and me at the same time. Nothing can happen to us without God knowing every detail.

Our Father is watching over us, not missing a thing and well able to take care of us.

FEBRUARY 29

## ***WORK FOR 80,000***

In her daily devotional, *The Lame Take the Prey*, in the February 21 entry, Peggy Verwey wrote about God giving special gifts and tasks to everyone in His church:

*No one has been called just to sit around and do nothing. It is our responsibility to discern what our God-given gift is and to use it for the extension of His kingdom.*

*We can learn so much from the honey-bees. They have a most highly developed social structure. A hive can house as many as 80,000 bees. The queen is the centre of the hive, but each bee has a specialized duty to fulfill.*

*The forager bees venture outside the hive to collect food. The guardian bees protect the hive from any intruders. The undertakers are responsible for removing dead bodies from the hive. The water collectors bring in moisture to regulate the humidity. The plasterers repair the hive with their cement. The fanners, stationed at the entrance, fan the particular scent of their hive outward to help lost bees find their home. Isn't it incredible to think that there is so much planning just for such insignificant insects as bees!*

*Just as the bees know their allocated task, may we [discern] the task that the Lord has given us [to expand] His Kingdom!*

Before the foundation of the world, God planned good things for you to do for Him and others around you.

***For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago***

*(Eph. 2:10, NLT).*

You cannot bring back an opportunity to be kind if it has passed! Let's be alert especially to do good to them that hate and despise us.

MARCH

MARCH 1

## ***HIRING SUBSTITUTE PILGRIMS***

Many Japanese believe that going on a pilgrimage to the 88 temples of Shikoku will gain them spiritual merit.

About 200,000 people a year make the pilgrimage, but for those who do not have the energy or time to do so, substitutes can be hired to go and do all the necessary rites at the 88 temples on the route of this 1,400km journey.

The sick and the elderly gladly entrust their sutras (Buddhist scriptures) to substitutes who handle these at the temples. The stand-ins take photos of clients' personal belongings at the stops along the route as 'proof' that the clients were there personally. Temple seals are stamped directly onto a white robe or in a sutra book for the clients.

Many substitutes do not follow the custom of walking from temple to temple which takes about two months for the whole pilgrimage. Instead, they do it the modern way traveling the route on motorcycle or car to complete the rites expeditiously. They can then collect their fee.

"Modern people want to hold on to something," psychiatrist Dr. Nadai said. "Originally, the only people who wanted to make the pilgrimage did so out of pure faith; but nowadays, many substitutes are traveling the same route for several people at a time, wanting to make money."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How tragic! Christ is the only substitute that can save men from sin.

***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*** (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV).

We cannot gain merit by hiring substitutes, nor by the number of temples, or even churches we visit. Only God can save us.

MARCH 2

### ***INTENTIONALLY CRASHING HIS OWN CAR***

Mr. Minoru Kawasaki and his four passengers were happily driving along the road when they noticed a car going very slowly, swerving in and out of the lane in front of them.

On pulling up alongside the car, they saw that the driver was blue in the face and slouched over in his seat.

Kawasaki honked the horn. He and his friends even hit the windows of the straying car with their open hands, but to no avail! The man was drifting in and out of consciousness.

A traffic light at a busy road was fast approaching. There was no more time to delay drastic action. Kawasaki raced past the car. As he saw the traffic light turning red, he swerved into the lane in front of the erring car and slammed on his brakes.

The car, uncontrolled by its driver, crashed into the back of Kawasaki's brand new car.

An ambulance came speedily to the scene. Kawasaki's quick thinking most probably saved the life of the ailing driver, but all four of his passengers needed treatment for whiplash. In spite of that, they were glad to have had a part in saving a human life.

The Japan Police Force awarded Mr. Kawasaki an official commendation. They concluded that his actions most likely prevented several much more serious accidents.

*Source: Mainichi News*

The unconscious driver, unaware of danger, reminds me of people hurtling along to hell, heedless, helpless and hopeless, insisting on a life of sin. Thank God for Jesus who comes alongside us and saves us from certain destruction!

***God demonstrates His own love for us in this:  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us  
(Rom. 5:8, NIV).***

God loves to save people.

MARCH 3

## ***ROBOTS TO THE RESCUE***

On January 17, 1995, an earthquake hit Kobe, killing 6,401 people and injuring 40,000 others, while 250,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed. Neighbors and rescue workers rescued 35,000 people trapped under collapsed buildings. It took an average of four hours for a five-person team to dig out one person caught under collapsed reinforced concrete.

In the aftermath of this earthquake, Japan has developed a variety of robots for rescue operations because entering such disaster areas carries huge risks for rescuers.

During a test rescue operation, operators were able to maneuver radio-controlled robots to retrieve dummies from beneath makeshift rubble. The dummies were wrapped with pressure sensors that are triggered if they are subjected to rough handling by the robots, such as having their arms or legs pulled too hard. Operators viewed the field through images taken by cameras mounted on the robots.

Aluminum plates were neatly folded and carried by the robots and then spread out onto a debris-covered area, allowing the rescue robot to travel smoothly in and out of the area without ‘injuring’ the dummies.

*Source: Yomiuri News & Internet*

Amazing! However, let us focus on the greatest rescue operation in the history of the world.

***For God did not send his Son into the world  
to condemn the world, but to save the world  
through him*** (John 3:17, NIV).

Sometimes God uses real upheavals to get us to a place where we seek Him. He is in the saving business, and will save us from certain destruction if we call on Him.

MARCH 4

## ***SELF-MADE JEWELRY***

Beads made of crystal, glass, metal, precious stone, wood and seashells are popular in Japan in the making of personal jewelry.

One shop in a fashionable neighborhood sells about 3,000 kinds of beads and buttons. It also has a wide selection of strings, chains, and ribbons in many colors, shapes, and sizes. This shop also offers free classes where the customers, mostly young working women and high school girls, make their own personalized jewelry.

“Jewelry is expensive. Besides, nothing really catches my eye,” said 24-year-old Chieko Yamada. “So I decided to make my own.”

Many young people, even men adorn themselves with their very own original one-of-a-kind jewelry with exceptional pride.

*Source: Japanese newspapers*

Do you realize that God makes jewelry? His jewels are very precious in His sight.

***“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts.  
“On the day that I make them My jewels. I will  
spare them as a man spares his own son who  
serves him”*** (Mal. 3:17, NKJV).

God uses jewels from all over the world where they are scattered. He picks them up out of the dirt.

Yes, we who belong to God are His jewels. He purchased us with the precious blood of His Son.

To get us ready for that great day, when we shall forever shine in His presence, He polishes us with trials and testing – sharp cutting instruments and rough files – because He really loves His jewels, desiring to make us most resplendent.

The day is approaching when He will send forth His angels to all the corners of the earth and gather His elect. We shall shine in beauty and splendor.

MARCH 5

### ***WHEN TALLER IS BETTER***

When Miss Xiaowei applied to a top Beijing foreign languages university, she could not believe it when she received a rejection letter telling her she was not tall enough!

“Chinese diplomats have to be tall,” officials told her. “Next to foreigners, they must not look too short.”

Xiaowei visited a Shanghai surgeon who promised to add 7cm to her height. The leg surgery would be simple, but brutal.

He examined her shinbones; affixed metal braces with 16 steel needles inserted into her legs; and then slowly stretched the newly forming bone tissue into a longer pair of legs.

Four months in the gloomy ward have left her stir-crazy, but she shows off limbs already stretched by 4cm.

“I can take the pain, if it means becoming a diplomat,” she said, wincing as she shifted her metal-embraced legs.

Many clinics have yearlong waiting lists.

The exclusion of short citizens from dozens of fields – from flight attendants to government interpreters – boosts the popularity of this type of surgery.

*Source: Time Pacific*

I could not help thinking of Zacchaeus.

What is more, his short legs helped him to find Jesus!

***He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore–fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly***

(Luke 19:3-6, NIV).

That day, Zacchaeus was completely transformed, and became a follower of Jesus.

May you also gladly welcome Jesus.

MARCH 6

## ***DOUBLE-EYELID SURGERY***

Skyrocketing numbers of young schoolchildren in Japan have been undergoing cosmetic surgery. Most of the operations are for the creation of 'Western-style' double eyelids. To form the double eyelid, nylon stitches are used. These dissolve after a few days.

Usually women in their 20s or 30s head in for the *nip and tuck*, but cosmetic surgery among teenage girls is more popular than ever.

Officials from Jujin Hospital said that during July and August of 2003, its surgeons performed cosmetic operations on 81 girls aged 10 to 15.

Most of the patients arrive at the hospital with their mothers. Many carry photos of popular singers and tell surgeons they want to look like their idols.

*Source: Mainichi News*

When we become Christians, we adore Jesus and want to look more and more like Him.

***Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure***

(1 John 3:2-3, NIV).

Without pure hearts and a God-glorifying lifestyle, we cannot be a part of God's kingdom.

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*** (Matt. 5:8, NIV).

Nothing that is impure can enter heaven. Let us, with God's help, daily strive to be transparent.

MARCH 7

## **VIP CHICK**

The Crested Ibises, or *Toki* in Japanese, are very strongly associated with Japan.

Hunters ruthlessly killed the birds for their beautiful feathers, while farmers killed them for disturbing their rice paddies. As a result, they hovered at the brink of extinction.

In 1981, conservation center officials captured the five remaining ibises, but the breeding program was unsuccessful until 1999 when a chick hatched on May 21.

To name the chick, eleven thousand people sent their suggestions to the conservation center. In early July, officials chose the name Yu-Yu, meaning ‘gentle’.

Yu-Yu is the most famous bird to be hatched in the Far East.

His parents, You-You and Yan-Yan, are very proud of the chick they are raising.

Yu-Yu will continue to be a central figure in the public eye for as long as he lives. For instance, many children in Japan even know when Yu-Yu goes for a swim.

*Based on domestic Japanese news*

It struck me that Yu-Yu with his little birdbrain can never comprehend his importance to millions of people in the East.

We humans, with our very limited perception, can never understand how significant we are in the sight of a Living God.

***Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God*** (Luke 12:6, NKJV).

Our infinite God, who is vitally involved in the life of each sparrow, is also concerned for each one of us.

God, who takes care of the sparrows and the ibises, even keeps count of every hair on our heads.

MARCH 8

## ***THE TROUBLE TREE***

Everything went wrong that day. A flat tire made the carpenter lose an hour of work. Then his electric saw quit. When he wanted to go home, his ancient truck refused to start.

His employer had mercy on him and drove him home, but all the way the carpenter sat in silence with an intensely worried look on his face.

On arriving home, he invited his employer in to meet his family. As they walked towards the front door, the carpenter paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands.

Upon opening the door, he underwent an amazing transformation. He broke into a big smile as he hugged his two small children and his wife.

Afterwards, as he walked his boss back to his car, they passed the tree where the carpenter had paused. His employer wanted to know why he had touched it so tenderly before entering his house.

“Oh, that’s my *trouble tree*,” he replied. “I know I can’t help having troubles on the job, but one thing is for sure, troubles don’t belong in the home with my wife and children. I just hang them up on the trouble tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning, I pick them up again.”

“Funny thing is,” he smiled, “when I come out in the morning to pick them up, there aren’t nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before.”

*Source: Readers Digest (Carpenter in Pakistan)*

***The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song*** (Ps. 28:7, NIV).

We can be victorious and joyful in all circumstances!

MARCH 9

## ***STRAY CAT INHERITS FORTUNE***

When Peggy and I were on the outskirts of London in June 2003, we did not visit Tinker, although Peggy loved cats very much.

Tinker was a black stray cat who got all the cream when an elderly widow died and left him her detached 3-bedroom house in Harrow, north London, along with a trust fund to keep him comfortable.

Margaret Layne, 89, left her a £562,000 house and a £150,000 fund to Tinker after he had befriended her, the Times newspaper reported.

The childless widow made it clear that Tinker, who has a lifelong residency at the house, should not stray again:

“If Tinker abandons the property permanently, the trustees shall at their discretion be entitled to bring the trust to an end.”

Tinker at age eight has acquired two other cat-friends, Lucy and Stardust, as housemates.

Layne looked after her pet as well as she could, but our Father in heaven looks after His children infinitely better.

***Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*** (Matt. 6:25-26, NIV)

How privileged we are to be of more value in God’s eyes than cats or other living things all around us!

Yes, indeed, He takes care of animals, but He also takes care of us every day of our lives.

What is more, He will also take care of us through all eternity.

MARCH 10

### ***MAIL CARRIERS WATCHING THE ELDERLY***

I was very interested to learn that in some areas post office mail carriers in Japan do more than deliver mail. Some municipal governments have a contract with the post office to have mail carriers watch out for any illegal dumping of waste in the town.

In other places, mail carriers pay close attention to elderly residents who live alone. They visit the homes of elderly folk, even if they have no mail to deliver in the area.

The municipal government also provides information to the post offices about elderly residents so that they can do follow up.

As there are not enough welfare commissioners to confirm the well-being of all elderly residents every day, the mail carriers can ‘step in the gap’ by making sure that they are living without problems. They also help take care of elderly residents who suffer from senile dementia and tend to wander away from their homes.

When the mail carriers notice anything unusual at the homes of elderly residents, they inform the fire department, the municipal government office, or other appropriate authorities.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Many people do not understand that according to the Bible, it is actually the responsibility of family members to take care of their elderly family members.

This principle is often more valued in the East where households lack the Bible than in the West where Christianity is widely preached.

***Children . . . should learn first of all to put  
their religion into practice by caring for their  
own family and so repaying their parents and  
grandparents, for this is pleasing to God***

(1 Tim. 5:4, NIV).

Kindness should begin at home.

MARCH 11

## ***DRIFTING ON HIS OWN ROOF***

There are actually millions of stories emerging from the Japan March 11, 2011 triple disaster. Here is one of them:

Hiromitsu Shinkawa was one of the many people who lived through the ordeal. As the tsunami pushed him out to sea, he clung to the roof of his own house.

For two days, he drifted off Japan's northeastern coast, trying to get the attention of helicopters and ships that passed by – to no avail.

Finally, a Japanese military vessel spotted the 60-year-old waving an old cloth. He was about 16km (10 miles) offshore.

Troops used a small boat to pluck him from the ocean.

Shinkawa told his rescuers just after the earthquake, he and his wife were gathering belongings to flee when the tsunami hit. Sadly, the tsunami flattened his house and swept his wife away.

"Several helicopters and ships passed by, but none of them noticed me," Shinkawa said.

Japanese troops used a small boat to pluck him from the ocean.

Officials said Shinkawa was lucky that mild weather and relatively calm seas allowed him to stay afloat for nearly two days.

"I thought today was the last day of my life," he said.

*Source: Tokyo Associated Press*

It is such a pity that most people in Japan believe in luck and not in our God who is in charge of everything that happens – including our very lives.

***Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places*** (Ps. 135:6, KJV).

***God does just as he pleases, however, wherever, whenever*** (Ps. 135:6, TMSG).

MARCH 12

## **PAY UP FOR ANGRY WORDS**

In largely non-Christian countries like Japan, there are various forms of *marriage* available to older couples.

A 73-year-old man exchanged a document with a 69-year-old woman who had agreed to share her life with him.

The document replaces a written registration of marriage. With grown children involved, this couple decided on a type of *union by contract* only after getting their approval.

“The 18 promises we decided to make to each other reflect our desires for happiness, and ensure that our new life together does not contradict our prior married lives,” the man said.

The woman agreed.

The 18 pledges include these rules:

*We acknowledge the differences in our sense of values and ways of thinking.*

*We individually own the articles in our respective rooms and keep our respective bank passbooks, but share expenses.*

*We shall enjoy our life together to the fullest.*

*If one of us gets angry, he or she shall pay a penalty of ¥10,000.*

*Source: Yomiuri News*

*To loose your temper can be an expensive luxury.*

*– Italian proverb*

***Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires***

(James 1:19-20, NIV).

Anger is often unreasonable – in marriage or otherwise.

Therefore, we need the help of God in every situation to practice self-control.

MARCH 13

## ***INCONSIDERATE PARENTS***

Public primary and middle schools across Japan are agonizing over how to deal with parents who make unreasonable requests and complaints.

One over-indulgent parent requested that the school not ask her child to clean the classroom because she herself had never asked her youngster to help with cleaning at home.

Another agitated parent demanded that a student, who had fallen out with her child, be transferred to another school or be suspended.

Some parents even implied that they had connections with gang organizations who could apply pressure on schools!

Many parents contact the local board of education to lodge their complaints. A member of an education board said he fielded one complaint by telephone that for six hours.

The board of education is sometimes compelled to call the police when parents' behavior gives rise to safety fears, or moved to hire psychiatrists for problematic parents who are obviously in need of counseling.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How unreasonable parents can sometimes be! It is no small wonder that some children become monsters. Their parents do not model proper behavior and attitudes while they are young and pliable.

***The father shall make known Your truth to the children*** (Is. 38:19, NKJV).

***Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it***  
(Prov. 22:6, NIV).

If we point our children in the right direction, they will become adults who rarely stray.

MARCH 14

## ***ROPE IN THE MIDDLE***

Long ago, when Japanese males and females still regularly bathed together in public baths, a certain bath-owner was converted. The missionary suggested that men and women ought to bathe separately. The bath-owner thought it was a very good idea – so he put a rope in the middle to separate the sexes.

The Japanese still love their public baths. Even though most homes and apartments are now equipped with bathtubs, public baths still enjoy remarkable popularity.

At one new location, the bathhouse owner and his staff welcomed over half a million customers in its first 10 months of operation. Customers have a choice of some 10 varieties of baths, including outdoor tubs, Jacuzzis, and different types of saunas.

Many customers see the bathhouse as a place for improving their hygiene, an economical way to relax and refresh themselves, and as a place to socialize with friends.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Washing our bodies is highly recommended, but when David sinned before God, he realized that the washing of his soul was of the utmost importance. It caused him to cry to the Lord in repentance.

***God, show me your favor in keeping with your faithful love. Because your love is so tender and kind, wipe out my lawless acts. Wash away all of the evil things I've done. Make me pure from my sin*** (Ps. 51:1-2, NIV).

Are there things that you should repent of before a Holy God who hates all forms of sin?

Earnestly seek and experience the inner cleansing from sin made possible only through the shed Blood of Jesus Christ your Savior. He will surely wash you clean if you sincerely repent.

MARCH 15

## ***HIGH-TECH SUITS***

In June 1999, after a three-year absence, Japan's former top swimmer, Suzu Chiba, suddenly broke two Japanese records. What surprised the public just as much as her comeback was her swimsuit that went down to her thighs.

A hundredth of a second could make all the difference. This garment was the key to Chiba's return to the spotlight.

Her swimsuit is made of a fabric that boasts less friction against water than human skin.

Evolving swimsuits is the key to faster swimming records. Japan's swimmers are ready to break records with the help of high-tech suits. They are learning much from overseas swimmers who have achieved good results from suits that cover most of the body – from the neck down to the ankles.

Full-length swimsuits can take as long as an hour to put on! However, this is hardly a drag for ambitious athletes willing to don any cutting-edge innovations.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

We might not be swimming for a medal, but spiritually we are in a race.

***When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*** (1 Pet. 5:4, NIV).

***To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup, but we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears.*** (1 Cor. 9:25, TLB).

Refrain from anything that acts as an obstacle to your gaining the prize that will last forever.

MARCH 16

## ***16 DUMPLINGS***

March 16 of every year in Japan is the ‘Day of the 16 Dumplings’, signaling the start of cultivation in spring.

Legend has it that on that day, the guardian god of agriculture comes down to the village to take up his job, prompted by the sounds of rice cakes being pounded.

Many farmers mark the day by offering 16 dumplings on their household altars. The number of people who observe this custom has diminished considerably, but there are farming households in various parts of Japan that still keep it up.

For some farmers, March 16 is also a day of rest. They stay home to avoid running into the guardian god of agriculture when he comes down from the mountain.

Also, the weather on the day of the god’s movement is said to be invariably bad. If it is very bad, they call it ‘the rage of the god of rice fields’.

*Source: The Internet*

We might laugh at the superstition of these farmers. How they need to know about the only God, the Creator of the universe!

***I am Israel’s King. I set them free. I am the Lord who rules over all. So listen to what I am saying. I am the First and the Last. I am the one and only God*** (Is. 44:6, NIV).

The only true God exposes the folly and absurdity of idolatry.

God is God alone!

He is also trustworthy in His supreme power.

***He alone is my rock. He is the One who saves me. He is like a fort to me. I will always be secure*** (Ps. 62:2, NIV).

Think of it! We have the magnificent privilege of putting our full trust in the only God. We do not need any other trappings.

MARCH 17

***WANT A LIVE PET?  
JUST ADD POWDER TO WATER***

Sea-monkeys have been on the Japanese market for around 30 years, but now sea-monkeys and other little sea creatures have taken on a new dimension. Proud owners even exchange information over the Internet.

Keeping crustacean pets is a special experience. To get started, go to a toy store or a hardware shop and buy a kit. The powder in the kit is actually eggs. After filling a fish tank, sprinkle the powder on top of the water and wait one day. As if by magic, the tank will become alive with tiny aquatic creatures.

These lively little animals are a city dweller's alternative to traditional pets. They may not be cuddly, but they are cheap and easy to care for.

These baby sea creatures grow with amazing rapidity, seeming to double in size each day. They grow into three to four centimeter adults and are very active. In addition to performing somersaults, they dig up the sand and swim on their backs, sometimes while they are eating.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Be that as it may, one thing is sure: no matter how clever a man is, he cannot create life itself. Only the Creator of the universe can do that.

***LORD, you have made so many things! How wise you were when you made all of them!  
The earth is full of your creatures. Look at the ocean, so big and wide! It is filled with more creatures than people can count. It is filled with living things, from the largest to the smallest*** (Ps. 104:24-25, NIV).

We stand in awe of the great and mighty works of our Creator-God.

MARCH 18

## **TIN MEN**

*Time Asia* of August 28, 2002, described Honda Motor Company's first tin man as being 1.2m tall, spacesuited, child-like, and walking with a natural gait as a whir of gears and motors emanate from its hard plastic body.

When someone enters the lobby, the robot advances, bows, and says in a boy's voice, "Welcome to the Honda Research Center. My name is *Asimo*." He extends a mechanical hand to the visitor. After a handshake he walks away. *Asimo* waves and emits a chirpy, 'bye-bye'.

Cute, but is this bucket of bolts smart enough to be practical?

"Imagine a machine that's as versatile as a human, but works 24 hours a day," gushes Mr. Hirose at Honda Motor Company.

Japan's rapidly aging population and shrinking workforce is creating a growing need for personal assistants and unskilled health care workers that machines could fill. "*Asimo* was designed with that in mind," says Mr. Hirose.

His human-like form helps break down our inhibitions about sharing a home with a talking tin man. *Asimo* is tall enough to reach light switches and doorknobs and he clears the table.

*Source: Time Asia*

People are going to great lengths to try to make someone like themselves, but they will never really succeed; we were created too marvelously to be imitated.

Only God can create life!

***Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness"*** (Gen. 1:26 NIV).

When God created His masterpiece, He molded a man out of dust and blew in him the breath of life.

Male and female He created them. Let's worship the awe-inspiring Creator of all creatures!

MARCH 19

## ***ROBOT THAT SMILES AND SCOLDS***

A robot-teacher in Japan called *Saya* was tested in a real classroom earlier this year. The robot called the roll, smiled and scolded; drawing laughter with her eerily lifelike face.

“The children had great fun,” Hiroshi Kobayashi, Tokyo University of Science professor recalled, “They were tickled pink when it called out their names.”

Nevertheless, the developer warned that it is not about to replace human instructors.

“Robots that look human tend to be a big hit with young children and the elderly,” Kobayashi said. “Children even start crying when they are scolded, although the robot still can’t do much more than call out names and shout orders like ‘Be quiet!’”

Even so, the robot-teacher can express six basic emotions: surprise, fear, disgust, anger, happiness, and sadness. An operator in the background maneuvers it with motors and wiring.

“*Saya* is just meant to help people: It has no intelligence, no ability to learn, and no identity. It is just a tool,” Kobayashi confirms, warning against getting hopes up too high for its possibilities.

*Source: Tokyo University of Science*

Unlike robots, we humans have potential to become intelligent students and wise teachers.

The essential requirement is that God should be the center of our learning and teaching.

***If you really want to become wise, you must begin by having respect for the LORD. All those who follow his rules have good understanding. People should praise him forever*** (Ps. 111:10, NIrV).

As we honor God, we grow in genuine wisdom and knowledge, helping all those with whom we rub shoulders.

MARCH 20

## ***ROBOT SUITS FOR THE ELDERLY***

Researchers are looking to improve autonomy for the elderly by designing robot suits for them to use instead of relying on caregivers.

A *muscle suit* developed by Tokyo University of Science allows its wearer to lift heavy objects as the half-body suit incorporates artificial muscles for the arms. Made of elastic rubber and nylon, it activates air pumps that aid the arms to move freely.

“Thus far, we have limited the suit to caretakers and construction workers,” said Hiroshi Kobayashi, the professor who spearheaded the project. “They are greatly benefiting. In the future this will give old people more mobility with their limbs.”

Another product is a *walking assist*, which will help the elderly to walk independently without the need of a cane, walking frame or even the arm of a caregiver.

As the person walks, a device behind the thigh pushes the leg forward and once he or she steps on the ground, another one at the front of the thigh pushes inwards, stabilizing the user.

*Source: AFP on Internet*

The physically strained are not the only ones who need help from time to time. Whether we know it or not, we human beings cannot exist one moment without God. We need Him every moment in our lives.

Our God, who never slumbers or sleeps, is ever ready to help those who lean on Him.

***I am the LORD your God. I take hold of your right hand. I say to you, ‘Do not be afraid. I will help you’*** (Is. 41:13, NIV).

We are not left groping for God’s hand. It is God who reaches out to us with infinite love and mercy. He firmly grips our hand and never lets us go for all time!

MARCH 21

## ***HELPING PAWS***

In animal therapy, patients gain physical and emotional relief by spending time with pets.

This therapy is gaining acceptance in more hospitals, nursing homes, and welfare institutions throughout Japan.

Emotionally disturbed children benefit from contact with dogs. Those suffering from racing pulses lower their vital signs by stroking rabbits.

Pets give more than mere enjoyment; they have evolved into partners that help calm troubled people.

Once a month, the front of Tachikawa Hospital in downtown Tokyo is crowded with dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters, and other pets brought in by volunteers who go up to patients, strike up conversations, and get them interested in touching the pets.

One usually stony-faced patient with an emotional disorder gingerly stretches out his hand and strokes a dog's head. A cat clammers onto a patient's lap, causing a neighbor to smile.

"I'm so glad you came," says another patient embracing a rabbit.

Stroking an animal can make a patient feel relaxed. As anxiety goes away, blood pressure goes down.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

The therapeutic value of animals is wonderful, but we long for everyone to experience a much deeper therapy, administered by God Himself.

***The LORD will take care of him when he is lying sick in bed. He will make him well again***  
(Ps. 41:3, NIV).

When sick, we should approach the God of the universe, who desires the best for us.

MARCH 22

## ***IDENTIFIED BY VEINS***

Fujitsu Ltd., Japan, has developed an identification system that verifies a person's identity by analyzing the pattern of blood veins in their palm.

Like fingerprints, the pattern of blood veins in the palm is unique to every individual. Apart from size, the pattern will not change during a person's lifetime.

Unlike passwords, code numbers and ID cards used in conventional technology, the palm is not so easy to forge, lose or steal.

Until now, identification systems that use analysis of fingertips or hands have required contact between user and device to operate. Fujitsu claims its system is the first contact-free gadget of its kind in the world.

The company believes this will facilitate widespread public use since the device is free from the hygiene problems of a contact-based system.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is wonderful and reassuring to know that Jesus has no problems identifying those who belong to Him.

***I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me*** (John 10:14, NIV).

The shepherd calls his sheep by their names. In the sight of God, we are not a remote number. God knows us inside out!

***The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God***  
(1 Cor. 8:2-3, NIV).

God knows us better than we know ourselves.

MARCH 23

## ***DOGS THAT AID THE HEARING IMPAIRED***

Guide dogs for the visually impaired are now relatively common, but only 13 dogs in Japan are certified to aid the hearing impaired. Mr. Shinden trained two of these 13 dogs.

“Dogs do not select their masters, but they do show reverence and affection for them,” he said. “The masters may be good, bad, rich or poor – the dogs don’t care.”

Shinden, 56, said that unlike guide dogs for the visually impaired, hearing dogs do not take orders from their masters. This means training has to focus on completely different aspects as compared to police dogs or household dogs.

Hearing dogs are trained to inform their masters by leaping around them when they hear, for example, the sounds of a telephone, a doorbell or the end of a washing machine cycle.

“A rambunctious dog has the potential to turn into an excellent hearing-aid dog,” Shinden said. “His energy level is a sign of self-motivation.”

Within 18 months, an energetic dog can be fully trained.

Shinden said he would never forget the smile of the hearing-impaired person who received one of his first dogs in 1992.

“It was great to know there was someone, somewhere who would benefit from a dog I trained,” he said. “No prize-dog contest can match this feeling of satisfaction.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***We who have strong faith should help the weak with their problems. We should not please only ourselves. We should all please our neighbors. Let us do what is good for them. Let us build them up. Even Christ did not please himself*** (Rom. 15:1-3, NIV).

Let's wade right in and do the best we can, according to our ability and means, helping people who are suffering or are in trouble.

MARCH 24

## ***THE LONGEST TREE-LINED STREET***

A stretch of cedar trees 35.4km long, is the world's longest tree-lined avenue, but sadly they are dying at the rate of 100 a year.

The damage is mostly due to difficulties the trees have in spreading their roots, as the road is paved with asphalt that extends deep into the soil. Officials also blame automobile exhaust, vibrations and acid rain for the deterioration of the trees.

The trees now number 12,700, down 4,000 from 40 years ago.

People come from all over the world to travel this scenic path leading to Nikko, one of the most beautiful places in Japan, which is also the home of the well-known *Toshogu* shrine.

The trees, planted in the 17th century, are known as the *Nikko Cryptomeria Avenue* in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

However, in the Book of all books, God speaks of the highway for honest people who want to bypass evil.

On this path of holiness that leads to heaven, there is no decay of any kind.

***The path of honest people takes them away from evil. Those who guard their ways guard their lives*** (Prov. 16:17, NIV).

God desires to make our life a highway of holiness.

Every day, let us conscientiously tread the highway of the just that He has especially created for those redeemed by the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

***Turn away from evil, and do good. Look for peace, and go after it*** (Ps. 34:14, NIV).

The feet of the godly are firmly planted on a path that steers clear of sin.

MARCH 25

## ***PEDESTRIAN CROSSING POOCH***

In Japan, there are yellow flags at pedestrian crossings. Before crossing, children grab a flag and hold it up high, to make themselves more visible as they cross.

A brown mongrel dog named Cheeko became popular for his flag-carrying antics at pedestrian crossings near schools in Tendo, Japan.

When Cheeko was a puppy, his owner, Minami Takahashi noticed his habit of carrying any object in his jaws. Takahashi decided to put a traffic safety flag in his mouth and have him guide schoolchildren across pedestrian crossings.

The dog's performance became a hot item in the community. When Takahashi visited local primary schools and kindergartens, Cheeko would always cooperate, as if to encourage traffic safety among the children.

Cheeko carried the flag at 49 pedestrian crossings before he died at the age of 12.

After his pet's death, Takahashi taught traffic safety to children using a picture-story show he created starring Cheeko.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

As in other countries, roads in Japan can be very dangerous so it is imperative for children to hold up a yellow flag when at a crosswalk.

The redeemed of Christ also have flags and banners to unfold as we proceed with safety in the glorious victory that our God obtained for us.

***We will shout with joy when you win the battle. We will lift up our flags in the name of our God*** (Ps. 20:5, NIV).

Let us keep on walking triumphantly on the road of holiness and sing the songs of everlasting joy, until we cross over to our heavenly residence!

MARCH 26

## ***OBAMA MANIA IN JAPAN***

In Japan, there is a town called Obama. Since President Obama moved into the spotlight, this town has been inundated with tourists. ‘I love Obama’ T-shirts and sweets with Obama’s face on them are selling like hot cakes.

A Buddhist monk has been playing Obama’s speeches during his temple service. *The Speeches of Barack Obama* has sold 420,000 copies since its release.

Obama mania also scored a hit for a Japanese mask-maker, Ogawa Rubber Inc., who moved into high gear, manufacturing more than 300 masks of the US president per day.

“I don’t see any faces among Japanese politicians that match Obama’s,” a salesman of the masks said.

*Source: The Internet*

Our faces are also like masks, not letting others see what is going on in our hearts. The most despicable mask is the mask of religion. Like sheep’s clothing for wolves, it conceals the wearer’s identity. Beware of the pretence of sanctity, which is only selfishness with a mask on its face.

In the final judgment, Jesus will strip away religious masks. That will be a dreadful day for many! We can hide what is going on inside from people but not from God.

***Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*** (Matt. 7:22-23, NIV)

May we depend on God’s grace alone to save and sanctify. Let us not depend on some religious life-style for our eternal well-being.

MARCH 27

## ***HOLY HIKING WITH CHAINSAW***

In Japan, the Buddhist pilgrimage is a type of holy hiking to gain merit, an ancient tradition that requires visiting many temples.

There are two kinds of pilgrimages: big and small.

The Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage takes five to six weeks to walk, but the Mount Hiei pilgrimage covers 40,000km and takes over seven years for a Buddhist monk to hike.

Traditional straw sandals are worn in the first three years, covering 30km a day for 100 days in a row.

It is so strenuous that only about 50 monks have completed it in the last century.

On the less frequently used sections of the routes, the pilgrims need to bring a map, drinking water and a portable chain saw.

Fallen trees, territorial spiders and disappearing paths are the plagues of the smaller pilgrimages. It is not only a form of walking meditation, but also a test of mental, physical and spiritual endurance.

This holy hiking forces the pilgrim to constantly ask the question: “Where am I?”

*Source: Japan Times*

There is a holy road where no evil people will ever walk!

***My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer*** (Ps. 17:5-6, NIV).

God's people are traveling on a sacred highway. Evil-minded men and women cannot enter it. There are no rebellious or rude people. This pathway is exclusively for those who love God and keep His laws.

May God keep our faltering steps firmly on His paths.

MARCH 28

## ***CONQUER 100 MOUNTAINS***

A 60-year-old solo mountain climber, Susumu Toyosaka took just 106 days to conquer 100 of the country's highest peaks.

As a retired company employee, he felt empty inside, so he decided to tackle Mt. Miyanoura, the highest mountain in Kyushu.

Soon Toyosaka had climbed Japan's 100 most famous mountains, ranging in height from 1,000 to 3,000 meters.

Driving around the Japanese Alps, he slept in a tent and sometimes ascended three mountains in a single day.

His climbs were not without incident. While climbing Mt. Warusawa, he slipped on a rock, fell and broke a bone in his right hand. After a doctor bandaged it and attached a splint, he continued undaunted.

During his adventures, his weight dropped from 72kg to just 60kg.

Toyosaka's crowning glory came when he reached the summit of Mt. Fuji. There, he planted a banner that read, 'Proud to be 60 years old'.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Let's never forget, we believers in Christ are also in the mountain climbing business!

***Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully*** (Ps. 24:3-4, ESV).

As we climb, may we wave others on to become fellow climbers up the mountain of holiness.

***Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, shout to them; beckon to them to enter the gates of the nobles*** (Is. 13:2, NIV).

MARCH 29

## ***STUPID YOUNG PEOPLE***

(Sent in by Frank Nakashima)

A growing number of people in their twenties and thirties are suffering from severe memory loss due to increasing reliance on computer technology, according to researchers at Hokkaido University in Japan.

“It’s a type of brain dysfunction,” says professor Sawaguchi. “Young people today are becoming stupid.”

He treated a 28-year-old sales clerk who was forced to give up his job when he found himself forgetting where he was going, who he was supposed to be seeing, or when he finally did get somewhere, he did not know what he was supposed to do next.

A preliminary study of people aged 20 to 35 has shown that more than one in ten suffer from severe memory problems.

They have lost the ability to remember new things, recall old data or distinguish between important and unimportant information.

*Source: The Globe and Mail*

We will lose out physically, mentally and spiritually if we allow memory loss to rob us of the knowledge of our God and His priorities.

***This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.” This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways”*** (Hag. 1:5-7, NIV).

Without fail, God withholds blessings from those who put themselves and their own interests ahead of God and His priorities.

MARCH 30

## ***SALAD BOUQUET***

Words, flowers, chocolates, expensive designer products, love letters and a myriad of other things let people all over the world say: ‘I love you’.

The latest craze to hit shops all across Japan is the *Salad Bouquet*.

You gentlemen can now buy your lady-friend a bouquet that she can eat – the package even includes salad dressing and a dinky plastic fork.

“When a gentleman gives flowers to his girl, she often throws them away because she doesn’t want her family to know she has a boyfriend,” explains Matsuo Terazaki, the brain behind the popular *Salad Bouquet* explains. “But the *Salad Bouquet* lets her gobble up the evidence – and it’s not fattening.”

*Source: Internet*

I know of a Bouquet – the best and rarest of flowers presented to lost sinners – that can never be thrown away for all eternity.

***I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys***

(Song of Solomon 2:1, NIV).

Christ is the Lily of the Valley, the Rose of Sharon.

With the fragrance of the Lily of the Valley, and the Rose of Sharon in hand, at anytime and with boldness, we can approach the throne of God.

***Brothers and sisters, we are not afraid to enter the Most Holy Room. We enter boldly because of the blood of Jesus***

(Heb. 10:19, NIrV).

***So let us come near to God with an honest and true heart. Let us come near with a faith that is sure and strong*** (Heb. 10:22, NIrV).

MARCH 31

## ***THE ROBOT MONK***

Automation has crept into the devotions of Buddhists.

A robot monk has been introduced and it may well be one of the world's first mechanical priests, together with one that was recently introduced to lead funerals.

The robot monk resides at a temple in Kakogawa, Japan. Fixed in a kneeling position with its smoothly shaven head and prominent ears, while clad in priestly robes, it grasps a string of Buddhist prayer beads in its left hand.

Most of the time it sits absolutely still; one could say it meditates.

When its sensors detect a worshipper approaching the altar, the robot goes into action. It begins to chant a Buddhist prayer. With a clapper in its right hand, it rhythmically strikes a hollow wooden gong and a drum.

In line with Buddhist precepts against wasteful excess, its creator fabricated the robot from discarded items including bicycle parts, a cassette tape recorder, and a washing machine motor.

"When worshippers drop by to chant Buddhist prayers at the temple, they seem to enjoy seeing the robot in its praying mode," says the temple's resident priest. "If we take him away to make repairs, people ask, 'What's wrong? Why isn't he here today?'"

*Source: Japan Information Network*

Thank God for the High Priest of Bible-believers, who became sin for us so that we might become righteous in the sight of God!

***We have a High Priest who can feel it when  
we are weak and hurting. We have a High  
Priest who has been tempted in every way,  
just as we are. But He did not sin***

(Heb. 4:15, NIV).

We rest on the merits of our High Priest in heaven, Mediator between God and us.

APRIL

APRIL 1

## ***MADE-TO-ORDER BONES***

Japanese hospitals are testing the world's first custom-made bones. Doctors create new bones within hours of an accident using the patient's computer tomography (CT) data, a form of medical imaging,

Doctors usually mend defective bones by transplanting real bones or using ceramic substitutes; but these new implants are made from calcium phosphate powder, the substance that makes up real bones. They can reproduce the complicated structures of the jaw, cheek and other parts of the skull down to one mm (0.04 of an inch).

The implants are currently limited to use in the skull since unlike limbs, they do not need to carry the weight of the body.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***Ezekiel, the people of Israel are like dead bones. They complain that they are dried up and that they have no hope for the future***  
(Ezek. 37:11, CEV).

In this Old Testament prophecy, these bones represent the people Israel. In the New Testament, Christians make up the body of Christ.

***For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones*** (Eph. 5:30, NKJV).

I believe Jesus wants to present us to His Father unbroken and completely restored to a heavenly design.

***For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken*** (John 19:36, KJV).

In Christ, we will be perfect!

APRIL 2

## ***THE BEST DRINK ON EARTH***

Do you know what the best drink on earth is?

The world's first vending machine sold holy water at a shrine in Egypt to anyone who put in a coin. It was manufactured in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

In the 1950's, machines dispensing juice into paper cups became a hit in Japan. Vending machines have pushed their way into the national lifestyle selling such diverse things as flowers, dolls, umbrellas, cameras, funeral money envelopes, insects and Bibles.

The Japanese park their cars right in front of rice vending machines and buy rice in 5 and 10kg bags.

In Japan, there are even restaurants where machines sell drinks and serve meals. Plastic meal samples help you make up your mind. For example, you can order piping hot noodles, cold rice balls and other quick meals, or any number of variations of coffee.

The vending machine that intrigues me the most is one selling 'The Best Spring Water in Japan'. After inserting a coin, the machine pumps 20 liters of water from 1,500m under the ground into a container for you to take home.

*Source: Japanese Newspapers*

I recommend that you drink from the purest fountain of water known to man. It is free and much better than any drink dispensed from vending machines.

***Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*** (John 4:14, NIV).

Drink deeply from the fountain of eternal life and experience God's blessing, which is like an artesian well, gushing up and flowing over to bless others all around you.

APRIL 3

## ***ASHES TO ASHES***

In Japan, bereaved families are increasingly looking for modern alternative ways to inter ashes of loved ones.

On December 20, 1999, the ashes of people, 10 of them Japanese, were launched into space on board a three-stage rocket called *Taurus*. Seven grams of each person's ashes went into lipstick-style capsules, which were then placed in the tip of *Taurus*. The satellite is currently in orbit 250km above the earth and will stay there for up to 10 years. Eventually, it will re-enter the Earth's atmosphere, burning up to briefly look like a shooting star.

One of the capsules of ash was that of a 28-year-old Hokkaido police officer who died when he was hit in a car accident while on traffic patrol. His family said that by interring him in space, they like to imagine him riding around in the heavens on his beloved white motorbike, to turn into a shining star one day.

Another man sent his wife's ashes into space because after visiting 41 countries, the couple had hoped to go on a space trip together.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is amazing how few people believe in a physical resurrection of all human beings to either eternal bliss or eternal condemnation.

***There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man*** (Acts 24:15, NIV).

No matter how impossible it might sound, one day in our resurrected bodies, we all will appear before God to give an account to Him of what we have done with our lives.

If you have not done so, earnestly seek God and do not rest until you have found deliverance through his Son. He shed his blood on the cross so that you might be completely forgiven.

APRIL 4

### ***LONE SURVIVOR OF COMMANDO UNIT***

In 1968, Mr. Kim was one of 31 young soldiers handpicked by North Korea for the job of assassinating the South Korean president, Park Chung-Hee. Kim was in command.

Out of the mountains, dressed in civilian clothes, the soldiers marched in a column to *The Blue House*, the presidential mansion.

A police officer stopped them and asked for identification. Shots were fired and four of the assassins were killed. The others fled, prompting a nationwide manhunt. Kim was the luckiest.

Police caught him with a grenade in his hand. Would he pull the pin? Moments before, another commando blew himself up when police cornered him. Instead, Kim simply placed the grenade on the ground and surrendered.

“I had an aching desire to live,” Kim said. He was the only commando to survive.

*The Blue House* incident haunted him for many years. “I feel guilty to this day,” Kim said. “I led 30 people to their deaths.”

In 1981, he went to church for the first time to appease his religious wife, and became a Christian. Later, he became one of the pastors of the *Sungnak Baptist Church*, a towering complex in Seoul.

*Source: Stars and Stripes*

Rev. Kim chose not to die but to live and to live more abundantly through the forgiveness of his sins.

***Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart  
in full assurance of faith, having our hearts  
sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty  
conscience and having our bodies washed  
with pure water*** (Heb. 10:22, NIV).

How wonderful it is to draw near to God and experience Him!

APRIL 5

## ***STOLEN NEWSPAPERS***

Police arrested a 68-year-old homeless man on suspicion of stealing a newspaper from a private mailbox. Mr. Nakagawa is unemployed and has no fixed address.

A police officer caught Nakagawa in the act of stealing a newspaper from a 49-year-old woman's house one morning at 06:20.

The police believe Nakagawa stole newspapers from private mailboxes on at least 50 occasions.

"I just wanted to keep up with the news," he explained. "I can only get old news from discarded newspapers, and I wanted to obtain the latest information," he complained.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Nakagawa might have thought that stealing a newspaper was quite a small matter, but it was a grave misdemeanor, and he was punished for it.

The Bible teaches us that a person who makes one little slip is just as guilty as the one who has broken every law there is.

***If you obey every law except one, you are still guilty of breaking them all*** (James 2:10, CEV).

***No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners*** (Rom. 3:20, TLB).

Not being able to keep any of the law makes us sinners.

Once we realize we are sinners, God can save us.

There must be conviction before there can be conversion.

Through the cleansing power of the Blood of Jesus Christ, God makes it possible for us to keep a clean slate with our Creator.

APRIL 6

## ***TOFFEE WRAPPERS***

(Sent in by Frank Nakashima)

Exposed to crude manners of Western popular culture, Japanese young people are abandoning polite, seemingly stifling codes of the past while older people look on in horror.

Apart from putting on their makeup at train stations or in the trains themselves, young Japanese have adopted such ‘vices’ as swinging umbrellas, eating in public and crossing their legs sitting in the trains. In the summer, some men even wear shorts in broad daylight! These are minor sins elsewhere but in Japan, elderly people take a very dim view of these transgressions.

*Source: Globeandmail.com*

Be that as it may, I am also distressed by the deterioration of the manners of young people in Japan.

I was recently walking behind three senior high school students who were eating candy. So different from their elders, they just threw the wrappings on the sidewalk. I collected the wrappers, gave them back and politely asked the students not to litter the streets of our town.

If I had spoken like that several years ago, the young people would have been very apologetic. Not so these high school girls: they were downright indignant!

I am concerned for the current generation of Japanese, especially if they have not been corrected and taught properly when they were younger – or been given Christian principles by their parents.

***A child is going to do foolish things. But correcting him will drive his foolishness far away from him*** (Prov. 22:15, NIV).

Customs and people change, but God’s Word never does.

Young people do foolish things so disciplining them is essential.

APRIL 7

## ***DETERGENT-FREE WASHING MACHINE***

Sanyo Electric Co., a leading home-appliance manufacturer in Japan, has developed the first washing machine in the world that can wash clothes without detergent – it uses ultrasonic waves instead. Sanyo targeted selling 300,000 machines in Japan.

It is good news for people who wish to avoid detergents because they have extremely sensitive skin or limited budgets. It is also good news for the environment.

This new appliance is a hybrid meaning it can operate in two different modes: detergent-mode and non-detergent mode. Items with stubborn grease or mud can be washed using the detergent mode and all else, such as towels, underwear or pajamas can be washed without detergent.

“Wash with ultrasonic waves and electrolyzed water” is the slogan for the new Sanyo machine, which is being promoted as a new way to disinfect clothes and break down dirt and germs.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

There is a kind of filth in our lives, which no washing machine can remove; and only the blood of Jesus can cleanse.

***What Jesus gives witness to can always be trusted. He was the first to rise from the dead. He rules over the kings of the earth. Give glory and power to the One who loves us! He has set us free from our sins by pouring out his blood for us*** (Rev. 1:5, NIV).

Jesus shed his blood for us, so that we are set free from the curse of sin.

*There is power, power, wonder-working power  
In the precious blood of the Lamb. – L. E. Jones*

Have you ever trusted Jesus for the wonder-working cure of His blood for your sins?

Do not delay such an all-important matter!

APRIL 8

## ***ESCAPE ROUTE***

Mr. Taya and his nine friends spent two years funding and building a bridge in Kushimoto, Japan that stretches about 21m across a wetland so that residents can reach safety in case of a tsunami. The efforts of Taya, 65, and his friends came after appeals for help to the Kushimoto Municipality fell on deaf ears.

The government predicts that a tsunami with a maximum height of 6.3m would strike the town nine minutes after an earthquake originates in the nearby sea. Such a quake jolted the area in 1946, and a tsunami over 6m high slammed into the coastline. Without an escape route, 1,330 people were killed. Taya was then 6-years-old and never forgot.

*Source: Japan Times*

I admire Taya and the nine others who built an escape route for fellow citizens. However, there is a much more important escape route provided for those on their way to eternal damnation. God especially prepared it for sinners.

***You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*** (Rom. 5:6-8, NIV).

When we were utterly sinful with no way of escape, Christ came to our rescue and died for us on the cross.

“What is 750,000 miles (1,200,000km) long, reaches around the earth 30 times, and grows 20 miles (32km) longer each day?” The answer is “The line of people who are without Christ.”

Do not be in that multitudinous line leading to hell. Use the escape route that God created for you.

APRIL 9

## ***AN OVUM BANK IN JAPAN***

A nationwide group of fertility clinics launched Japan's first 'ovum bank' in 2008. Since then, registered women have donated ova, which are made available free of charge to married couples seeking fertility treatment.

Infertile women who have had their ovaries removed can only get pregnant through in-vitro fertilization.

Women donating ova to the bank should be mothers aged 35 or younger.

There is no compensation given for donating ova, except for medical fees and other accompanying costs.

The personal information of the volunteer donor will be kept for 80 years after a child's birth, to guarantee the child's right to know who his or her genetic mother is.

However, Prof. Noriko Mizuno, a Civil Code expert at Tohoku University, is worried about the psychological effect on children when they find out that the mother who gave birth to them is not a blood relation.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

While reading this, I recalled Hannah. When she could not conceive, she sought God about it.

***O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life*** (1 Sam. 1:11, NIV).

God took Hannah at her word, and her son Samuel, when he grew up, loved God and served Him all his life as a judge and leader of Israel.

It is wonderful when God gives us children, but it is essential that we give our children unreservedly to God even before they are born, for Him to use in any way He pleases.

APRIL 10

### ***WHEN THE BOOKS ARE OPENED***

Japan is being swept by a craze for young and old to write their own personal stories. People are using computers, the Internet, even their cell phones and other electronic devices to publish autobiographies. One of many libraries already contains more than 15,000 autobiographical works.

Composing an autobiography gives people an invaluable opportunity to share their own lives. Older people want to share the ups and downs they have experienced, and young people want to tell about their struggles to find a place in the world.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

God is also writing about us in His heavenly books, and everyone will be judged according to what is written in them.

***Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done*** (Rev. 20:12-13, NIV).

No one is pure or holy enough to stand on his own in the presence of Holy God. We need Jesus to represent us.

***Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*** (Heb. 7:25, NIV).

Trust Jesus now and for eternity!

APRIL 11

## ***HIGH-TECH DRIVER'S LICENCE***

At the beginning of 2004, the National Police Agency (NPA) of Japan unveiled a high-tech driver's license imprinted with integrated circuitry. It prevents forgery, expedites license renewals and accelerates the issuing of traffic tickets. (This might not be too pleasing to some people – insertion by Neil).

The integrated circuit chip printed into the license has 8 kilobytes of memory, which allows for the input of 8,000 characters.

While the license holder is allowed access to the information stored in the chip, only public safety commissions have the authority to input information.

The introduction of the new licensing system was expensive and time consuming but it was deemed necessary.

*Source: Kyodo News*

Continually, more is required to counter evil and deceit, but it seems like a drop in the ocean of wrongdoing.

Only Christ can completely change the heart, and the time for Him to do so is fast approaching.

***Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End*** (Rev. 22:11-13, NIV).

How wonderful it will be after Christ has obliterated all evil and evildoers from the world!

Nothing will ever again be crooked, sinful or wrong.

Let's make sure that we will indeed be part of the happy throng of people enjoying heaven.

APRIL 12

## ***LONG DISTANCE WHEELCHAIRS***

Since 2007, electric wheelchairs are in greater use as technological progress has made them smaller and easier to operate compared to their somewhat clunky prototypes.

Many elderly people are turning to them as a means of transport around town.

Mr. Ono of Nakano, Japan, at 74 years old, has been using an electric wheelchair for two years. It is difficult for him to walk long distances, due to a heart ailment and back pains.

“I can no longer drive the car because my eyesight has deteriorated and my reflexes have slowed,” he said. He used a bicycle for a while but had a fall. In his electric wheelchair, he goes to work at a volunteer organization, of which he is a member. He also uses it for shopping and for health checkups.

“My wheelchair is zippy and easy to drive,” he said, although the battery died once on his way home.

As a means of travel, the electric wheelchair satisfies such legal conditions as a maximum speed of less than 6km/h.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

There are many means of traveling.

The best example I can think is of Jesus traveling in humility to His own people. When He entered Jerusalem, He did not travel on horseback as kings of old did, but on the back of a donkey to bring the marvel of salvation to humankind!

***Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*** (Zech. 9:9, NIV).

Eagerly accept the gift of salvation that has been brought to you by King Jesus.

Do not postpone such an important life-giving matter.

APRIL 13

## ***SELF-MADE POSTAGE STAMPS***

Mrs. Suzuki and her six-month-old daughter pose for a photo in front of a special machine in the Post Office. Why? To make their own original postage stamps.

Snap-happy Japan's love affair with the camera has reached new heights, now that people can now put their faces on genuine postage stamps to mail letters to friends and family members.

Customers having their personal photo taken and printed on stamps can also order them in sheets of four stamps each.

*Source: Mainichi News*

Imagine, now you can put your best personal image on postage stamps. But more important than that is the image of God, stamped on us as human beings.

God created us in His very own image.

***So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*** (Gen. 1:27, NIV).

Sin has marred and ruined the image of God in all people, both male and female, except in the sinless Christ, who came to save us. He is well able to restore the image of God in us.

Our sin and rebellion against God and his precepts marred but did not totally destroy His image. If we yield our lives to Jesus Christ and walk daily with Him, He will by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, gloriously restore the image of God in us.

***Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator***

(Col. 3:9-10, NIV).

APRIL 14

## ***SPACE TOURISM***

You might not have heard of it, but Japanese firms are promoting space travel. Buckle up for the ride of a lifetime!

Space tourism is set to literally leap out of the pages of science fiction and take off in the coming years if some Japanese companies have their way.

“Space flight, which was once just been an idle dream of mankind, became routine for astronauts in the twentieth century,” says Kooki Isozaki, at the Japanese Rocket Society. “It will become your reality in the twenty-first century.”

In 2004, the Space Tourism Society built a prototype rocket. It will complete 1,200 test flights by 2015. The society aims to develop 52 spaceships in total, each with a circular cabin to give everyone a view.

“We have finished the research phase,” Isozaki said. “Now we are encouraging airlines to take an interest in the project.”

Each tourist going up in the 50-seat vessel would pay a hefty price, but as many as 70 percent surveyed are more than willing to pay up to one year’s income for a space trip.

“You will not need to have any prior training,” Isozaki said. “It will be just like an airplane ride where you can wear casual clothes.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Someday ordinary people will be able to travel out that far and see the earth hang in space. I am sure it will be an unforgettable sight.

May they then marvel at the handiwork of our God, the Creator of our terrestrial globe.

***He spreads out the northern skies over empty space. He hangs the earth over nothing***

(Job 26:7, NIV).

Let us worship the Creator of the universe.

APRIL 15

## ***THE BLIND MARATHON RUNNER***

A 56-year-old blind man in Japan tells how he crawled out of the deep abyss of disappointment and rebuilt his life after a horrible car accident some 30 years ago.

Mr. Akita was in the front passenger seat of a colleague's car when the windshield shattered and damaged his eyes. He tumbled into despair. Rage burned in his heart toward his colleague when he realized he would never see the face of his newborn daughter.

Fortunately, his wife vowed to share in his sorrow, and friends rallied around helping him feel that life was worth living.

In June 1982, he received a license as an acupuncturist and massage practitioner, and he then opened a clinic. To maintain his health and to serve as a role model for his patients, he began jogging. Escorted by other runners, he participated in more than 100 races in Japan and abroad, including marathons.

Mr. Akita loves to tell his story in primary and middle schools and tries to inspire those who are downhearted.

"There are some things I might not be able to do," he tells them. "But I had enough courage to take one step at a time, and indeed many of my wishes have come true."

"'Enjoy your life and do your best with a radiant face', is the motto by which I live every day," he assures them.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We need not be discouraged or sad if we fix our eyes on God.

***You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever*** (Ps. 30:11-12, NIV).

If you belong to Christ, there is no reason for you ever to be down in the dumps. God can put a genuine smile on your face!

APRIL 16

## ***RESCUE ROBOTS***

Spurred on by the deadly Hanshin earthquake of 1995 that killed over 6,000 people – most trapped under collapsed buildings and incapable of saving themselves – the Technology Ministry in Japan started developing a variety of rescue robots. These can search out people trapped under the rubble where it would be too dangerous or too confined for rescue workers to work.

One specially designed robot is a remote controlled caterpillar vehicle capable of climbing over mountains of debris. Its seven segments enable it to wiggle along much like a caterpillar.

Another project uses a snakelike robot. Its long flexible body allows it to ‘snake into’ spaces that are too small for humans.

The robots are equipped with sensors that can detect body heat and voices so they can alert rescuers when a person has been found.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Human beings need rescuing from a much more dreadful situation. Buried alive in darkness deeper than the grave and smothered to death in their sins and wrongdoings, they cannot help themselves. Only God can deliver them from eternal suffocation and bring them out into a bright eternal future. The Bible is full of His promises to deliver them.

***I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?*** (Hosea 13:14, NIV)

The greatest rescue that we as human beings can ever experience is that of God rescuing us from sin and death. Do not delay in acquiring His help!

APRIL 17

## ***INFATUATED WITH A DECOY***

In 1991, the Japanese government sought to attract endangered albatrosses to the small Izu islands to breed.

The Institute of Ornithology placed 100 wooden albatross decoys in the water in hopes of attracting the birds to the islands.

The project, for the most part worked remarkably well – the endangered birds have landed on the islands and breeding has increased.

However, for Deko, a 5-year-old male albatross, the scheme went awry. For two years, he tried to woo what he believed to be the love of his life. He built her fancy nests, fought off rival suitors, and spent countless days standing faithfully by her side. But his one-and-only was a synthetic decoy, and despite the blank stare and wooden personality, he did not catch on.

Institute researcher Miss Sato worries that Deko's infatuation with the decoy will keep him from meeting a true mate.

"He seems to have no desire to date real birds," Miss Sato observed.

*Source: The Sermon Illustrator*

Deko is not the only creature that has set his heart on some pathetic and inferior substitute.

Even people get obsessed with decoys.

God created human beings to seek and worship Him and Him alone, but unfortunately, most people become infatuated by hollow substitutes.

No phony decoys can satisfy earnest seekers of the real God.

***God has done all this, so that we will look for  
him and reach out and find him. He isn't far  
from any of us*** (Acts 17:27, CEV).

Don't settle for poor substitutes! Seek and find the true living God who will care for you while on earth and for all eternity.

APRIL 18

## ***EYEGLASSES 2,000 YEARS AGO***

In ancient Rome 2,000 years ago, people with poor eyesight laid glass cubes filled with water over documents to magnify the words for easier reading.

Eyeglasses became common in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century as more people began to read following the invention of the modern printing press around 1450.

Some documents suggest that St. Francis Xavier, the first missionary to Japan, presented Yoshitaka Ouchi, a 16th-century warlord, with a pair of eyeglasses.

Skilled farmers first manufactured eyeglasses in Japan; doing it as a sideline during the off-season.

Eyeglasses in frames fitted over the ears were unknown since lenses were hand held or attached to hats. Modern opticians now have frames for eyeglasses available in hundreds of different colors.

What is more, there are now sunglasses with a built-in electronic color device which can even change colors at the press of a button – all this to see better!

*Source: The Internet*

We need different ‘glasses’ for spiritual insight; only the Holy Spirit can give true perception and discernment to God’s seekers.

***I also pray that your mind might see more clearly. Then you will know the hope God has chosen you to receive. You will know that the things God's people will receive are rich and glorious*** (Eph. 1:18-19, NIrV).

To see things so amazing that they beg description, we need better spiritual sight. We need God’s glasses.

May we have our spiritual eyes focused and so sharp that we can see God’s way crystal clear – God’s eyesight for better insight.

APRIL 19

## ***GREEN TEA DEODORANT***

In Japan, green tea deodorant sprays have become popular. The tea is an effective and natural way of combating bad odors and even bacteria.

Mr. Kao's research found that while consumers were interested in using deodorants on such things as running shoes and suits, many were resistant to the idea of spraying items that come into direct contact with their skin.

The solution to the problem, Kao decided, was green tea. The tea's natural ingredients give consumers a sense of assurance and the product does not get sticky after you spray it on. Furthermore, *catechin*, a substance found in abundance in green tea, has strong deodorizing and anti-bacterial properties.

The target market includes housewives who do not take their husbands' suits to the cleaners all that often, as well as female office workers who want to get rid of the smell of cigarettes and other things on their clothes before going out to socialize after work.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Those who experience the presence of God, while being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, exude a sweet aroma of Christlikeness!

***Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma*** (Eph. 5:2, NKJV).

Observe how extravagantly Christ loved us, and let us be full of love like that. It will be as a fragrant perfume to God!

APRIL 20

## ***PARASITE SINGLES***

Increasing numbers of young people in Japan are choosing to stay single. The bulk of such freewheeling adults live with their parents well beyond young adulthood. They receive financial assistance and rely on their parents for day-to-day care such as meals and laundry.

Professor Yamada calls such young people ‘parasites’ because they live beyond their means and turn to their parents for basic needs.

Some are so keen on maintaining such ‘parasitic’ lifestyles that marriage is out of the question as it might lead to a life of less financial comfort.

A 29-year-old employee of an electronics company lives with her 61-year-old mother and 67-year-old father. Work, golf, English lessons and socializing dominate her life.

Every morning she eats a wholesome breakfast of rice and *miso* (fermented bean) soup prepared by her mother. Every evening she comes home to a hot bath and a nicely cooked meal. Her clothes are washed and ironed, or dry-cleaned without her lifting a finger. Even her photographs are developed.

“I know I am too dependent on my parents,” she said. “But there is no way I can pay rent and maintain my current standard of living.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Some pursue a life of comfort and ease which is not good. Rather, follow the advice of Jesus.

***If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it*** (Luke 9:23-24, NIV).

Commit your life to Christ for eternity – you will never regret it!

APRIL 21

## ***STREETCAR BELLS ARE RINGING***

The misery caused by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 was catastrophic. Many survivors aimlessly wandered through the streets, not knowing how to cope or what to do. Then magically, they heard the bells of streetcars!

In the outskirts of the city, a domestic science school for girls was hit hard. Thirty of their girls were killed in the blast.

“It is no good being miserable all the time, let’s do something,” their teacher urged the weeping girls. “Let’s start operating Hiroshima’s streetcars. There is no one left to do it. Get into the cabs and start driving. You will soon learn how.”

Thus, the drivers of the first streetcars after the atomic bomb blast were schoolgirls. Streetcars were again shuttling back and forth. In that city of death, bells were ringing anew.

“The streetcars are running. The city is alive!” an injured person shouted. “The bells of hope are ringing!” another yelled when he saw a streetcar running among the ruins.

What an encouragement it was to the stupefied and wounded citizens of Hiroshima! This became a starting point for them to rebuild their lives and their city.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Are we encouraging others around us? A good deed often costs us next to nothing.

***Do all you can for everyone who deserves your help. Don’t tell your neighbor to come back tomorrow, if you can help today***

(Prov. 3:27-28, CEV).

Do not be so preoccupied that you fail to notice the needs of people around you; neither be too busy to care.

Is anyone happier because your path crossed his or hers today?

APRIL 22

## ***BAGGY LEG WARMERS***

Some 10 years ago, baggy, white leg warmers hanging down over the ankles and covering the top part of the shoes were all the rage among Japanese high-school girls.

There is not much leeway for displaying the latest fashions in a school uniform. One of the few ways a schoolgirl could add a touch of style to her uniform was by wearing baggy, white leg warmers hanging down over her ordinary white socks and shoes. To me they look awful, but pupils seem to like being different.

At first, the girls simply wore the leg warmers neatly folded over, but soon they were wearing them in a very crumpled, baggy style, pushed right down over the ankles.

I would have understood this fashion if they had worn these baggy things only in the winter when it is bitterly cold; but these girls bedecked their legs and ankles with foot-long leg warmers even on simmering hot summer days – the baggier, the better.

Super, baggy white socks that are two feet long also appeared on the scene.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

The Bible talks about a special kind of clothing and a special sort of foot gear to equip the believer for service.

***Your desire to tell the good news about peace  
should be like shoes on your feet***  
(Eph. 6:15, CEV).

Oh for feet that run with the good news of peace to the needy! Jesus gives peace to His own people.

***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I  
do not give to you as the world gives. Do not  
let your hearts be troubled and do not be  
afraid*** (John 14:27, NIV).

Share the peace of Jesus that clears up troubles and fear!

APRIL 23

## ***SEEING STARS THROUGH PRISON BARS***

There was a young bride from the East, who during wartime followed her husband to a U.S. Army camp on the edge of the desert in California.

Living conditions were primitive at best. It was 115 °F (46 °C) in the shade during the day, and the wind constantly blew sand everywhere. The days were long and boring; she had nothing in common with her neighbors; and then, to add to her misery, her husband was ordered away. The young bride wrote her mother that she was coming home – she couldn't take it anymore.

“Two men looked through prison bars: one saw mud, the other stars,” was the reply her wise mother sent.

The young bride read it over and over again and began to pray to God for an attitude adjustment. Among other things, she began to study the desert. The desert changed from a desolate, forbidding place to one of marvelous beauty. She started to study the cacti, and she collected seashells that had housed creatures when the sand was the ocean floor. She became such an expert that she wrote a book about it all.

What changed? Not the situation! The heat, the desert, and the people were just the same. God had changed her attitude by using the words of a wise mother. She saw the stars from her self-made prison bars.

*Source: Cyberspace*

With faith in God, there is a supernatural exchange of strength that helps us handle any situation.

***Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song*** (Ps. 28:6-7, NIV).

Exceedingly great is our joy if we have learned to trust in God.

APRIL 24

***COFFEE POTS AND FRIDGES***  
***SENDING E-MAILS***

When your coffee pot starts sending e-mails from your home to your office reminding you that it needs servicing or a new supply of freshly ground beans, then you know that you are in a new era of connectivity.

Coffee machines are not the only things sending reminders these days. E-mail boxes are filled to overflowing with various automated reminders. Even cars let you know when they need servicing.

Households in the East were the first to buy internet fridges. A 37cm (15 inch) touch-screen LCD monitor mounted on the door allows access to the Internet, serves as a video telephone, or shows you the latest movie while you wait for the kettle to boil.

The screen on the refrigerator also shows the best-before dates of packaged food in the fridge. It even suggests recipes for the remaining items in the fridge.

If the fridge breaks down, it sends a message to the service center to come and fix it.

*Source: Japan Information Network*

Everybody seems bent on sending his or her own message via e-mail. These household appliances are now adding to the overwhelming number of reports and reminders that we get on a daily basis.

May the bedlam of wanted and unwanted communications not drown out the most important message of the ages.

***For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*** (1 Cor. 15:3-4, NIV).

This is the most important message of the Bible!

APRIL 25

## ***COMPUTERS WITHOUT MONITORS***

For the visually impaired, computer monitors are unnecessary.

Mr. Shibata, 45, a blind computer programmer, moves his fingers smoothly across the keyboard. He is entering programming codes, checking what he has typed by listening to the text through an earphone. At his firm, Shibata, together with many ‘seeing’ members, is involved in the development of operating systems for weather observation activities, as well as for aerospace and automobile industries.

The loss of his sight has not affected Shibata’s commuting or his private life either. He still commutes to his office by train and got married three years ago.

Mr. Shibata said he hoped that many other disabled people would become active in the world of information technology.

“Disabled people have such good working environments that they can function as efficiently as able-bodied workers,” Mr. Shibata said. “I’d be happy to be considered an example and a role model for anyone.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How wonderful it is to be such a perfect role model that we can encourage others to follow our example.

Paul of the Bible urged people to be imitators of him as he was imitating Christ.

***Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*** (1 Cor. 11:1, NIV).

***Brothers and sisters, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you*** (Phil. 3:17, NCV).

Is it safe for your children, family and other acquaintances to imitate your lifestyle?

APRIL 26

## ***MOVIES IN TUNNELS***

Commuters who are sick of overcrowded subway trains may now be able to find some relief, or at least entertainment, by simply looking out of the window.

In Tokyo, on normally blank subway walls, a new kind of view has appeared known as ‘moving picture tunnel advertising’.

For the commuters to perceive the advertisements as moving images, the inventors placed special displays of still images at calculated intervals on the walls of the subway tunnel. The images then appear to move as the train goes by.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How good to have eyes to see the marvels around us, but how much better it is to have our spiritual eyes opened so that we can see God at work around us in even in humankind’s decadent world of confusion.

At a scene of war in olden times, Elisha prayed for his worrying servant to see the unseen.

***“O LORD, open his eyes so that he may see.”  
Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes,  
and he looked and saw the hills full of horses  
and chariots of fire all around Elisha***

(2 Kings 6:17, NIV).

May God open our eyes that we may see every day the numerous actions of our God all around us in a world that is filled with wonder.

***For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light*** (Ps. 36:9, NIV).

God’s light enables us to enjoy life more abundantly, physically and spiritually!

APRIL 27

## ***THE PHANTOM BAKERY***

On a commercial street in Meguro, Japan it is mid-winter, and at 01:00 the sudden clatter of opening metal shutters shatters the midnight's hush. Manabu Kobayashi, the 84-year-old proprietor of the Kikuya Bakery appears and bows low.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he apologizes to the couples with coats wrapped over their pajamas and women hooded against the cold.

The shelves of his shop are lined with 20 varieties of bread. The melon-bread cakes and custard cream bread are especially popular. On this particular night, Kobayashi sells more than 200 items. When the shutters clatter down again, it is 03:00, and the street returns to its nocturnal stillness.

Kobayashi and his wife clean the shop and go upstairs to their family quarters for a meal and a bath. Bedtime is 06:00. At noon, they are up again, preparing bread for the following morning.

On the Internet, Kikuya's is known as 'The Phantom Bakery'.

Kobayashi's interest in bread is rooted in his wartime experience when a friend of his unit was killed. "Do something for the good of Japan," was his dying request.

Demoralized, Kobayashi made his way back to Tokyo where a hungry orphan stole his rice balls. Food could be the basis of Japan's recovery, he suddenly realized.

*Source: Asahi News*

The Phantom Bakery's bread might be nourishing, but the most precious Bread ever offered to humankind came down from heaven and provides spiritual life to the world.

***Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth . . . it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"*** (John 6:32-33, NIV).

Feed every day on the Bread of Heaven!

APRIL 28

## ***CONVENIENCE DOERS***

(Sent in by Frank Nakashima)

There are about 5000 ‘convenience doers’ (*benriya*) in Japan. They are willing to do anything their customers want. The job requires discretion, patience and a willingness to do whatever it takes without blinking an eye; even if one feels like bursting with laughter or worrying about scruples.

“I was called to an apartment to clean a refrigerator. I found items that had expired in 1996,” said Mr. Sugimoto, a veteran ‘convenience doer’. “An egg in there looked like a fossil.”

Some customers need help to fill out their wedding parties. Brides or grooms, with a shortage of guests on their side of the aisle call in many ‘convenience doers’ to pose as wedding guests. One had to pretend to be the groom’s university professor, going so far as to give a glowing speech about the young man’s non-existent academic accomplishments.

“People pay me to eat out with them or sit in their homes wiling away the evening hours,” Mr. Ukon said. “It really reflects the emptiness of society.”

Others need to ‘borrow’ an understanding grandpa or grandma for a day.

One woman retreated to her bathroom after finding a single dead cockroach in her living room. She made an emergency phone call to her local ‘convenience doer’ to get it removed.

*Source: The Globe and Mail Social Studies*

Everyone needs friends, but too bad to have to rent or buy them, eh!

It is so wonderful to know that we can have the best friend in Jesus, if we but follow Him.

***You are my friends if you do what I command.  
I have called you friends, for everything that I  
learned from my Father I have made known to  
you*** (John 15:14-15, NIV).

APRIL 29

## ***EARTH VIEW FROM A COCKPIT***

“What does the Earth look like from a height of 10,000 meters?” This is just one of the questions a veteran pilot, Mitsuo Yamada, asks and answers at lectures he gives around Japan to teach children about environmental issues affecting our globe.

“My workplace is the sky,” Yamada, a Japan Airlines pilot said. Flying JAL aircraft for 35 years, he started noticing changes on the Earth’s surface seven or eight years ago.

He has observed a gray haze cover the skies of China. A red tide has spread across the South China Sea and swaths of Indonesia’s rain forest have disappeared.

He said he sees these and other changes as warning signals indicating that the world is in danger.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

God’s viewpoint of the future of the earth is written very clearly in the Bible, which is infallible to the last letter.

Without a doubt, the earth will be destroyed, but only according to God’s plan and not according to man’s predictions.

***God has commanded the present heavens and earth to remain until the day of judgment. Then they will be set on fire, and ungodly people will be destroyed*** (2 Peter 3:7, CEV).

God is poised to speak judgment over the earth. In the meantime, our Christ-given task is to win the lost, who will otherwise perish with the earth.

***I will create new heavens and a new earth. The things that have happened before will not be remembered. They will not even enter your minds*** (Is. 65:17, NIV).

We do not know when God will bring all this to pass, so let’s be ready for that great day!

APRIL 30

## ***THE GARDEN OF LIFE***

Rehabilitation at the Rosai Hospital, in a crowded urban area of Amagasaki, Japan, is looking rosy – thanks to *Ibuki no Sono*, “The Garden of Life.”

Rosai Hospital has 670 beds and 1,600 daily outpatients. In the hospital grounds, the patients enjoy the color and scent of the flowers of the garden or just relax and chat with the hospital staff there.

For sick people it is indeed a refreshing, natural atmosphere, far from the confines of a hospital bed. “I feel sick in my hospital room,” said a 60-year-old woman, “but in the sunny garden I feel refreshed.” She encourages her roommates to get out of bed and visit the garden too.

“We hope many of our patients can renew themselves in the garden and boost their capacity for healing,” said Dr. Hayakawa, the director of the hospital.

In a distant corner of the garden is a small, secluded place that features a bubbling fountain surrounded by walls. The area is usually locked and only available by special request.

“The place is for deep thought,” Dr. Hayakawa said. “We hope people will especially use it when they have a serious illness such as terminal cancer, or when they have lost a family member.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

When I leave this earth, I anticipate being in God’s garden, as seen in a vision by John.

***On each side of the river stood the tree of life,  
bearing 12 crops of fruit. Its fruit was ripe  
every month. The leaves of the tree bring  
healing to the nations*** (Rev. 22:2, NIV).

Let’s look forward to this garden that God created for us, which will truly be a garden of eternal health and well-being.

MAY

MAY 1

## **SERIOUS LITTLE SCIENTISTS**

“Good morning, teacher!” seven boys and girls shout in unison at a cram school in Yamato, Japan. It might appear to be just another cram school, but the first thing these primary school students do is don white lab coats, turning themselves into serious little scientists.

Many cram schools are providing primary school students with hands-on scientific education in a program called *Kid's Lab*. The aim is to help children cultivate an ability to think for themselves through experiments in physics, chemistry, biology, and geo-sciences.

Students perform simple experiments such as heating water in small aluminum cans over a spirit lamp, screwing the lids on and then cooling the cans in ice water. Their task is to predict what will happen to the cans and the water and air they contain, and to think about why and how such events take place.

“Wow!” the students shout, beaming excitedly, as the heated cans collapse in on themselves in the ice water.

“Experimenting is exciting! It teaches me how I can do things by myself,” a girl participating in the class reckons.

“In order to inspire children’s interest in science, it’s very important for them to experience and discover things by themselves,” said Mr. Koizumi, the school manager.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Enthusiasm about science is fine, but we need to impress a much more important message on the minds of young people worldwide! Listen to what David of the Bible has to say:

***Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD*** (Ps. 34:11, NIV).

Help children discover the importance of respecting and worshipping God!

MAY 2

## ***SPLASHES OF COLOR IN PRISONS***

In the hope of nurturing a willingness to rehabilitate, the Justice Ministry of Japan chose new colors for clothing and bedding in its prisons. Inmates had worn the same uniforms – dark brown for men and grey for women – since 1966.

Prison authorities replaced the drab prison uniforms and bedding with brighter colors in response to criticism from color therapists who said the current designs were depressing and tended to make inmates aggressive.

Color therapists claim that the extremely plain clothing contributed to an atmosphere of dull monotony in the institutions, and that colorful uniforms would go a long way toward helping prisoners take a more positive attitude to life.

Color experts advised the Justice Ministry to use light blue, mint green and deep pink for the inmates' clothing and pajamas, and to add warm colors such as orange and brown to all the comforters in the prisons of Japan!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

But did you know that there is costly apparel far better than the colorful new uniforms that these therapists are promoting?

***Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you”*** (Zech. 3:3-4, NIV).

What Jesus made possible for Joshua, He makes possible, not only for prisoners but for every one of us, if we but follow His instructions and allow Him to help us out of our dirty clothes of sin!

How wonderful it is to be dressed in God's clean outfit of salvation, which He has prepared for us!

MAY 3

## **LIFE-SAVING ROBOTS**

Landmines exist in many parts of the world, ready to kill or maim people indiscriminately. Approximately 100 million landmines are currently buried beneath the earth's surface.

Removing them is slow and dangerous work. A person has to lie down on the ground and listen for indications from a metal detector. When metal is detected, he must then stretch out his arms and attempt the nerve-racking job of digging out the mine from the side so as not to set it off. Searching two square meters takes hours of intense concentration, and much of what actually turns up are empty bullet cartridges and other scraps of metal.

According to 1998 data, a person using this method takes as long as three months to find just one mine. At this rate, ridding the world of landmines would take centuries.

This is where Japanese robotics comes in. Today there are many life-saving robots at work! One research group uses a de-mining 'insect' robot, which moves on six legs. It has two antennae – one that serves as a metal detector and the other as a marker. The first antenna sweeps the ground looking for signals; the other one marks an area that is determined to have metal beneath the surface. In addition to being safer than doing the job by hand, this robot is also much faster: It works about 700 times faster than a human being does.

*Source: Japan Echo*

All of us, regardless of our exposure to land mines, need God's protection every day of our lives.

***Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident*** (Ps. 27:3, NIV).

We can be cool, calm and collected when God takes care of us!

MAY 4

## ***FREE BIKES FOR VISITORS***

A non-profit organization supplied bicycles to several hotels in central Oita, Japan. They were available for tourists and business travelers to use free of charge when sightseeing or visiting business clients.

The service was part of a pilot project called *Creating a Bicycle-Friendly Town* project intended to reduce both traffic congestion and the environmental harm caused by motor vehicles. Forty new shiny bicycles were available at 12 hotels.

The project was not a big success, but the bicycles are still available free of charge at the Oita Japan Railway station for those who want to use them. Maps of bicycle paths are also provided for sightseers.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Free bicycles are nice, but how about free eternal life in heaven?

***I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. I am the Beginning and the End. Anyone who is thirsty may drink from the spring of the water of life. It doesn't cost anything!*** (Rev. 21:6, NIV).

For your eternal good, drink your fill of the water of life that God has made available to you!

You do not deserve it; you cannot earn it by good works or pay for it by any means for it is a gift from our living God to a thirsty world.

If you have not yet tasted this living water, call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and ask for a drink from the well of eternal life-giving water! It is a free gift from the living God to you!

For all eternity, you will never regret it!

Do not refuse it!

MAY 5

## ***PAPA'S NOT A ROLLING STONE***

The decision to make his family the center of his life was one of the most important choices that Katsuhide Tsuru ever made. He worked as a professional musician in the Tokyo area but in 1988, he decided to put everything aside and move his family to a secluded farm in a rural part of Japan.

Tsuru's life transformed as he spent more time with his family. He made musical instruments out of bamboo in all shapes and sizes.

At the time when his children's ages ranged from 6 to 14, one of them, Misora, suggested that the entire family produce music. Each chose a bamboo instrument, and under *Papa's* direction, usually after dinner and before washing the dishes, they began practicing together.

Very soon, Katsuhide, his wife Kimiko, and their four children – Tenri, Satoma, Misora, and Tasuku were playing together not only at home but also for live audiences throughout the country, as well as on TV.

“Making their own instruments stimulates my children’s minds and playing music shapes their imagination. They grasp things quickly and music becomes a part of them,” said Tsuru.

*Source: The Japan Times*

Tsuru did marvelously well in teaching his own children what he knew. It is the duty of God’s people to teach their children Biblical truths.

***Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them*** (Deut. 4:9, NIV).

Let us lovingly impart to our offspring what is good and right!

MAY 6

## ***CRAZY ENGLISH SHOUTING***

Li Yang used to be painfully shy – too shy to answer the phone and too shy to leave his bedroom when friends of his parents dropped by his childhood home.

However, today Li thinks nothing of standing before 40,000 people, shouting repeatedly, “I enjoy losing face!”

He incites craziness in stadiums, universities and hotels: “Let the voice of China be heard all over the world!” he screams.

Armed with a ragbag of slogans and 20 special gestures, Li is putting into practice his theory that language learning is essentially a physical activity.

“Never let your country down!” he shouts as he leads a group of joggers along a city street. “Never let your country down!” they holler back in unison. “I enjoy pain!” he screams next. “I like it when people stare at me!”

More than 14 million people in 60 cities and provinces across China have attended Li’s rallies, gesturing madly and shouting phrases such as, “I am ashamed that I don’t know English.”

Even in Japan, Li had large crowds gesturing earnestly and echoing his slogans!

“English doesn’t belong to the United States. It doesn’t belong to Britain. It belongs to the world,” he shouts.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

If Li Yang has something good to shout about, followers of Christ have something much, MUCH better to proclaim.

***What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight. What is whispered in your ear, shout from the rooftops*** (Matt. 10:27, NIrV).

May we not keep our lips sealed until . . . ***the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea*** (Is. 11:9, NKJV).

MAY 7

## ***AN ILL-WIND BLOWS NO GOOD***

“I always switch off the TV when it shows large clouds of pollen billowing out from Japanese cedar trees,” said Japan’s famous storyteller, Mr. Enzo. “Just the very thought of hay fever gives me the sniffles.”

On stage, performers shouldn’t blow their noses, so what does Enzo do? When it gets to be too much for him, he stands up slowly from his *zabuton* (cushion) and away from the microphone. Exaggerating his movements, he turns his face away in an attempt to hide from the audience and has a huge sniff!

Enzo is 70, but hay fever is even becoming prevalent among children!

An 11-year-old primary school student’s mother asks her son the same question every morning before he leaves for school: “Do you have your tissues?” The child has been suffering from hay fever since he was 2 years old. Now he cannot even go to school without a supply of eye-drops.

A vast number of Japanese suffer from hay fever and remedies are a big business.

“Medicines that do not cause drowsiness and shaped masks which do not smear one’s lipstick are popular this year,” said a medicine dealer. “Manufacturers always come up with various new twists on their products and I am happy to sell them!”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

There’s nothing wrong with making money, as long as it doesn’t exploit the condition of an ill person.

***Anyone who loves money never has enough.  
Anyone who loves wealth is never satisfied  
with what he gets. That doesn’t have any  
meaning either*** (Eccl. 5:10, NIV).

Money can be a good servant, but it is a relentless master!

MAY 8

## ***CHILDREN BUILD ROBOTS***

"We are so glad to know that our students are enjoying making robots," said Mr. Kono, manager of a cram school. Under the supervision of instructors, children build small robots.

Kenshiro Nakamura, 10, is a fourth grade student at one of the robot building schools.

"Working with computers and the robots I create by myself is lots of fun!" the boy said. His mother is excited too. Mrs. Nakamura cannot stop talking about the change in her son.

"My son used to have nothing he felt any passion for," she said. "He seemed too low-key for a kid and was very shy and lacked self-confidence. I badly wanted him to discover something that he would like very much, something that would make him feel proud. That's why I decided to have him enter this course, and I don't regret it at all. Through robot classes, including presentation sessions, he has gained self-confidence and his science grades have gone up," the mother rejoices.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Above anything else for parents in Japan, we long for them to point their children to God.

***You know how, when you were a small child,  
you were taught the holy Scriptures; and it is  
these that make you wise to accept God's  
salvation by trusting in Christ Jesus***

(2 Tim. 3:15, TLB).

From the very beginning, parents should infuse their children with the Word of God!

If father and mother point their children in the right direction, they will not forget it; even in old age, they will still strive to live the right way!

MAY 9

## **200 CIGARETTES**

The Asahi Newspaper of Japan wrote about a mother who was a very heavy smoker. Her three children detested her smoking habit, but for a birthday present they gave her – of all things – 200 cigarettes. She was very surprised, seeing that her children had so often urged her to quit the smoking habit. She thanked them for being so considerate, but could hardly wait for them to leave so she could start smoking them.

When she was about to light up the first one, she noticed some very fine writing on the side of it. As her eyesight was not so good anymore, she put on her glasses to decipher the fine writing. She read, “*Every cigarette you smoke shortens your life by 2 minutes and 30 seconds!*” In disgust, she threw that cigarette down and took up the next one. To her horror, the same lettering was on that one too! Moreover, it was on the next one and each one after that!

She suddenly realized how much her children loved her. It must have taken them hours of hard work to write those words on every one of the 200 cigarettes they had given her.

Her children wanted to make sure that she would be around for a long time. That day, she quit smoking cigarettes and has not touched one since.

Even non-Christians can teach us that goodwill gestures can transform very bad habits in the people they love.

***Above all, love each other deeply, because  
love covers over a multitude of sins***

(1 Pet. 4:8, NIV).

***Let us not love with words or tongue but with  
actions and in truth*** (1 John 3:18, NIV).

Love is the key to good relationships and to changing people's hearts!  
May God help us to love with a practical love!

MAY 10

## **THE ART OF LUNCH BOXES**

Every day millions of women all over Japan create art in their husband's and especially their children's lunch boxes.

"I just want my son to have fun when he goes to daycare on Saturdays," explains Mrs. Shimomura as she sculpts rice, coloring it with egg yolks and shaping a dinosaur.

She fashions its eyes with sliced cheese and strips of seaweed. Star-shaped pieces of okra adorn the belly. She uses tweezers to place tiny teeth-shaped bits of cheese in the dinosaur's mouth.

Creating the faces of celebrities in lunchboxes, such as Mozart and the *Mona Lisa*, comes easily to many of these mothers. Sauces become pigments for reproducing skin tones; spaghetti turns into strands of hair; strands of seaweed reproduce black ink and brushstrokes.

The lunches – like other forms of Japanese art – often feature a seasonal motif such as fireworks in summer or snowmen in winter.

Spending hours meticulously perfecting meals that their children will gobble down in minutes hardly seems like time well invested. Nonetheless, the intricate presentations are a way for mothers – who often forgo careers – to cater to their families and to demonstrate their creative skills. It confirms their devotion to motherhood as well as dedication to their children's nutrition.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her***  
(Prov. 31:28, NIV).

The good mother's sacrifice begins with great pain, and continues with hope for her children.

God bless the warm-hearted mothers!

MAY 11

## ***CELL PHONE FRIENDS***

Many young Japanese people cannot imagine life without their personal cellular phones. Those aged between 10 and 29 spend more money on phone bills than on compact discs, computer games or magazines.

“My cell phone is like my other self,” said Naomi, a high school student, caressing the phone in her palm. At home, she even takes it wrapped in a plastic bag into the bath, so that she will not miss a call. She does not hesitate to talk to strangers on her phone, even up to an hour. They introduce themselves and then she goes on to talk about topics such as boyfriend troubles.

“When there are a lot of numbers stored in my phone, I feel happy!” she said. “It means many people care about me!” Her phone’s memory holds about 300 numbers of people she refers to as friends.

Many young people desire quantity rather than quality, preferring a large number of acquaintances to a few close friends. This reflects the shallowness of relationships in the ‘network society’.

We have gained a great deal thanks to cellular phones: a wide circle of friends, convenience, freedom and a means of self-expression; but we also need to consider what we have lost.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I can recommend you to a very special Friend! With Him, you can share your deepest feelings, and He will become a source of great happiness and joy!

***Jonathan made a covenant with David  
because he loved him as himself***

(I Sam. 18:3, NIV).

As Jonathan loved David let us love Christ. We need to consecrate everything we consider valuable to Christ!

I invite you to enjoy a deep friendship with Jesus!

MAY 12

## ***THE MAGIC TREE***

Mr. Kinoshita, 61, of Asahikawa, Japan, may not look like a magician, but he has a magic tree.

Through long, hard, and skilled manipulation on his part, what was once an ordinary pear tree in his backyard now bears up to 20 different types of apples and pears!

Kinoshita began grafting apple and pear strains onto the tree about 30 years ago. The tree is as versatile as it is prolific.

The tree produces about 250 apples and pears a year. Kinoshita conjures up struts to support branches heavily laden with fruit in summer and snow in winter.

The blossoms appear in late May: red and white apple and pear flowers opening one after another for about 10 days. The harvest starts in late August, with the legendary Asahi apples the first to ripen.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

God intends for us who are His children to be fruit-bearers. He makes this clear to us in the parable of the vine.

***Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful*** (John 15:2, NIV).

***I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit***  
(John 15:5, NIV).

***This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples*** (John 15:8, NIV).

***I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last*** (John 15:16, NIV).

God expects us to bear abundant and delicious fruit!

MAY 13

## ***NATION TRIMMING WAISTS OF MILLIONS***

Summoned by officials, Mr. Minoru Nogiri, 45, a flower shop owner, found himself lining up to have his waistline measured. With no visible paunch, he was sure that he was not overweight.

The prescribed limit for male waistlines is a strict 86cm (33.5 inches)! Nogiri had anxiously measured himself at home a couple of days earlier. “I’m on the border,” he moaned.

Japan, a country not traditionally known for its overweight people, has undertaken one of the most ambitious campaigns in any nation in order to slim down its citizens. A national law came into effect in April 2008 stating that companies must measure the waistlines of their employees aged between 40 and 74. That represents more than 56 million waistlines!

Officials have moved aggressively toward measuring waistlines – the limit is 86cm for men and 89cm for women – and in giving dieting guidance to those who miss the mark. If after three months they do not lose weight, they are steered toward further re-education and special checkups.

When the turn came for the flower shop owner Nogiri, he entered a booth and bared his midriff, exposing a relatively flat stomach. A nurse wrapped a tape measure around his waist across his navel: 87cm – one centimeter over the limit.

“What a stunning blow!” he cried out, defeat spreading across his face.

*Source: NY Times*

If you belong to God, your body is His property, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit!

***Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit . . .***

***Therefore honor God with your body***

(1 Cor. 6:19-20, NIV).

Let me urge you to use every part of your body to bring honor to its Creator!

MAY 14

## **TREES GROWING IN TEACUPS**

One morning in 1987, Mr. Yamamoto, then a stressed-out car designer in Tokyo, was walking to work one morning when he spotted a chunk of moss growing around the lid of a drain, sparkling in a mysterious way. The moss charmed him so much that when his workday was done, he went back, spatula in hand, to collect it.

He put the moss in a small cup and placed a tiny doll on top. After magnifying the miniature doll and shiny moss in his mind's eye, they suddenly seemed to resemble a life-size landscape.

From then on *manbonsai* (the art of miniature landscaping) fever gripped him and proved contagious. He often goes out plant hunting.

"Because the plants are potted in containers the size of small teacups, a very unnatural environment, you have to lovingly take care of them every day," Yamamoto says. "Otherwise they will easily die."

Given tender treatment, these miniature trees can live for hundreds of years. "It's thrilling to imagine that my creations will survive, under somebody else's care, much longer than I will," he said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We as believers, in our little space in the world, may think that we are small and insignificant, but God plants us like trees of righteousness that will live forever.

***Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit*** (Jer. 17:7-8, NIV).

We are like graceful trees, reflecting God's eternal glory!

MAY 15

## ***LOCATING DRUGS***

“Could you kindly keep this bag with your luggage?” a stranger asked Peggy and me, as we were waiting with hundreds of other passengers to board our plane. Having heard many horror stories of drug smuggling, we were hesitant.

“Cindy and her trainer are making their rounds searching for drugs. It will be an encouragement to her if she could find the little black bag we plant with you!” The man proved to us that he was a customs official, so we cooperated.

Peggy, my wife, tucked the black bag containing narcotics under her arm with her carry-on luggage.

Very soon, Cindy, a golden retriever, came bouncing in on a lead with her trainer. En route, one bag intrigued Cindy as it possibly contained jerky. She very much wanted to spend more time with that particular bag, but her trainer urged her on, saying, “We have a lot of work to do!”

As it only took Cindy a fraction of a second to pass many people, I wondered if she would ever be able to find any contraband item at the playful speed she moved down the row. However, when she reached Peggy’s luggage she suddenly stopped, singled out the planted bag under Peggy’s arm, stood still and pressed her nose against the bag – sign to her trainer that she had struck it rich.

“Good girl!” “Good girl!” her trainer said and patted her gently on her head.

We can never hide from God any evil in our hearts.

***From heaven, the LORD looks down and sees everyone. From his throne, he watches all those who live on the earth. He is aware of everything they do*** (Ps. 33:13-15, NIV).

God observes all our deeds in detail!

We need to confess our hidden sins and seek God’s favor.

MAY 16

## ***TRACKING THE ELDERLY***

In many countries including Japan, new technology is available to people who need help in tracking dogs, children or elderly people. This service is very popular as users claim they now have peace of mind when aging family members leave the house.

“He is walking down Yamate Street approaching Otori Shrine,” an operator explains to a user over the cell phone while following a map on a computer screen. “Thanks! I will go and find him,” a family member replies, expressing appreciation.

Operators are on duty around the clock to locate subjects and inform families of their whereabouts by telephone, fax or e-mail.

Antennas receive radio waves from chip-transmitters attached to the elderly people or their clothes, from which computers display their locations on maps.

A 75-year-old woman in Tokyo recently lost sight of her 77-year-old husband who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease. She reported the incident to Telenet, which tracked him immediately and reported his location to her by cellular phone.

“Until recently, it was not unusual for families to split up and search for lost members for more than half a day,” said Mr. Aratsuna, director of a support group for families with senile members, “but the tracking service alleviates this burden considerably”.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

When I read about this tracking service for the elderly, I recalled a passage describing how God keeps track of all of us at all times through His omniscience and omnipresence.

***The LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them*** (Ps. 11:4, NIV).

We are under the all-seeing eye of God!

MAY 17

## ***MICROWAVE DISCOVERED BY ACCIDENT***

Many inventions are made by mistake. One of them is the microwave oven.

One day while building magnetrons at a U.S. radar facility and standing in front of an active radar set, Dr. Percy Spencer noticed the chocolate bar in his pocket had melted. This messy discovery eventually led to the marketing of the first microwave oven in 1946.

In June 1999 Sharp Corp. of Japan became a microwave oven trendsetter with the creation of the world's first Internet-capable microwave oven. It can download recipes from the Internet which consist of heating directions for the oven as well as a list of ingredients and preparation instructions for the cook. The dishes can then be prepared easily using automatic heating.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Just as there is continuous development and improvement in microwave ovens, so there should also be development and growth in our spiritual lives. God promises to help us!

***I am sure that the One who began a good work in you will carry it on until it is completed. That will be on the day Christ Jesus returns*** (Phil. 1:6, NIV).

Problems and difficulties in real life could lead to wonderful discoveries and become opportunities for spiritual growth.

Every day God is working on us to bring us to a glorious finish for the very day that Christ will return to earth to fetch those who belong to Him!

May we not resist God's daily dealings with us!

MAY 18

## ***FLYING WITHOUT WINGS***

In 2003, a magnetically levitated linear motor train made its first successful test run, at a speed of 500km/h. The Japan Railway Co. conducted several test runs carrying about 480 people, including local government officials and university researchers, on an 18.4km long test track.

At first, the train runs on wheels, just like an ordinary electric train, but when it reaches a speed of about 160km/h, it shifts into *maglev* mode. The train rises into the air for a moment and then the noise of the wheels stops. It feels like an airplane taking off. The speedometer in the passenger cabin clocks off every 10km/h as the speed increases. In about a minute, it tops 500km/h.

The test runs showed that maglev trains are technologically feasible, but the largest remaining hurdle is the cost.

*Source: The Internet*

I do not know what they will do with a train going that fast in Japan seeing that the largest island is barely 1,000km long, but in competition mainly with France, Germany and China, Japan has exported whole train systems to foreign countries.

Anyway, there is something much more significant running faster than any train!

***God sends his command to the earth. His word arrives there quickly*** (Ps. 147:15, NIrV).

Do you believe that God directs all the happenings on earth?

God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, is in charge of what happens on our chaotic terrestrial globe! If it were not so, everything around us would collapse like a deck of cards!

The Word of God with its supporting message flies swiftly to desperate people in desperate places!

Take heart, God is engineering your circumstances!

MAY 19

## **THE MAGIC OF CHERRY MOUNTAIN**

The people of Kanzaki, Japan decided that they needed to have a completely new mountain!

The old mountain served them well when the town of 8,000 boasted a thriving forestry industry, but the recent recession knocked the stuffing out of the local economy. The peak's dark, dull greens looked so gloomy that residents called it the "Black Tree Mountain". To cheer up the mountain and its people, what could be better than planting cherry trees?

The first saplings were planted in the spring of 1991, and the park opened to the public in 1996. At the end of March, when the greater part of 2,500 cherry trees explodes into bloom, the entire peak is a shimmer of pink and white.

"Cherry Tree Mountain" is the very same mountain that used to bring gloom. About 1,000 of the trees have 'owners' people who forked out money to have their own saplings planted. Their names are posted on the trees.

"The cherry trees themselves are guiding us into the future," a tree owner said. "You plant one, then come back in 10 years and see that it has grown and changed, just as you have done. In a sense, we've grown together."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Let's praise God for His wonderful mercies. Let us not disappoint Him with lack of spiritual advance and growth.

***The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a farmer plants a mustard seed in a field. Although it is the smallest of all seeds, it grows larger than any garden plant and becomes a tree. Birds even come and nest on its branches*** (Matt. 13:31-32, CEV).

There is no limit to growing spiritually. Open up your life to the seed of God, and He will reward you with astonishing results!

MAY 20

## ***IN DARKNESS WITHOUT A LIGHT***

Aki Denki Co. of Japan developed a new type of bicycle headlamp. Mr. Furuike, aged 72, runs the company, which employs just eight people.

In conventional headlamps, a dynamo in contact with a wheel generates the power when a cyclist pedals. This is hard work, tempting many cyclists to pedal in darkness without a light.

Magnets attached to three of the wheel's spokes power Aki Denki's new headlamp. Every time the magnet passes the generator as the wheel turns, electromagnetic induction occurs.

The bicycle is much easier to pedal, as there is no friction between a dynamo and the wheel.

The inspiration for the lamp came when Furuike was driving at night and a cyclist with his headlamp off dashed out in front of him from a side road, nearly causing an accident. He began to wonder whether people would use a light if it did not make pedaling so difficult.

"I hope this new invention will help decrease the number of cyclists dangerously riding their bikes without a light," Furuike says.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Do not choose darkness and death but select light on your way!

***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*** (Ps. 119:105, NIV).

By God's Word, we can see where we are going. We need not aimlessly stagger around in darkness!

***The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple***  
(Ps. 119:130, NIV).

MAY 21

## **SAND FOR STRESS**

Natural sand baths in Japan have a history of over 300 years. Sand infused with hot spring water promises relief from stress and many other ailments.

At the natural sand bath facility at Saraku, Japan, you can go to the front desk, pay your bathing fee and receive a special *yukata* to wear in the sand bath. In the changing room, you strip off all your clothes and put on the *yukata*.

Under a simple roof, about 100 people can lie down. During the holiday season, there can be quite long lines of people waiting for their turn.

Staff members pour sand all over your body with a shovel. All except for your head, that is.

A guest explained that because of the Saraku facility, he never needs any medication. Lying in the comforting sand, you can easily believe him!

Most people lie down for about 10 minutes. With the pressure of the sand all over your body, you soon start to sweat profusely.

The sand bath facility opened at the beach in 1996, and now enjoys 270,000 to 300,000 visitors each year.

“Taking a natural sand bath while listening to the sound of the sea is a superb way of relieving stress,” a visitor said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Sand baths are wonderful but only God gives guaranteed results for the relief of stress – you have His Word on it!

***Don't worry about anything. Instead, tell God about everything. Ask and pray. Give thanks to him. Then God's peace will watch over your hearts and your minds because you belong to Christ Jesus*** (Phil. 4:6-7, NIV).

If you rely on God, there is no need to ever fret and worry about anything!

MAY 22

## ***JUICE OF SIX LEMONS AT ONCE***

Mr. Yukio Hattori, president of a nutrition center in Japan, is probably one of Japan's busiest men. In 26 years of work, he has only taken 23 days off. The 57-year-old flies around the world for TV shows, lecturing at symposiums and judging food contests.

With this demanding schedule, it is difficult for him to maintain healthy habits.

"Yesterday, I was a judge at a food contest held by a department store, he explained. "There were 50 different dishes, which I had to narrow down to 13, and then again to three for the next stage. I ate and ate. The total amount I consumed was about 2.5kg. I had to skip lunch!"

"One of my secrets for keeping well and active is very simple," he informs whoever wants to listen. "Every night before I go to bed, I take six lemons, squeeze them and mix the lemon juice with tonic water, making enough for two big glasses. It is very, very sour. I do this because when you are tired, the level of lactic acid goes up, but the citric acid in lemons decomposes it. So when I wake up the next morning, I feel completely refreshed!"

*Source: Japan Times*

It is good to be sensible in our eating habits, but the Bible tells us that however healthy our eating habits are, they cannot sustain eternal life in the Heavenly Kingdom to come. For that, we need the Spirit of God and His way of life.

***For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men***

(Rom. 14:17-18, NIV).

The most important thing is not what we eat or drink! It is much more significant to have the spirit of goodness, peace and joy placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

MAY 23

## ***WHEELS TO THE ELDERLY***

Recently, a social welfare council in Kyoto, Japan organized an event in which elderly people toured their residential areas by *Velo-taxi*, a pedal-powered tricycle.

Organizers planned the event to encourage the elderly to go out more often. About 140 residents, aged 65 and over boarded five two-seater *Velo-taxis* in turn, enjoying 20-minute rides.

“I thought I was quite familiar with the layout of the area in which I live, but I discovered that many old houses have been turned into reinforced concrete buildings,” said Miss Yoshii, 66, said after riding through her neighborhood for the first time in years.

*Velo-taxis*, developed in Germany, have a maximum speed of 25km/h and operate in 20 cities in 11 countries around the world. Since its launch in Japan, the number of passengers using this service has reached about 96,000.

“It may take time for the service to become popular among local elderly people,” a social worker said. “But the efforts should prevent some of them from developing dementia, reducing the need for nursing care.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Yes, it is good for the elderly to wheel their way to health, but there is something much more important for everyone to consider, whether we are at home or going out for a spin.

We need to have God, the Creator of the universe, live in us and accompany us wherever we go!

***I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the LORD. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you”***

(2 Cor. 6:16-17, NIV).

It is wonderful to enjoy physical health and freedom, but how much more important it is to gain spiritual health.

MAY 24

## ***MYSTERY OF STOLEN NAMEPLATES***

When walking through any residential district in Japan, one sees nameplates at the top of each door or gatepost, announcing who lives inside. Made of wood, ceramic, stainless steel or acrylic resin, each nameplate looks prettier than the next.

However, sometimes these nameplates mysteriously ‘disappear!’ In certain parts of Japan, there is a superstition, that stealing a nameplate will help a student pass an entrance examination!

*Source: Nipponia*

“How could students stoop to something that deplorable in trying to pass their examinations?” you might say.

Maybe we ought rather to pray for them to be able to pass the entrance examination into heaven! No superstitious act will help them then!

Heaven is a glorious place to which no one will ever receive entrance without first having his name added to the list of the redeemed!

Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross of Calvary so that those who believe in His atonement might have their names entered in the Book of Life.

An earthling can do nothing to deserve a ticket to heaven. It is made possible only by the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ.

***Nothing unclean will ever enter the city. No one who does shameful things or tells lies will ever go into it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the city*** (Eph. 5:5, CEV).

Christ has redeemed your life on the cross!

Put your trust in Him and have your name entered in His book as a permanent resident in His heavenly abode!

MAY 25

## ***ROBOTS AIDING THE ELDERLY***

Japan is a virtual robot kingdom. Back in the 1980s in Fanuc's Factory at the foot of Mt. Fuji robots built other robots, inspiring Japanese manufacturers to employ in excess of 410,000 robots – more than half the world's supply. Those robots helped make everything from cars to cell phones, but since then, inventors have brought robots from the factory floor into the living room to assist in the care of the elderly.

If you grow old in Japan, expect meals served by a robot, expect to ride in a voice-recognition wheelchair or even expect care from a nurse in a robotic suit – all examples of cutting-edge technology to care for the country's rapidly graying population.

At a home care convention in Tokyo in 2006, a spoon-feeding robot with its swiveling arm helps the elderly or disabled eat their food.

A rubber and nylon 'muscle suit' developed by the Tokyo University of Science helps keep the elderly active by providing support for the upper body, arms and shoulders. Powered by air pressure actuators, the prototype suit, which looks like an oversized life jacket, provides subtle backing to help older people lift heavy objects.

*Source: Time Asia*

Lonely and needy people are in search of companions that can help and understand their needs. Can robots really fill that role?

Never forget that God is the best Helper ever.

Without His life-giving sustenance and help, we cannot exist for one minute!

***I know that God helps me. The Lord is the one  
who keeps me going*** (Ps. 54:4, NIV).

Do not spurn the aid God gives with every breath you take!

MAY 26

## ***MCDONALDIZATION***

Do you know what the most popular Western restaurant in Japan is? Yes, you guessed it! It is McDonald's!

Following the instructions of the McDonald's manual carefully is the key to success in Japan:

*HAMBURGER: Set the temperature of the lower steel plate at 17 °C and that of the upper plate at 218 °C grill the meat for 38 seconds.*

*BREAD: The thickness of the upper piece is 16mm and that of the lower piece is 13mm.*

*Wash your hands every hour for 30 seconds by rubbing both hands against each other. Clean arms up to the elbows.*

The McDonald's manual is kept on a CD-ROM and the contents are equivalent to 450 pages in 250 chapters.

"It is surely because of the manual that we could expand the chain to 3,700 outlets nationwide, the second only to the United States," said 75-year-old Den Fujita, the president of McDonald's Corporation, Japan.

Today, not only private companies, but also administrative organizations and even traditional Japanese inns have introduced working manuals.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

In your daily activities, never forget that the Bible is the best and only worthy manual for true success and prosperity.

***Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful*** (Josh. 1:8, NIV).

Eat, sleep, work and act by your God-given manual every minute of your life, and God will pour out blessings on you every day!

MAY 27

## ***SANDALS ON HIS HEAD***

The Kagato church, started over 100 years ago, is one of the oldest Protestant churches in Japan. Its members have been through many hardships. God has blessed their witness through times of war and various tribulations.

In the beginning, a believer from that church would make a tremendous impression with his unusual attire as he went out on his tract distribution ministry. He wore straw sandals on his head of all places, and rice straw hats on his feet as he went from house to house distributing tracts.

“The world we live in now is upside down,” he would reply when people questioned him about this odd outfit.

If he said it back then, I wonder what he would say about today’s topsy-turvy globe.

The planet that the Creator-God prepared for us to live in is definitely in a more upside down state now than at any time since He created it!

Egoistic men and women make no place for a Holy God in their daily living.

The Bible encourages us to be unlike those around us and to make a clean break from selfishness and anything that might pollute or distract us from enjoying the purity of our God!

***Since we have these promises, dear friends,  
let us purify ourselves from everything that  
contaminates body and spirit, perfecting  
holiness out of reverence for God***

(2 Cor. 7:1, NIV).

To please God and to be prepared for heaven, we must serve Him every day here on earth and turn away from anything that is wrong. We must live in awe of God!

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see  
God*** (Matt. 5:8, NIV).

MAY 28

## ***THE MOST IMPORTANT MOUNTAIN***

I do not know if you are into mountain climbing, but everyone in Japan who scales mountains knows about Ken Noguchi.

At the age of 25, Noguchi made it to the top of Mt. Everest. The newspapers hailed him for his achievements as the youngest person to challenge the ‘seven highest summits’ of the world.

He was a university student in Tokyo when he started his quest to ascend the highest mountains on each of the seven continents, having already climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro at the age of 16.

At that time such a goal seemed an insurmountable mountain, but over a nine-year period, he achieved this goal and took his place in the record books.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

I know of a much more important mountain to climb.

***In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths”*** (Is. 2:2-3, NIV).

To go up this mountain, we do not need physical strength and special mountain climbing gear, but a spiritual aptitude and a desire to ascend into Holy living.

With God’s help, we can rise above this present evil world and reach the unpolluted heights of God’s Holy Mountain.

Are you on your way – climbing?

MAY 29

## ***HUNDREDS OF SMILES***

In 2000, the 100 Smiles of the *Mona Lisa* Exhibition was held in Tokyo. Many Japanese were disappointed that the exhibition, which encompassed works by artists from all over the world who have copied, referenced, and parodied the *Mona Lisa* painting, did not include the original work by the great Da Vinci.

The original painting did however come to Japan in the spring of 1974. Some 1.51 million visitors streamed through the turnstiles to see the *Mona Lisa*, a record for art exhibitions in Japan.

A young girl was so glad when she saw the *Mona Lisa* in Japan since she had originally planned to travel to Paris to spend hours in front of that unique painting! After seeing the painting, she decided rather to spend all her travel money to get a face-make-over to help her look more like the Mona Lisa! After the exhibition, she approached a plastic surgeon.

“Please change my face to look like the *Mona Lisa*’s,” she requested. “Hers is the most beautiful face I have ever seen!”

*Source: Internet*

We who are of the household of God should have a deep longing to have a life and a face that clearly reflect the beauty of Jesus. How awesome to realize that we can be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ!

***And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect  
the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into  
his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which  
comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit***

(2 Cor. 3:18, NIV).

May the radiance of Christ strongly shine through our lives with ever-increasing brightness and splendor!

Others will be aware of it and long to meet our Christ!

MAY 30

## ***TEN SECONDS TO GO***

People in Osaka are always rushing here and there. They walk faster than any other people in Japan. The hustle and bustle in Osaka and its eagerness to keep moving is part of its culture.

Above some crosswalk lights, there are large display panels with numbers indicating how many seconds one must wait at the crosswalk before the lights change from red to green. When the panel indicates 10 seconds to wait, pedestrians are already crossing the street!

As soon as someone in Osaka gets on an elevator there is a good chance he will push the 'Door Close' button before the door shuts automatically.

Osakans prefer to walk up escalators and along moving sidewalks, rather than stand and relax on them. One survey found that people in Osaka walk at an average speed of 1.6m/s – faster than any other people in the world.

In Osaka they say, *haya-ne haya-meshi* (eat quickly and early to bed). They believe if you go to bed early you will spend less money, and if you eat quickly, you will have more time to work!

Osaka chefs have developed special fast food recipes such as noodle dishes and octopus snacks that satisfy the stomach and are very quick to eat.

Anything in order to quicken the pace!

*Source: Japan Times*

Some things might need to be done faster, but waiting on God is not one of them!

***Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes*** (Ps. 37:7, NIV).

Evildoers might elbow their way to the top but we who walk with God will be at rest, waiting for Him to act on our behalf!

MAY 31

## **LATEST CRAZE – RENT A DOG**

On Sundays, dozens of lonely people gaze at photos of adorable doggies and then hand over money to take a Chihuahua, a toy poodle or a miniature dachshund for an hour's walk. On returning the dog, many give their short-term companions a quick hug and then wave a misty-eyed farewell.

Japanese are fond of animals, but are often unable to keep pets due to cramped homes or strict apartment rules. Animal shops are very popular. In Tokyo alone, there are 115 places registered to rent out pets.

To a person who rents a dog by the hour, the staff gives a leash, some tissues and a plastic bag – in case the pooch has to answer a call of nature. The renter is strictly instructed not to let the dog run free, to keep it in the shade on hot summer days, and to refrain from feeding it snacks.

At a steeper price, renters can take their chosen dog home, along with a day's supply of pet food, a water dish and a cage for the animals to sleep in for an overnight stay.

*Source: News Limited*

Unfortunately, some people over-dote on their pets because they do not know God and His claims.

***For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles***

(Rom. 1:21-23, NIV).

Loving a pet is great, unless it takes the place of God – then it becomes idolatry. Do not trade God for anything, no matter how precious it might be to you!

JUNE

JUNE 1

## ***THE TURNING POINT***

Soichiro Honda went from being a poor country boy to becoming the president of the world-renowned Honda Motor Co. As an elementary school student, he saw his first car and chased after it on his bicycle.

"I remember getting such a thrill from the smell of gasoline that I felt faint," he said. Not long after the end of World War II, Soichiro established Honda Motor Co. This was at a time when having a driver's license was as rare and sought-after as a pilot's license is today.

However, in 1951, Honda Motor Co. was on the verge of bankruptcy. They set out to design the *Dream E*, a motorcycle with Japan's first 4-cycle engine. There was not yet a Japanese motorcycle powerful enough to climb a mountain road and this test run would determine the fate of the company.

The *Dream E* ended up saving the company, which later reached a record production of 130 motorcycles a day. Honda Motor Co. slowly but surely wheeled its way to the uttermost parts of the world.

*Source: Asahi News*

The turning point for Mr. Honda was in 1951 when he was on the verge of bankruptcy.

There should be an important turning point in the life of everyone who sets their feet on the road to heaven.

***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ* (2 Cor. 5:17-18, NIV).**

When you come to Christ in all honesty, He transforms you into a brand new person. The old life and habits are gone; an exciting new way of life becomes a reality for you.

JUNE 2

## ***COLORS OF IMPORTANCE***

In a recent Japanese poll, more than half of the respondents cited the color gray, followed by brown and black, as the most important colors in their lives and experiences.

This survey was in stark contrast to the results of a similar survey conducted about 10 years ago when the colors yellow, gray and blue were preferred.

According to psychiatrists in Japan, the results may reflect a sense of anxiety and helplessness felt by the public.

Underlying this gloomy sentiment is perhaps the growing public distrust of politicians and corruption in high circles.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Which color do you associate with your present experience?

When I read about Japanese sentiments on color, I thought about the *Wordless Book* with its pages of color.

The black page represents sin; the red page illustrates the blood of Christ shed for our forgiveness; the white page shows our hearts purified from sin; the green page represents our need to grow in Christ; and the golden page speaks of our home in heaven.

The Bible also attaches a lot of meaning to colors.

***“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool”*** (Is. 1:18, NKJV).

Settle the sin question with God.

Even if your heart is crimson-stained with sin, it will become as white as virgin snow.

If you do not know Jesus yet as your Savior, remember He shed His precious blood in order to forgive your sins and transform you into a new human being.

JUNE 3

## ***CERTIFIED TO FLY AT 14***

“When I grow up, I want to become the best pilot in the world,” said Jun Yoo-nah, a 14-year-old Korean girl. She passed a sports plane field test, and became a *bona fide* sports pilot of the two-seater plane.

The sports plane is an ultra-light vehicle designed for both relaxation and competition flights. It can carry up to 250kg and fly for two hours at a speed of 120km/h.

Jun already had three years of flying experience. Usually it takes several months to pass the test, but she had to wait until she turned 14, the legal age to become a pilot.

“When I took her to an airfield, she desired to give flying a try,” said her 39-year-old father, who is a construction worker. He enrolled her in Dream Air Co. Ltd., with the hope that she would enjoy flying and grow up bright and cheerful, despite the loss of her mother in an accident three years before.

“At first, what I liked most about flying was the fact that I felt closer to my Mom who is in heaven,” Jun told reporters. Her mother died in an accident three years ago.

*Source: The Korea Herald*

Oh, Jun! When you leave this earth for the last time, there is a possibility you will join your mother in heaven. Just believe and Christ Himself guarantees heaven.

***Say with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord.” Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. Then you will be saved*** (Rom. 10:9, NIV).

We are certainly not going to heaven because we are good and cheerful, accomplished, or excellent, but because Christ died for our sins and opened to us the way to a marvelous life on earth followed by an eventual heaven.

Why is it that millions stumble over this sheer simplicity?

JUNE 4

## ***A ROBBER OF 130 PLACES***

At 23 years of age, a son left his home to seek his fortune. First, he went into a local bar and robbed everyone. He never imagined it could be so easy to get a hold of cash. For the next 18 years, he went from town to town having a good time and was never short of money again.

In a little Japanese country town, his mother started to look for him when she was 82.

“My son left our home 30 years ago,” she informed the local police. “If he is still alive, can you find him?”

After many enquiries, the police told her the shocking news that they had found him in jail.

She wrote him a letter, asking him to ‘turn over a new leaf’ and come back to live with her. On receiving such a letter, he completely broke down and made a full confession to the police about the 130 places he had robbed.

“My mother loves me!” he declared unashamedly. “I am willing to take whatever comes to me, but when I am through with my jail sentence, I want to go home to be with mother.”

*Source: Mainichi News*

The story made me think about the prodigal son and his decision to go home to his father.

***When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men’*** (Luke 15:17-19, NIV).

Oh! That sinners might know the incredible love of God!

He wants to welcome them back with gladness when they have strayed from Him.

JUNE 5

## ***FOUR TINY VACCINATION DOTS***

“I would not have realized that I was Japanese had it not been for the scar on my arm.” said He Rixin, a 56-year-old Chinese tourist in Japan. While taking a hot-spring bath, she noticed that the vaccination scar on her left arm was similar to those on the Japanese arms around her. The Chinese vaccination scar has three small holes in a row. Hers, like the Japanese, had four holes in a square. Increasingly intrigued, she went to the hot springs every two days and discovered that all the Japanese women of her age bore the same type of scar as hers.

After many phone calls back to her father in China, he reluctantly admitted that her mother, whoever she was, had abandoned her as an infant. Her father found her beside some railway tracks. It was a great sacrifice for them to take her in, but he and his wife felt they were fated to take care of her.

She appreciated her Chinese parents and all they did for her, but she had a very strong desire to search for her Japanese relatives and resettle with them. However, the media failed to trace her family.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

In a somewhat similar way, human beings are estranged from the God who created them and He urges them to come back to Him and His household.

***You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*** (Jer. 29:13, NIV).

What the prophet Jeremiah said to Israel was true then and is definitely true in our day. It is a thousand times better to be in the household of God than to remain encircled by any pleasures this sinful world offers which keep us away from Him.

So, more than anything else in life, get serious in finding and living for God!

JUNE 6

## ***ACCIDENTAL ACCELERATION CURBED***

Nissan Motor Co. has developed a system of using cameras and sensors designed to suppress the acceleration pedal and apply the brake should the need arise. It applies the brakes if the driver mistakenly presses the accelerator when the car stopped.

There are four cameras installed, one on each side and an ultrasonic sensor for the front and rear of the car. Nissan's Elgrand minivan marks the first sales employing such a system.

The system is designed to detect parking-space lines, walls and other obstacles in parking lots and will automatically engage the brakes should the accelerator be pressed. Nissan plans to equip compact cars and sedans, which are popular among middle-aged and elderly drivers.

According to the National Police Agency, there were 6,432 car accidents nationwide in 2011 when drivers accidentally stepped on accelerators instead of brake pedals.

Drivers in 30 percent of these accidents were 65 years or older, and it is feared that an increasing number of elderly drivers will be involved in such accidents in the future.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

As followers of Christ we often blow it, but God in His mercy provides forgiveness!

***Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But  
the Lord delivers him out of them all***  
(Ps. 34:19, NKJV).

If we trust in God, He certainly knows how to get us out of a tight spot! We just need to cry to Him!

***The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears,  
And delivers them out of all their troubles***  
(Ps. 34:17, NKJV).

God is listening and ready to rescue for time and eternity!

JUNE 7

## ***PROUD ROBOT DAD***

I read in the *Asia Times* of Mr. Hashimoto, the 44-year-old engineer who gave birth to ‘the magnificent seven’ of industrial robots. He calls them his children.

In a factory setting, they put together car starter motors in a ballet of efficiency. If one member slows down, another robot slides into place in the assembly line, picks up a tool and takes over. Officials and academics from around the world make pilgrimages to Denso Corporation in Nagoya, Japan to watch them in action.

“I feel like a nervous father, quietly praying at formal occasions that my children would give their best performance,” says Mr. Hashimoto.

“We wanted robots that would work independently like humans with their arms, legs and eyes. Unlike conventional robots that are fixed and designed to perform just one job in one place, ours function in coordination with others.”

They carry out various functions that include picking out the appropriate tool from a table as they switch jobs on the assembly line.

Equipped with visual sensors, they avoid bumping into one another as they move along a magnetic tape laid out on the floor. Informed of the assembly line’s performance status, they can judge where labor is needed most and come to the rescue.

Mr. Hashimoto is proud of his ‘children’. We should also be proud of the children God has given us. They are a gift from God.

***Children who are born to people when they are young are like arrows in the hands of a soldier. Blessed are those who have many children. They won't be put to shame when they go up against their enemies in court***

(Ps. 127:4-5, NIV).

Children are God’s greatest blessing to parents!

JUNE 8

## ***TOYS FOR GRANNIES***

(Sent in by Paul Clarke)

Toys are no longer just for children.

*Primopuel* is a knee-high Japanese doll with soft apple cheeks and big black button eyes, created by the Bandai Company. It comes in green and pink. When you cuddle or talk to it, it talks back. Designed for grandmothers, the two-tone doll can ‘master’ up to 5 songs and 380 words in the course of a year, provided it is talked to and cuddled.

“Families are living apart these days, so grandchildren are giving the dolls to their grandmothers, and daughters to their mothers,” said Bandai’s Tajima Toy Store spokesperson. “It’s a little odd, but the dolls become like substitutes.”

*Primopuel* is Bandai’s best-selling doll with more than a million sold, mostly to women in their 50s and 60s.

Sega Toys Co.’s *Dream Golden Retriever* is also for adults. The life-size puppy robot wags its tail when petted, looks lovingly into your eyes when you pat its cheek, and responds to six commands, including ‘sit up and beg’.

“A robot is probably better than nothing. People want companionship,” said Tomoyoshi Inoue, a professor of education at Kyoto’s Doshisha University. “I don’t know if I’d buy one, but I guess people are just lonely.”

*Source: Japan Times*

I encourage young and old with the powerful Word of God:

***The LORD’s compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him*** (Lam. 3:22-25, NIV).

God’s faithfulness towards us is new and fresh every day.

JUNE 9

## ***NO FRIENDS FOR 19 YEARS***

“I’m 19 years old and I’ve never had a friend. Consequently, I’ve attempted suicide twice,” a man lamented on his Internet home page.

About 65 people commit suicide in Japan every day and the rate is increasing. Many people are lonely and in despair because they are overwhelmed with life’s problems.

Unfortunately, the Internet offers many deceptive ‘solutions’ to such people in trouble.

A woman in a desperate frame of mind decided to browse through the Internet to find out about ways to commit suicide. Out of the 24,000 sites she visited, she found a site that offered cyanide for sale. She ordered a supply and took her life.

By tracing the websites she had visited, the police discovered the provider of the cyanide. The site, managed by a schoolteacher sold ‘medication to those wanting to commit suicide.’

The police contacted the man via the telephone number he had written on the parcel’s address form to the woman who committed suicide. Realizing her death might be pinned on him, he killed himself.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

There is so much deception and evil on the Internet, but followers of Christ have a light that shines with great clarity in a world of utter darkness and confusion. The Manual of Life, the Bible, has helped many troubled ones find lasting solutions to their problems.

***My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life*** (Ps. 119:50, NIV).

No matter how distressed you are, God’s Word can rejuvenate you! Give His powerful Word a chance in your life.

JUNE 10

## ***A BRIDGE FOR THE GREATEST CHASM***

The Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge in Japan, also known as Pearl Bridge, is the longest suspension bridge in the world. The bridge links the mainland of Honshu to Awaji Island across the busy Akashi Strait.

Its total length is 3,911m. The height of the bridge's central tower is about 300m. It is indeed a magnificent sight.

Before the bridge was built, ferries carried passengers across the divide. This dangerous waterway often has severe storms. In 1955, two ferries sank, drowning 168 children. The ensuing shock and public outrage convinced the national government to draw up plans for a suspension bridge. The bridge, carrying six lanes of traffic, opened on April 5, 1998.

*Source: The Internet*

There is a bridge that spans an even greater chasm. Our sin has caused a great separation from God, so we need a bridge back to God.

***Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear*** (Is. 59:2, NIV).

People try to build many types of bridges to span the gulf between sinful man and a Holy God. Some have tried to reach God through good works. Bridges built by human methods and inventions are no good in the eyes of God.

***[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time*** (2 Tim. 1:9, NIV).

Do not trample the grace of Christ!

JUNE 11

## ***THE CLICKING OF CELL PHONES***

Mayumi uses her cell phone to send photos of herself to her boyfriend – several times a day! Itari enjoys snapping cell phone pictures of cats on the street. Commuters store shots of train schedules on their cell phones for future reference. Buyers at the fish market beam photos of frozen tuna to sushi chefs across Japan before placing their bids.

In 2002, cell phones with built-in digital cameras took Japan by storm. A couple of clicks allow you to take a photo, store it and send it by e-mail to virtually any mobile phone in the world. Some personalize the photos with a written message.

The Osaka police were getting dozens of cell phone photos a month of possible stolen cars or other suspicious activities from concerned citizens at possible crime scenes.

The godless use cell phone data to forge digital alibis, by sending previously taken photos of themselves at work to husbands or wives back home, when in real time they are off having affairs at some romantic spot!

“When arriving at home, one must make sure to wear the same clothes that were worn in the picture,” advised a crafty systems engineer.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Increasingly, many gadgets and devices lead people away from the paths of God. Remember His warning and advice to us.

***The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever***

(1 John 2:17, NIV).

This world with all its sinful temptations will fade away and only those who keep to the will of God will receive His benefits.

JUNE 12

## ***SUICIDES IN RECORD NUMBERS***

The prolonged economic slump since the dawn of the new century in Japan has driven many entrepreneurs and company presidents to commit suicide.

The country's economic troubles seem to be a major factor in the increase of suicides. Japan is grappling with its deepest recession in 50 years and every day, the newspapers report suicides.

The president of a printing company was pouring over sales records alone in his office. He was at the end of his tether. After leaving four suicide notes on his desk, he took his own life by driving his car over the edge of a pier in Tokyo Bay. In the note to his wife, he said that he felt he had no other choice as the situation had become intolerable.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is a deeply ingrained tradition in Japan to regard suicide as an honorable way to atone for failure and express remorse.

The main reason people commit suicide is that they have lost hope. Looking ahead, they cannot see any meaningful future and they feel utterly hopeless. It is not so for those who put their trust in God.

***Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God*** (Ps. 42:11, NIV).

***The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love*** (Ps. 33:18, NIV).

No matter what pain or trial we face in this life, we know it is not our final experience.

If we trust in the love of Christ, we will live in heavenly glory with Him forever. Our only hope and security lies in trusting Him.

JUNE 13

## ***A SCRAP OF PAPER IN A BOX***

Kunitaro Mikami went off to war and never returned.

Keiji Mikami still vividly recalls the day in January 1943, when his brother left for the war zone.

“I probably won’t return. Please look after Mum and Dad,” were Kunitaro’s final words to Keiji. Now 70 years old, Keiji took those words to be the last will and testament of his brother.

Every day, his nearly deaf father sat by the road outside of the family home waiting for his missing son to return. When they finally received an official government notice of Kunitaro’s death – a scrap of white paper inside a wooden box – his father threw the box away in disgust.

For 60 years, Keiji wondered what had become of his brother’s mortal remains. After advances in DNA testing, Keiji decided to ask the government to identify Kunitaro’s remains. Establishing the link to the family through DNA taken from Kunitaro’s teeth, the government returned Kunitaro’s ashes to the Mikami home on March 23, 2004.

“I am full of emotion,” said Keiji as he placed Kunitaro’s remains in the family grave alongside those of his parents. “The war is now finally over for our family.”

*Source: Asahi News*

Death has no victory over those who have said ‘yes’ to Jesus Christ. We have the certainty of Heaven.

***We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him*** (1 Thess. 4:13-14, NIV).

Believers in our Savior, Jesus Christ, have a most sure hope after death – the hope of eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

JUNE 14

## ***SOLDERING FOR 14 YEARS***

Wielding a miniature soldering iron with speed and dexterity, Mrs. Masuda, a female engineer at Sharp Corporation's factory in Nara, Japan, joins ultra-fine semiconductor chips as small as one millimeter across to integrated circuits. She is one of the company's top engineers. The company certified her as one of its 'Masters of Manufacturing,' chosen from about 4,000 engineers working at the company's 10 factories. Among only seven masters, two are women.

"In our company, it is rare for female engineers to keep working long enough to master a specific skill," Mr. Okada, the factory's production manager said. It is hard for female workers to juggle both work and motherhood, particularly in the constantly evolving field of science and technology.

To help women, especially homemakers, to be effective in their vocation, a number of companies and schools have embarked on projects to create better working environments for female workers.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***One skilled worker makes a statue of a god. Another covers it with gold. The first worker says to the second, "You have done a good job." Another worker smoothes out the metal with a hammer. Still another gives the statue its final shape. The third worker says to the last one, "You have done a good job." Then they nail the statue down so it won't fall over***  
***(Is. 41:7, NIV).***

Working people need encouragement! Even idol worshippers encourage each other. How much more should we encourage each other as Christians!

Are you an encourager of your fellow workers?

JUNE 15

## ***TRANSPARENT CLOTHES***

Some time ago, I read in the Daily Yomiuri about a very special video camera produced by the Sony Corporation.

Boasting that it could film the faces of sleeping babies in the dark or the behavior of nocturnal pets, Sony enjoyed healthy sales – selling 870,000 units by the end of July that year.

The feature that made this particular camera so popular was the so-called ‘night-shot function’, which records objects clearly even in darkness, beyond the scope of normal human vision.

Later, to their horror, it was discovered that under certain conditions, the clothes of the people recorded by the cameras became ‘transparent’. They immediately suspended the shipments of seven types of this camera.

“Modifications have now been made to correct the problem, and shipments have been resumed,” an embarrassed official of Sony announced.

When I read this news item, I was reminded of how utterly transparent we are in the sight of an all-seeing God.

***[Hagar] gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me”*** (Gen. 16:13, NIV).

How careful our conduct before God should be, when we realize that His camera is upon us. Everything that is not covered by the blood of Jesus Christ will be revealed one day.

***Everything that is secret will be brought out into the open. Everything that is hidden will be uncovered*** (Luke 12:2, NIrV).

Nothing can ever be concealed from God!

JUNE 16

## ***WHIPPING AROUND TOWN***

More and more business documents make their way across Tokyo on two wheels. Clad in bright racing jerseys, bicycle couriers fly through central business districts bearing documents entrusted to them by companies for safe delivery.

Bicycle couriers originated in New York City around 1970 and made their first appearance in Tokyo in 1987.

One leading bike courier company employs as many as a hundred cyclists and handles a thousand packages a day.

Traffic Jams? No Problem! Bicycle couriers, unlike motorbike couriers, use sidewalks and go up one-way streets. They choose the quickest route by nimbly avoiding stoplights.

Some of the messengers are die-hard cyclists that see their jobs as an extension of their racing hobbies. One of the cyclists finished third in a nationwide triathlon tournament.

Outfitted with eye-catching helmets, sunglasses, and messenger bags, they sail past motorbikes on crowded streets. Bicycle couriers have become very popular.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

We Christians are also in the delivery business. We convey the Word of God as quickly and as efficiently as possible to all inquirers.

Prayer puts wheels under God's Word. We pray that the Word of God may be conveyed without hindrance to every nation, every kindred, every tongue, and every people.

***Finally, our friends, please pray for us. This will help the message about the Lord to spread quickly, and others will respect it, just as you do* (2 Thes. 3:1, CEV).**

Let's run with the Word of God to as many as have not heard the glorious message of Jesus Christ.

JUNE 17

## **FIRST ROBOT WORLD CUP**

The player neatly catches the ball, places it on the marked spot then kicks it. Hurrah! He scores a goal! The soccer player on this team however, receives no salary because it is a robot.

The first fledgling Robot World Cup was held in Nagoya, Japan, in August 1997. It had problems to solve in a wide range of technologies. Even so the RoboCup Federation boldly stated its aim:

*By 2050, a team of fully autonomous humanoid robot soccer players, complying with the official FIFA rules, will beat the champion team of the most recent human World Cup tournament.*

The first step in developing soccer-playing robots started with a giant, cumbersome prototype called *Everyday*. The next *Everyday* version still had no fingers. The following version could bend at the waist and had one finger. Later versions could walk, kick, punch, duck, do handstands and twirl. In addition, it quite easily found a colored ball, approached and kicked it toward a colored goal.

Whether these improvements will enable the RoboCup Federation to beat a human team by 2050 remains to be seen.

*Source: Internet sites*

The Japanese are intent on making robots as similar as possible to the human frame, but it will be impossible to produce robots with real life.

***The body without the spirit is dead. In the same way, faith without good works is dead***  
(James 2:26, NIV).

Some human beings are as dead spiritually as these robots. Those made alive by the miraculous working power of God will be recognizable by a living faith that stimulates them to vibrant good works.

JUNE 18

## ***WALKING TO FITNESS***

Each year about 50,000 people from 50 countries come together in Saitama, near Tokyo, to take part in the *Japan Three-Day March*.

The participants walk at their own pace and choose which of the three days and which of the five courses – ranging from 5 to 50km – they wish to cover.

The rapidly graying population of Japan sees walking as a means of keeping fit and keeping medical expenses down.

What is more, the central government is interested in funding such programs. It has found that, under the supervision of a specialist and with the aid of portable instruments to measure activity, brisk walking improves one's health.

The government is also considering promoting the program of walking for health to the national level.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

A pedometer in Japan is called a *mampokei* – literally a 10,000-step-meter. The idea is to walk 10,000 steps a day.

A sedentary person may only average 1,000 to 3,000 steps a day. For these people, adding steps has many health benefits.

A reasonable goal for most people is to increase daily steps each week by 500 per day until they can easily average 10,000 per day. Then, in Japan, one is no longer regarded as sedentary but as active.

Walking for exercise is very good, but walking by faith is much better, eh?

### ***For we walk by faith, not by sight***

(2 Cor. 5:7, NIV).

Indeed, a closer walk with God results in improved spiritual, mental and physical well-being!

In addition, when we walk by faith it means that we are secure while we focus on the greatness and glory of God.

JUNE 19

## ***TO BEAT STRESS***

More and more people in Japan are turning to ascetic pursuits to relieve the stresses of modern life.

Two such activities are sutra copying, which involves copying out Buddhist scripture portions with an ink brush, and Zen meditation, where people sit in a temple clearing their minds of worldly thoughts.

Rows of people kneel before writing tables in the vast hall of Sensoji temple. The faint scent of incense wafts through the dead silence in the hall as students write exact strokes for each Japanese character of a sutra.

There is a conspicuous jump in the number of working women in their twenties and thirties turning to sutra copying, meditation, and other disciplines training for stress relief and inspiration. It takes less than an hour for the 400 available places to fill up.

After an hour, a bell rings, the tension lifts, and the students stretch their legs and look refreshed.

As modern society becomes harried and less forgiving, people long to relax their minds and free themselves from its pressure. They are doing their level best to defeat stress.

“I feel refreshed when I finish writing,” a woman who works for a trading company in Tokyo said.

*Source: Japan Information Network*

Defeating stress is difficult for us as human beings. It is easy when we fully rely on the God who made us and understands our innermost needs!

***Turn your worries over to the LORD. He will keep you going. He will never let godly people fall*** (Ps. 55:22, NIV).

If we trust God and give our doubts and fears over to Him, He never lets us down and teaches us to be victorious in the most trying of situations.

JUNE 20

## ***ACID THROWN IN HER FACE***

Beauty contest winner Ms. Aomori was ecstatic. Consumed with jealousy, her friend waited for her around a corner and then threw acid in her face. From that day on, they hated each other – Ms. Aomori in a hospital bed and her friend in jail.

A local minister visited Aomori in the hospital and urged her to forgive her rival.

“Do not ask me to forgive that good-for-nothing!” she vehemently replied. “I will do anything to get God into my life but I will never, never forgive her!”

“If you cannot forgive your enemy, you cannot have a part in the kingdom of God,” the minister assured her. That night she found no rest until Christ in His mercy showed her the way to go.

***Your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you; but if you refuse to forgive them, he will not forgive you***

(Matt. 6:14, TLB).

Aomori wrote a letter to her attacker, forgiving and said she no longer bore any malice toward her. When her assailant finished her jail sentence, she had nowhere to go. She turned up at Aomori’s apartment, prostrating herself on the floor.

“I am not worthy of it, but please forgive me.” she pleaded and Aomori replied: “I have not only forgiven you, but I love you.” Since that day, they have lived together in the same apartment, testifying to the world of the marvelous love of Jesus.

*Source: Ministerial Stories from Northern Japan*

***Put up with each other. Forgive the things you are holding against one another. Forgive, just as the LORD forgave you*** (Col. 3:13, NIRV).

If you do not freely forgive, you can never enter heaven.

JUNE 21

## ***WORLD'S HIGHEST DUMP***

On his five trips to Mt. Everest, acclaimed Japanese mountaineer Ken Noguchi, in addition to gathering experience, has collected more than 9 tons of garbage from the mountain!

The piles of rubbish mountaineering parties leave behind dismayed him, so he set his mind to clean up what he calls ‘the highest dumping site in the world’.

“Mt. Everest is a very special place for me,” he said. “I organize clean-up missions as a gateway to spread environmental protection activities throughout Japan’s society.”

His talks to primary school children in Japan have yielded tangible results: one group of kids cleaned their neighborhood on their own initiative, and then they undertook a clean-up expedition to Mt. Fuji.

*Source: The Internet*

There is a mountain, described in the Bible that is much more important than Mt. Everest or the famous Mt. Fuji of Japan! It is the mountain of the Lord. We should encourage as many as possible to ascend this mountain!

***Who may live on your holy mountain? Those whose walk is blameless, who do what is righteous, who speak the truth from their hearts; who have no slander on their tongues, who do their neighbors no wrong, who cast no slur on others; who despise those whose ways are vile but honor whoever fears the LORD; who keep their oaths even when it hurts; who lend money to the poor without interest and do not accept bribes against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken*** (Ps. 15: 2-5, TNIV).

If we purify our hands and hearts to practice honesty and speak truth, we can go up the holy mountain of God and continually abide in fellowship with Him.

I urge you to ascend this mountain of all mountains!

JUNE 22

## ***CELL PHONE CAMERAS***

When cellular phones with digital cameras came on the market in Japan in 2001, they were an instant hit among young users. Apparently suited to the communication style of the digital generation, they became a permanent and prominent fixture.

Young women used their cellular phones to send their friends e-mail reports of their pets, display items they intend to give away at flea markets or to show off a new hairstyle to a boyfriend.

Others took pictures to remember where they parked their car, scanned printed documents such as clippings of text from newspapers, or used their cell phone as a mirror before arriving at a party; taking self-pictures to check their make up.

Before removing cables to computers, pictures are taken to remember the right ports to plug in again.

When shopping alone, one man sent a quick e-mail picture to his spouse to help him check articles in the shop.

“I can clearly show my facial expression using my digital camera,” said Takashi Yamaguchi, 23, who works at a restaurant. “The person on the other end would know if I was angry or smiling.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Maybe we would not like other people to watch everything we feel or do by e-mail cameras, but we sometimes forget that God is an all-knowing God, acquainted with the secrets, intentions and thoughts of all men to the smallest detail.

***The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart***  
(1 Sam. 16:7, NIV).

It is important to remember that our God has His eyes constantly upon us, beyond physical appearance, looking right to the core of our hearts.

JUNE 23

## ***ROBOT HOME GUARD***

*Roborior*, ‘the first practical home-use security robot’, became available in Japan in 2006. Greater consumer interest in crime prevention spurred the design of *Roborior*.

The watermelon-sized eyeball-on-wheels glows purple, blue and orange, and is armed with a digital camera, infrared sensors and a videophone.

When not on duty, *Roborior* functions as interior decoration; but in its owner’s absence, it is a virtual watchdog. The infrared sensor-studded robot can detect an intruder within a 5-meter radius and send a flood of necessary information. It calls its master or mistress on their cellular phone and sends cell phone videos from its digital camera.

*Roborior* is so popular that extremely limited supplies were soon gone and stores had to take orders.

The 26cm tall robot weighs about 3kg. Owners can control it by cell phone, look around their home through the robot’s camera and talk to people on the premises.

*Even Source: Asahi News*

This eyeball on wheels, guarding the house for its owner, is a strong reminder of God’s all-seeing eyes, never resting from watching out for people, whose hearts are perfect towards Him. To them He wants to show His great power by helping them.

***If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast***

(Ps. 139:8-10, NIV).

God is everywhere to help those who ask Him!

JUNE 24

## ***ROBOT GUIDE DOGS***

The *Hitomi* ‘guide dog’ is designed to help visually impaired people move about. *Hitomi*, which means pupil (of the eye), has a high-speed image recognition system that guides the user to his or her destination.

Onboard computers process information and send signals to its electric motors. For example, when the robot encounters an obstacle, sensors detect it and the robot stops walking. While indoors, the robot uses the border between the floor and walls as a cue for guidance. Outdoors, it uses curbstones, pedestrian crossings, and similar objects as its cues.

When a visually impaired user grasp handles fixed to the robots back, *Hitomi* informs him or her of traffic signal colors and traffic conditions. It also has a learning function, allowing it to memorize routes and gently guide its users to their destinations. The guidance system can also be fixed to a wheelchair.

There are about 300,000 visually impaired people in Japan getting about with the use of a white cane or a guide dog. The number of guide dogs cannot keep pace with the need, so *Hitomi* is an alternative solution, allowing visually impaired people to go from one place to another safely without a guide dog.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

With just our own abilities, we are entirely blind spiritually. We need God to guide us all the way, until we reach heaven.

***You hold me by my right hand. You give me wise advice to guide me. And when I die, you will take me away into the glory of heaven***

(Ps. 73:23-24, NIV).

How wonderful to know that, if we belong to God, He Himself is safely and systematically guiding us into the unknown, until we reach glory.

JUNE 25

## ***LEFT-HANDEDNESS IN VOGUE***

About 10 percent of Japanese are left-handed. Lefties in Japan have a tough life. Holding chopsticks with the left hand is considered ill-mannered, so parents often ‘correct’ a child’s left-handedness.

Living in a right-handed world is not always easy. Implements are geared for right-hand use. Automatic ticket gates at train stations, vending machines and home appliances are all designed for easy operation with the right hand. Even pens and spectacles are positioned to the right side of the writing area at bank and post office counters.

Living from day to day in such an environment can be stressful for lefties; hence, more and more goods designed for lefties are coming on the market, such as left-handed scissors and can openers. There are bottle openers that are made to be turned counter clockwise, folding fans that open from the right to the left, and watches with the crown on the left. Even so left-handed people often do not fit in a right-handed world.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

In a way, we who want to live for God are worse off in this unrighteous world than left-handers in a right-handed world.

We do not fit in. We are not citizens of this world and we long for a place with better standards. The saints of the Bible did not feel at home in this world either.

***All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth***

(Heb. 11:13, NIV).

God-lovers are foreigners in a world where many people spurn God. We do not feel at home here. We are on our way to a much better and glorious place without a trace of sin.

JUNE 26

## ***GOOD-BYE TO BUGS***

“On July 7th, all bad bugs left our island. How do I know? I and 40 other islanders threw them out ourselves. It was ‘*Mushi Okuri*’ (“Sending Off Bugs Day”), so we kicked them off our island,” writes Miss Amy Chavez, living on Shiraishi Island, Japan, with 800 other inhabitants.

“I’ve always annihilated the bugs on our island in the usual way: swatting, squashing, decapitating or spraying them with insecticide – but this is not the Buddhist way. Buddhists don’t like to kill anything, not even bugs; so instead, they merely send them off and hope they are convinced to stay away.”

The island’s elementary schoolchildren drew all kinds of bugs on paper – cute drawings of termites, centipedes, worms, hornets, beetles and many other unrecognizable ones – enough for everyone to hold a ‘bug’ to throw in the ‘bug boat’ and send them off to sea.

“What was more surprising was that two days later some men knocked on my door to inform me that they would be spraying my neighborhood for pine bark beetles,” Amy said. “Now I think about it, no one made a sketch of a pine bark beetle.”

*Source: Japan Lite*

You cannot chase bugs away that easily! When Adam sinned, God pronounced a curse on the soil.

***But we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Godliness will make its home there. All of this is in keeping with God’s promise. Dear friends, I know you are looking forward to that. So try your best to be found pure and without blame. Be at peace with God*** (2 Pet. 3:13-14, TLB).

God has promised us a new earth without curse or sin, where there will only be unsurpassable goodness. Are you ready to enter heaven where there will be no evil in any shape or form?

JUNE 27

## **LAVISHING CARE ON AGING PETS**

Nowadays, many owners take out nursing care and medical insurance services for their animals.

At a care service provider for pets, a dog with bald patches in its fur looks happy as its hind legs are bathed in warm water containing lavender herb essence. Minori Ito, a caregiver for animals, scratches the dog behind its ears and rubs its head with a towel. In human terms, the 16-year-old dog is about 80. When dogs get older, they suffer from poor blood flow, shoulder discomfort and difficulties controlling body temperature.

While Ito, one of 10 staffers at the facility, walks a dog, gives it snacks to strengthen its jaw and provides it with other care into the evening, the dog's owner, a 54-year-old company employee, can concentrate on her job.

"After my parents passed away, I was the only one left to care for the dog. This day-service is very convenient," the woman said.

The company also offers counseling for owners who feel fatigued due to taking care of elderly dogs.

The nation's aging dogs are increasingly being doted on. Rika Kayama, a psychiatrist who also keeps dogs and cats, said this is due to people having fewer children and to poor relationships among family members, leading some owners to treat their pets as being more important than members of their own family.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is very good to take good care of our pets in their old age, but it is terrible if we dote on them and they become idols!

***Dear children, keep away from anything that  
might take God's place in your hearts. Amen***

(1 John 5:21, TLB).

God should be the center of our existence and the heart of our relationships.

JUNE 28

## **SNAKE STOPS 27 TRAINS**

A snake got caught in power lines, causing an interruption in electric services. Railway workers found the one-meter-long dead serpent wrapped around a pole and an insulator. The snake touched a 25,000-volt electric wire that electrocuted it, causing a short circuit, thereby delaying 27 trains for as long as 61 minutes, and inconveniencing some 14,000 passengers.

*Source: Mainichi News*

A snake stopping 27 trains? Yes, a small thing can happen to jeopardize a whole system!

Spiritually, it is the same! If we go wrong, many people around us are affected. When Achan sinned, Israel suffered a shocking military defeat. Thirty-six soldiers died as Achan brought trouble to the whole nation of Israel.

***Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath”***

(Josh. 7:20-21, NIV).

May God help us not to sin and not to bring calamity to our family or other people.

Our walk can be pure and upright if we obey God's directives.

***Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart*** (1 Pet. 1:22, NIV).

May we clean up our lives by following the way of truth and sincere love.

JUNE 29

## ***ABANDONED BICYCLES***

A nation-wide free rental service, *Ecochari.com*, was launched to make effective use of abandoned bicycles, helping students who are financially strapped and raising awareness of how to treat property with respect. Many universities worry about the large number of bicycles that students abandon – some institutions removing more than 1,000 bicycles each year.

Ecochari.com pays the cost of delivering the bikes to and from the users, asking users to return their bicycles on graduation.

“Abandoned bicycles can be put to good use by incoming students, but it needs an organization that understands supply and demand,” a representative for the company said.

*Source: Ecochari.com*

Giving new purpose to abandoned bicycles reminds me of God’s powerful plan of recovery for us.

***He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people***

(Ps. 113:7-8, NIV).

God stoops down to the poorest of men in their most abject circumstances to make them objects of his mercy.

***He sets the poor on high, far from affliction***

(Ps. 107:41, NKJV).

Despicable ones, He makes honorable.

***He sets on high those who are lowly, And those who mourn are lifted to safety***

(Job 5:11, NKJV).

God finds lost human beings on the sad garbage dumps of the world and appoints them to seats of honor.

JUNE 30

## ***DESPERATE TO DE-STRESS***

In Beijing and Shanghai, young white-collar workers toil to meet harsh deadlines set by demanding bosses. By night, they form packs and prowl supermarkets, swiping biscuits, defizzing soft drinks and crushing noodle packs in their quest to ‘de-stress’.

Others turn to stress eating. On June 30, 2010, some 50 such workers in their 20s and 30s took part in a contest called *Let's Go Crazy!* They wolfed down biscuits larger than their faces while yelling out their grievances about work.

Other mass de-stressing activities include public pillow fights and an immensely popular online game where young adults wake up in the middle of the night to ‘steal vegetables’ from virtual gardens.

Such unusual pursuits reflect the collective craving of hundreds of millions of young office workers, who seek outlets that can deflect some of the stress they face at work. These stresses are brought about by factors ranging from unreasonable superiors to fears of retrenchment amid the recent downturn.

*Source: The Straits Times*

***Don't fret and worry—it only leads to harm***

(Ps. 37:8, TLB).

Worry, worry, worry! It will get you no good results!

***Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is the Father who gives tender love. All comfort comes from him. He comforts us in all our troubles. Now we can comfort others when they are in trouble. We ourselves have received comfort from God***

(2 Cor. 1:3-4, NIV).

Once you are a receiver of the inexhaustible love of God, you can give it away to others!

JULY

JULY 1

## ***DOGS OVER CHILDREN***

(Sent in by Frank Nakashima)

Japan's birth rate keeps plunging, and the number of Japanese children in schools continues to drop. However, according to pet industry figures, Japanese families now have more than 19 million pet dogs and cats; exceeding the number of children under 15, which has just hit a new low of 17.8 million.

Japan's birthrate has been falling for decades, a trend largely attributed to changing values among the younger generation. They find less fulfillment in marriage and children.

Miss Asahara and her friends are approaching age 30 and have achieved something once considered rare for Japanese women: careers, financial independence, and personal freedom.

Many of Japan's young women do not want to get married. They are postponing the event – or not getting married at all, because they think becoming a traditional Japanese wife will mean giving up their freedoms. Whereas those who do want to get married are postponing the event. As a result, Japan's birthrate has dropped sharply to become one of the lowest in the world.

As the birthrate drops, Japanese pamper their pets. Some dogs are enjoying a lifestyle many humans can only envy: weekend spa visits, pasta lunches at open-air cafes, and even designer clothing.

*Source: Social Studies*

***Jesus replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, LORD,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour***  
(Matt. 15:26-28, NIV).

Dogs are fine to keep, but children are of far greater value!

JULY 2

## ***MASSIVE KITE FILLS THE SKY***

The Japan Kite Association flew the world's largest kite above Tokyo in January 2006. The kite, measuring 25m by 40m has a total surface area of 1,000m<sup>2</sup>.

"Japan has a long tradition of kite flying which has been passed down for a thousand years. We cannot just wistfully look at other nations' successful attempts to fly giant kites," reckoned Masaki Modegi, the 66-year-old head of the association.

Once up in the air and fully inflated, the nylon kite, which does not have a bone framework, spreads out like a soft quilt.

It is a monster kite, weighing about 250kg. To fly the behemoth, about 80 members of the association must attach the kite by ropes to a truck.

"The most fascinating thing about any kite is its struggle with the wind. If there's a good wind, it takes off easily, but if there is no wind, flight is impossible," Mr. Modegi says.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

No one can predict the pattern of a wind! You can hear its rustle through the trees, but you have no idea where it originates and where it is heading.

***The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit*** (John 3:8, NIV).

We cannot see the wind, but we can see what the wind is doing! In the same way, when the Wind of God, the Holy Spirit, is working in the heart of a human being, a mysterious thing is happening. We can only see the results through a changed life!

Has the Spirit of God already transformed you into a new creature?

JULY 3

## ***BANANA LEAF CLOTHES***

In banana-producing countries, some 1 billion tons of stems and leaves are thrown away annually. In 2002, Nissinbo Industries of Japan developed a denim-like cloth using banana stems. In addition to a greater capacity to absorb water, banana stem fibers dry quickly and offer a high level of breathability. Now the use of various plant fibers in the clothing industry has escalated.

Bamboo plants grow over a meter a day during periods of rapid growth. In 2003, Toray began selling T-shirts and traditional Japanese clothing made from material containing bamboo fiber.

Kanebo Gohsen developed a synthetic fiber called Lactron, made from fermented corn starch. Lactron clothes have become quite popular because of their pleasant feel on the skin. Lactron also boasts antibacterial properties and reduces itchiness so sufferers from dermatitis have received it well.

The leaves of the Shell Ginger give off a unique aroma and have antibacterial and insect repellent properties. They make a good beauty product, but they are just as good for wrapping rice cakes. The stem, however, which makes up most of the plant, is industrial waste. A local company noticed the wasted material and developed cotton out of it, mainly for making colorful T-shirts.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

What is the best outfit?

***The angel spoke to those who were standing near him. He said, “Take his dirty clothes off.” He said to Joshua, “I have taken your sin away. I will put fine clothes on you”***

(Zech. 3:4, NIrV).

Even the High Priest Joshua, in all his costly robes, had clothes like ours: filthy rags in the sight of God. God wants to wrap us up in robes of righteousness!

Let's be in fashion spiritually, eh?

JULY 4

## **CENTENARIAN GROCER**

Born in 1908, Jutaro Shibuki of Tokyo has been surrounded by fruit and vegetables for more than a century. He shows no sign of slowing down despite his age. He turned 100 in May 2008.

As a greengrocer, he still prides himself on making sure his customers get the freshest produce every day. At 08:00, he heads down from his second-floor apartment to work at his store on the first floor where he stuffs carrots and cucumbers into bags in a small room next to the store, as he has done since he was 13 years old. Now and then, he pokes his head into the store to greet regular customers.

“I won’t sell an inferior product to a customer,” says Shibuki, whose strong legs and back allow him to pick up heavy watermelons with ease.

“Working is the secret to health,” the centenarian said. “My hobby is my work.” He wakes at 05:00 and has breakfast at 06:30. He works from 08:00 through 17:00, eats dinner at 19:00, and goes to bed at 21:00.

His meals consist mainly of vegetables. According to Shibuki, this combination of work, diet and routine have kept major illnesses at bay.

His wife, Kimiko, also approaching 100, is just as zealous and helps him run the store. He has kept the family tradition alive by passing on the operation of the store to his son, Kunio, 62, who is the third person to run it.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all  
your might, for in the grave, where you are  
going, there is neither working nor planning  
nor knowledge nor wisdom*** (Ecc. 9:10, NIV).

Anything you can turn your hand to, do it wholeheartedly!

On a spiritual plane, we should be even more energetic!

JULY 5

## ***ROBOTS ON THE MARCH***

“Hello! I’m Artemis!” said a 1.6-meter-tall robot with a woman’s voice. It is cordially receiving visitors to the Fukuoka government office. Children flock to the robot.

“This could become common in the future,” remarked an elderly lady as she warily watched the mechanical receptionist.

“At a shop we had a robot distribute free ice cream to shoppers,” said Takamoto, spokesperson for the robot company.

The next day, he received a phone call from the local police, who had received a complaint about the robot.

“Honestly, we’re at loss as to how to deal with the complaint,” the police admitted. “The law says nothing about robots.”

In another project, a robot ‘went shopping’. Its owner operated it by means of a public mobile phone.

“To make robots really useful, we should collect data from the places where they would actually be used,” said Professor Takanishi of Waseda University. “Experiments will help researchers to see how ordinary people interact with robots. Some may be afraid and keep away from the machines, while others may try to touch them.”

Robots are truly on the march!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

However, robots can never be more than a poor imitation of that which God has made.

***How you made me is amazing and wonderful.  
I praise you for that. What you have done is  
wonderful. I know that very well***

(Ps. 139:14, NIV).

The design of any part of our body is too wonderfully complex for man to comprehend. Never will he be able to duplicate it, not even one part of it!

God’s workmanship is indeed awe-inspiring.

JULY 6

## **SCHOOL UNIFORMS ARE FUN**

(Sent in by Frank Nakashima)

For Japanese schoolgirls, the school uniform has gone from being a glaring reminder of rules and regulations to a stylish fashion statement.

“Even before 2004, school uniforms were being redesigned to be more attractive,” says Miss Kayama, a psychologist of youth culture.

The students are wearing their uniforms and carrying school bags as status symbols, with some girls even choosing to enter certain schools just because their uniforms happen to be cute.

Ami and a teeming number of her fellow high school friends are capitalizing on their position as teen fashion trendsetters by donning uniforms after class and even during holidays. One would think uniformed schoolgirls get enough of wearing plaid skirts or sailor-style uniforms most of their waking hours, but it is not so.

High school girls’ uniforms have evolved into a kind of brand, which the girls relish, enjoy, and experiment with to the hilt because they honestly find the uniforms cute and fun to wear.

*Source: Japan Times*

We who belong to God and who live according His directives can even now be dressed in the most valuable and beautiful uniforms that one can ever think of!

***Here is my advice. Buy from me white clothes to wear. Then you will be able to cover your shameful nakedness*** (Rev. 3:18, NIrV).

Have you reserved your pure white robe designed for heaven, so that you may enter the Kingdom of God?

JULY 7

## ***THE ELIXIR OF LIFE***

When Pastor Wong Ming-Dao was a child, he had a problem that consumed his thoughts day and night. Who was better to help him than his favorite uncle?

“Uncle is there any way not to die?” he wanted to know.

“Yes, indeed!” his uncle replied with gusto. It brought the child great comfort to hear him speak with such fervor.

“Go into the mountains and seek the answer. Get away from the world and its cares! Give up fame and wealth. Deny yourself all pleasure. Meditate in a cave. Drink the dew on the grass and leaves. Dig up fungus from the floor of the cave and eat it. By practicing such asceticism, you will gradually become immortal and will not die.”

He pled with his uncle to take him to such a mountain, but his uncle always made excuses.

Later as a young man, Wong Ming-Dao read about the Emperors Qin Shi Huang and Han Wudi who zealously sought the elixir of life. Neither of them found it; neither escaped death.

This account plunged him into the depths of despair. Despite their being exalted as high as the heavens and as wealthy as the four seas these two emperors failed to find the way to immortality.

“What hope have I, an ordinary young man?” he cried out, relapsing into utter despondency.

Now he is Pastor Wong Ming-Dao, but it took him many years to discover that Jesus Christ is the only solution for death. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus gave his life for the human race.

*Source: A Stone Made Smooth*

True immortality comes only from the living God!

***What I'm about to tell you is true. Anyone who obeys my word will never die*** (John 8:51, NIV).

Are you one of those who will enjoy victory over death and live forever with Christ who conquered our last enemy, death?

JULY 8

## ***LEFT-HANDED CREATIONS***

In September 2001, Kasuga, a former piano teacher suffered a stroke. Since then, her right arm hangs limp.

“It would have been better if I had died,” she moaned. Her family had to help her do even simple things such as open a plastic drink bottle.

After a period of utter despondency, she decided to look again at the egg-art she started 10 years before. In a cardboard box, she found her half-finished eggs.

“It is probably impossible to make them anymore,” she thought, but, bored beyond measure, she half-heartedly tried to use her untrained left hand to complete a decoration. It did not go as planned; yet for an hour each day, she persevered.

After a whole month, the 45-year-old Kasuga finished the decoration of one egg. Previously, it would have taken her only a few days.

“That’s great mom; you did it!” her ecstatic high school daughter exclaimed. Those words of encouragement spurred her on to concentrate on her hobby. Unable to support the egg with her right hand, she used tissues and other items to keep it steady in the box while she worked on it. Completing 30 eggs gave her a starting point for a new life, and friends displayed them at the famous Big Heart Izumo Hall in Shimane, Japan.

“I am still thrilled by the smile on my daughter’s face at my every achievement,” she said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How uplifting it is to motivate those around us to succeed!

***And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds***

(Heb. 10:24, NIV).

In gratitude for all the blessings God pours out on us, let us determine to outdo each other in encouraging others to do well.

JULY 9

## ***FANCY FEET***

Fashion-conscious young women have embraced the ‘sock-less’ look and routinely wear closed dress shoes, mules, clogs or sandals with no hose. This way of wearing shoes gives rise to various problems such as blisters and uncomfortable sweatiness.

When *No-show Boat Socks* made their debut as an accessory intended to alleviate such problems, they were an immediate hit. Designed to stay hidden inside closed dress or flat shoes, the covers hook over the toes, line the bottom of the feet, and stretch over the heel. Though just a thin lining, they significantly cut down on rubbing and make shoes more comfortable to wear.

Five-toed half-socks prevent the toes from rubbing together and are invisible when worn with clogs or mules.

What started as a practical tool has blossomed into a completely new dimension of footwear fashion.

Manufacturers initially produced foot covers in plain, skin-colored fabric so that no one could see them, but today, women deliberately show off bright and colorful covers.

This trend reflects women’s desire to make sure their feet look good when they enter a house, since Eastern custom demands everybody to take off their shoes.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc*

Do you know what God regards as the most beautiful feet?

***How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*** (Rom. 10:15, NIV).

Let’s dedicate our feet to spreading the news of Jesus!

***Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone*** (Acts 4:12, CEV).

We need to run to the ends of the earth telling others of Jesus!

JULY 10

## ***SUSHI POLICE ON THE PROWL***

The Japanese government is considering a system to certify authentic Japanese food restaurants in foreign countries.

The number of Japanese food restaurants' operating in foreign countries is 240,000, of which 9,000 are in the USA. As many as 100 places claiming to be 'Japanese food restaurants' open every year in Toronto. Many of the managers are immigrants from China, South Korea and Vietnam and are insufficiently versed in the basics of Japanese cuisine.

"In authentic Japanese dishes the food must be healthy, while delighting customers with visual beauty," said Miss Fuji, a restaurateur in Japan.

To popularize authentic and traditional Japanese food in the world, the government is considering honoring contributions by excellent cooks who have been working for an extended time abroad.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

In God's restaurant, the food is certified authentic!

***You treat me to a feast, while my enemies watch. You honor me as your guest, and you fill my cup until it overflows*** (Ps. 23: 5, CEV).

God treats you to a magnificent banquet that is much better than any six-course dinner!

He also has the power to protect you, so you can feast in perfect security!

***Those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing***  
(Ps. 34:9-10, NIV).

God-seekers will never miss out on anything good!

JULY 11

## ***RETIREE FLIES GLIDER***

On April 23, 2006, 59-year-old Toru Ikeda completed the first successful glider journey ever made across the Japanese archipelago.

He traversed the four main islands from the south to the north with surprising ease. During the 2,100km gliding experience, Ikeda touched down in only five cities and one village.

About 100 people welcomed him at a landing site in the northern main island of Hokkaido.

He had long dreamed of flying a glider across the archipelago of Japan. “I wanted to show that retirement from a job is not retirement from life,” a misty-eyed Ikeda said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Ikeda’s flight brings to mind another type of flight that all of us have wished for at some time or another!

***I wish I had wings like a dove, so I could fly far away and be at peace*** (Ps. 55:6, CEV).

King David echoed a cry for release, for freedom and escape from the things that weighed heavily on him.

When faced with sorrow, disappointment, tragedy or failure, don’t you wish that you could escape like a dove?

As Noah reached out his hand, and helped the dove back into the safety of the ark, so Christ graciously helps and welcomes those who fly to Him for rest.

***You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You*** (Isa. 26:3, NKJV).

If we fix our thoughts on Him, He will give us lasting peace in our hearts!

JULY 12

## ***ROOFTOP HARVESTS***

Mr. Shiratori, a green-thumbed 89-year-old, lives with his family in a four-storey concrete building near the centre of Tokyo. He is probably one of the original urban gardeners to enjoy the harvest of a rooftop garden.

To begin with, he planted a number of young plum trees. Now he generally ends up with an annual plum harvest of 150kg. He produces his own fruits and vegetables and has enough to give away – all from his rooftop.

Shiratori's garden has attracted a great deal of public interest. Even the Tokyo Metropolitan Government noticed! Concerned about the heat island phenomenon in summer, they took the dramatic step of requiring that all new big public buildings dedicate space for a garden. Often the only place available is on the roof.

Urban hospitals also learned from Shiratori. The Kosei Nenkin Hospital in Tokyo was one of the first hospitals to create a garden on its rooftop above the fourth floor. This garden was set up exclusively for patients and their families.

“One family told me they feel calm and at peace when they see plants growing here on the roof,” Dr. Chiba said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We are God's own garden – what kind of fruit do you produce for the Master?

***I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing***

(John 15:5, NIV).

It is God's desire for us to bear lasting fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit is only possible as God works in the lives of His people.

We had better trust Him for godly fruit in our lives!

JULY 13

## **NAILS AS CANVASSES**

Although nails are tiny areas on the digital extremities of the human body, they have, since 2002, become palettes on which the women of Japan can express themselves.

According to documents of three centuries ago, only certain classes of women in Japan – either of high social class or prostitutes – painted their nails a light red, using a solution extracted from balsam.

The idea of manicures for ordinary folk in the United States began in the 1930s when women were doing their nails with a by-product of car paint.

Forty years later, the fashion caught on in Japan.

Nail art has come a long way from a simple paint job. One company in Japan is selling 35 shades of color to women for decorating their fingernails and toenails in intricate geometric patterns and floral prints, turning their nails into mobile canvases.

Nowadays, beauty parlors assist ladies in achieving unusual miniature paintings on their nails: a slogan, the Japanese flag or even a painting of a boyfriend's face!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How does God see us? He looks deeper than skin and nails! He searches each chamber of our heart!

***The lamp of the LORD searches a man's heart.***

***It searches deep down inside him***

(Prov. 20:27, NIrV).

Outer beauty fades with age, but when God transforms the innermost parts of our being, its beauty becomes everlasting.

***Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life*** (Prov. 4:23, CEV).

JULY 14

## ***A DOG AT UNIVERSITY***

Injured in a traffic accident, Ms. Tatebayashi lost her ability to walk. After completing high school studies, she spent most of her time at home, isolated and withdrawn from life.

By surfing the Web, she learned of a dog-training centre. There she rented a two-year-old male Labrador retriever called Atom, and trained with him in the hope of rejoining society.

Brimming with regained confidence, she applied to the Doshisha University's Department of Journalism. Competition to gain admission to that University was fierce – less than 11 percent of applicants were successful. On receiving news that she was accepted, she was overwhelmed with joy.

"I think Atom knew by my excitement that I had been accepted," she said.

At the opening ceremony, during the hour-long welcoming address for 1,284 freshmen, Atom stayed quietly at her side. He only crossed his front paws once.

According to the Japan Service Dog Training Center, Ms. Tatebayashi is the first person in the nation assisted by a service dog to gain entrance to a university.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

No matter what your limitations and circumstances may be, give no place to despondency. God will help you! That is certain! Just trust Him wholeheartedly!

***The LORD takes care of those who are as helpless as children. When I was in great need, he saved me. I said to myself, "Be calm. The LORD has been good to me." LORD, you have saved me from death. You have dried the tears from my eyes. You have kept me from tripping and falling*** (Ps. 116:6-9, NIV).

We will NOT despair if we depend on the help of almighty God.

JULY 15

## **DADS RELIVE CHILDHOOD**

Many young fathers in Japan find themselves caught up in the '80's nostalgia'. When spending time with their children, they recall their own youth and buy re-issued plastic model kits, board games and radio-controlled cars.

The toy companies are enthusiastically helping the dads to relive their childhood.

The twenty-plus and thirty-plus dads are happy they can finally buy the collectors' items they could not afford during their childhood, and toy manufacturers are jumping on the trend, quickly reproducing the toys and taking the opportunity to make new customers of both the fathers and their children.

Bandai, the country's largest toymaker, which hitherto rarely reissued toys, also decided to reissue hit toys aimed at men who were boys in the 80's, as that age group has turned out to be a boon for toy manufacturers.

Some husbands report their wives have stopped nagging them since the toys give them opportunities to spend more time playing with their children!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***Children are a gift from the LORD. They are a reward from him. Children who are born to people when they are young are like arrows in the hands of a soldier. Blessed are those who have many children*** (Ps. 127:3, NIV).

Children are one of God's best gifts to parents!

Fathers who play and interact with their children give a great boost to their healthy development!

***Your children will bring you much good. They will be like olive branches that produce many olives*** (Ps. 128:3, ICB).

JULY 16

## **TOKYO-X PIGS**

Farmers that produce food for Tokyo-X pigs do so according to the strictest of standards. Ingredients used for feeding the pigs are free of chemicals. Genetically modified corn is not used at all.

Hygiene is so strict at the pig-breeding facilities that even visitors have to take a bath and change their clothes before entering the pigs' domain.

Traceability is another element that helps boost the reliability of Tokyo-X pork. Information on individual pigs, including date of birth, feed records, history of diseases and drugs administered, is stored in a database.

When consumers want information on the pork, they get printout lists. Tokyo-X pork products cost about 30 percent more than other pork; nevertheless, demand is very high, and distributors are always short of supplies.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Nowadays, Japanese are very persnickety about what to eat, but seem to be less concerned about spiritual nourishment. Jesus taught us to pray for our food.

***Give us day by day our daily bread***

(Luke 11:3, KJV).

Jesus did not only intend for us to trust God in keeping us alive with three square meals a day, but also to trust and pray for God's daily provision of the Bread of Life from Heaven.

We need to feast on God's heaven-sent Bread that will never leave us hungry and we need to feed others too.

***You give them something to eat***

(Luke 9:13, NKJV).

Think of it! God offers us Bread out of heaven – Jesus Christ! Those who partake of Him will never be hungry again.

JULY 17

## ***KITTY CAPTURES JAPAN'S HEART***

*Hello Kitty*, invented in Japan, is now all over the world and adults are just as likely to snap her up as children are.

The image of *Hello Kitty*, a cute little white kitten whose trademark is a flower and a red bow attached to its left ear, has popped up all over Japan – and not just on children's bags.

*Hello Kitty* appears on numerous items such as rice cookers, telephones, computers and even automobiles.

It is not uncommon to see young women in business suits pulling *Hello Kitty* cellular phones out of *Hello Kitty* bags.

One luxury hotel offers a *Hello Kitty* room, complete with slippers, bathroom articles, and furnishings embellished with the *Hello Kitty* image.

Even men are not exempt. A company making neckties featuring images of popular characters such as *Hello Kitty* is producing more than 10,000 neckties each month.

“Children view fictional characters as imaginary friends who serve as a reliable source of support when they first enter kindergarten and begin interacting with others,” a psychiatrist said. “The continued attachment of adults to these characters, even into their twenties and thirties, is a reflection of the uncertainty of today’s social environment.”

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

In the meantime, many children insist that their best friend is *Hello Kitty*.

***A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother*** (Prov. 18:24, NIV).

The best friend is Jesus Christ. He is also Shepherd, Helper, and Deliverer, a Strong Castle, and a High Tower, the Horn of your strength, your Confidence, your Joy, your All in all – the same yesterday, today and forever.

JULY 18

## ***SWEET AS HONEY***

In the autumn, Japan's persimmon trees are full of bright orange-red fruit. Shaped like tomatoes and vibrant orange in the setting sun, they practically beg one to pull them off the tree to eat.

The cultivation of persimmons originated in China, where farmers harvested them for many centuries. They then spread to Japan and Korea. A persimmon tree can live up to 100 years and bears about 200kg of fruit per year.

The fruit contains vitamin A and potassium and has twice the fiber of apples. It helps the body fight disease as its tannin oils have anti-carcinogenic and antiviral effects. In oriental medicine, it is considered to be a very good treatment for diarrhea and effective in lowering blood pressure,

The persimmon's botanical name is *Diospyros virginiana*, literally meaning 'Food of the gods'.

When persimmons are ripe, they are jelly-like in texture and almost as sweet as honey.

There are over a hundred recipes using fresh or dried persimmons in making cakes, puddings, vinegar and sauces.

*Source: Korea Herald*

Are we like persimmon trees that produce plenty of delicious fruit?

***Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire***

(Matt. 7:17-19, NIV).

What kind of a tree are you?

Are you a fruit-bearing tree, or are you hell-bent on being cut down and thrown into the fire?

JULY 19

## ***MUSIC THAT FOLLOWS***

*Miuro* is the new robot from Japan that turns an iPod into a dancing boom box, which rolls over to you and plays music. Simply push a remote control button and it will follow you from room to room.

It weighs about 3kg and looks like a split-open white egg with a white ball in the middle where you can insert your iPod.

Capable of autonomous movement, it is the first such product to go on sale anywhere in the world.

It is possible to direct it using a mobile phone. When owners are away, they can monitor what is happening at home by instructing the *Miuro* to go around the house, take photos and send them back by e-mail.

*Miuro* can also be used instead of an alarm clock; it moves into your bedroom in the morning to wake you up with a song of your choice!

*Source: Japan Echo Inc*

It may be nice to have a lifeless helper, but how much better to ask the living God to be your Helper!

***Hear, O LORD, and have mercy on me; Lord, be my helper! (Ps. 30:10, NKJV).***

If you love God and follow His commandments, He is your Helper through good and bad times!

What is more, our Helper is omnipresent (all present), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omniscient (all knowing)!

***So we may boldly say: The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?***  
(Heb. 13:6, NKJV)

Awesome, eh?

JULY 20

## ***SHRINKING BEDDING***

Japanese homes are small and crammed with consumer goods. The *futon* vacuum pack was born out of this crowded environment.

A fluffy *futon* (Japanese bedding) can be shrunk to half its usual size. Shrunk down, it looks like a huge piece of paper all crumpled up, but no – it is a *futon*! Or rather, it's a *futon* in a *futon* vacuum pack.

In Japan, it is common to sleep on a *futon* mattress on the *tatami* (rice stalk mat) floor. Actually, each person's bedding consists of two futons – the mattress and a thick comforter. Every morning, the home keeper folds and puts them away in a closet. This is a good arrangement for Japanese homes, which are not large enough for a lot of furniture.

Each family member generally has one mattress and two comforters, one for winter, the other for the rest of the year. There are also spare sets of *futons* for overnight guests. In other words, quite a few *futons* remain in the closet for much of the year, taking up valuable space. The Japanese have partly solved this problem by compressing the *futons* in *futon* vacuum packs.

It is easy to use – just put the *futon* in the nylon pack, close it and remove the air with a vacuum cleaner. In one minute, it shrinks to about half its usual thickness.

*Futon* vacuum packs first came on the market in the 1980s. From the beginning, they were a hit with everyone who wanted to keep a tidy house. Today they are a standard household item.

*Source: Nipponia*

What Bible verse comes to mind?

***He must increase, but I must decrease***  
(John 3:30, KJV).

Jesus should become greater and greater in my life and I should become smaller and smaller.

JULY 21

## ***MANAGERS SENT CAMPING***

On August 25, 1958, the Japanese company, Nissin Food Products, gave the world its first taste of instant noodles, *Nissin Chicken Ramen*.

In 2003, this food giant sent eight newly appointed section managers to the uninhabited island of Leshima on a three-day training session to ‘rediscover’ noodles and to make them appreciate anew the great value of its invention.

The company sent the new managers to this deserted island to remind them of the time when the company founders developed *Nissin Chicken Ramen* from scratch. The managers took packs of *Nissin Chicken Ramen* with them, but they had to extract extra salt from the sea. They also tried to catch fish but were not too good at that. They also had to make their own cookware, plates, and chopsticks from the available bamboo on the island.

“We wanted them to tackle their job and training with the same fervor as those who started the company from nothing,” the public relations officer said.

*Source: Mainichi News*

What should be our uppermost goal in life? Let’s learn from the apostle Paul!

***I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things*** (Phil. 3:14-15, NIV).

Life has no meaning unless you focus on the call from God to accomplish His purpose for your life!

Never forget that whatever activities you are involved in, your uttermost goal and highest calling is Jesus Christ!

JULY 22

## ***WRISTWATCH SETS FISHING SITE***

The Global Positioning System (GPS) in Japan is used in many interesting ways. The GPS-equipped rice-planting machine is a unique Japanese product. It plants rice seedlings at exact intervals. When it reaches the edge of the field, it automatically turns around and goes on to plant the next row with great precision until the entire field is sown.

GPS supplies information about traffic conditions, including accidents, congestion, roadwork, as well as the availability of parking spaces. It can make restaurant reservations, access the Internet, and process e-mail while you drive.

GPS in cell phones and even wristwatches are also designed for climbers and anglers. They come pre-programmed with 6,000 locations such as major mountain peaks and lakes throughout Japan even including good fishing spots.

GPS can track a wandering child or elderly person or a roaming pet.

An array of 24 satellites orbiting 24,000km (14,900 miles) above the earth guides the GPS.

*Source: Domestic Japanese news sources*

No matter how good the GPS is, our God's guidance system from above is of a much grander and higher dependability!

***For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous  
and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but  
the face of the LORD is against those who do  
evil*** (I Pet. 3:12 NIV).

It is wonderful to have a God so attentive to our needs!

***The LORD will guide you always*** (Is. 58:11, NIV).

Trust God for His unfailing guidance in your every day!

JULY 23

## ***INTERNET FORTUNE TELLING***

Fortune telling over the Internet – be it by home computer or cell phone – has won a dedicated female following. Many women use the services in lieu of personal counseling and check their fortunes any time and anywhere.

It allegedly helps them with their problems without the need for face-to-face contact. Some use the service several times a day and rely on Internet divination for every aspect of their lives.

“The questions I get asked are not only about big things like, ‘I’m thinking of getting a divorce’ or ‘My boyfriend has started talking about breaking up,’ ” said Kasemoto, who makes her living as an Internet fortune-teller. “There are also women asking trivial questions like, ‘Should I call my boyfriend?’ ”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I think if fortune-tellers could really see the future, they would be frightened to death!

I am so very glad that, as children of God, we do not need fortune-tellers. As we rely on our eternal Father, His Spirit leads us every day in all the details of our lives.

***Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*** (Rom. 8:14, NIRV).

What an unspeakable privilege it is to have the Spirit of the living God guiding us daily!

We need not fear anything in our future whatsoever!

***Many O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare*** (Ps. 40:5, NIV).

Who else can do such glorious things?

JULY 24

## ***THE BLIND MOUNTAINEER***

Engineer Kaneyama lost his eyesight in his twenties. Initially he was afraid to go out by himself. Then of all things, Kaneyama took up mountaineering! Ten years later, he still enjoys this hobby.

Gradually he began to sense objects lying 5 or even 10 meters ahead of him, based on subtle, reflected noises. This bat-like discovery improved his mountain-climbing skills dramatically.

Nowadays he uses audio-recognition devices. He can ‘hear’ the view. Stung by a piercing wind on the mountaintop, he feels a sudden burst of liberation as he stands beneath the vast sky.

A volunteer describes the breathtaking view and Kaneyama can further sense the beauty of the countryside before him.

Now at 44, he has scaled a number of mountains in Japan, including Mt. Fuji. His ultimate goal is to climb Mont Blanc in the European Alps!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

What a powerful lesson this teaches us – we who are often spiritually blind to God’s beauty.

***Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me will never walk in  
darkness, but will have the light of life”***

(John 8:12, NIV).

***The LORD is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold  
of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?***

(Ps. 27:1, NIV).

If it were not for the love of God, we would be blind, roaming around without direction. When we go astray, He guides us back to the Light of Jesus Christ!

The direction that God indicates enables us to accomplish great things for His Kingdom!

JULY 25

## ***SCARY WORLD OF CELLPHONES***

Young people in Japan are conduits of a new lifestyle in the 21st century based on cell phones.

Few are now able to live without cell phones. They are using their phones to read books, listen to music, watch videos, chat with friends and surf the Internet – an average of 124 minutes a day for high school children.

Cell phones have become an obsession with youngsters who use them while eating meals or watching television.

While the wired world they now inhabit holds enormous potential for communicating, there is a downside – a growing inability to deal with other people face to face.

“My life is impossible without it,” Ayumi passionately says of her cell phone. “If I forget to take it with me to school, I pretend to feel sick and leave school early!”

“I send some 20 e-mails a day,” 16-year old Tomomi says. “There are friends I never talk to – even if I see them at school. We are connected only by a machine.”

Parents do not realize what a very scary world is lurking behind the cell phone screens of their children.

As they send out personal information about themselves into cyber space, children can easily become prey for fraudsters and pedophiles.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Youngsters can become influenced and then poisoned by evil communications on the Internet!

***Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning***

(1 Cor. 15:33, NIV).

We must be on our guard so that a good tool for communication does not become a destructive force in our lives!

JULY 26

## ***EVERLASTING HOMES***

The average life of a house in Japan is as little as 26 years.

Yamane and his firm looked for materials to build a home so strong that the owner would have no complaints and that the house would actually last a hundred years or more.

One solution is to reuse timber from older houses. Used timber contracts and expands less than new timber, removing a common source of homeowner complaints about product defects.

In his designs, Yamane does not allow the use of any metal parts in the construction. The interlocking joints consist of dovetails and mortises fixed with wooden pegs.

“We call these homes, *everlasting homes*,” he said looking at a miniature timber-frame home in his Tokyo office.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Jesus clearly explains the secret of building an everlasting home!

***I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built*** (Luke 6:47-48, NIV).

When building an ordinary house, the foundation is most important! In the same way, we need to build our lives on the rock of all ages – Jesus!

He is the only true foundation!

We will never regret building on Him and in His way!

JULY 27

## ***COOLER PAVEMENTS***

In blazing hot urban summers, temperatures rarely fall below 25 °C (77 °F) even at night. The concrete and asphalt surfaces in cities catch the sun's heat by day and release it at night, leading to higher air temperatures – a growing problem across Japan.

To help solve the problem, Matsuo Corporation has developed water-retentive blocks for use in roads and pavements. They are as strong as ordinary blocks, but they also absorb and retain rainwater and groundwater.

When the retained water evaporates, it reduces the heat on the surfaces of roads, resulting in lower air temperatures in a similar way to a sprinkler system.

The surface temperature of the blocks is 2 to 3 °C (3.8 to 5.4 °F) lower than the air temperature and at least 10 °C (18 °F) lower than the surface temperature of ordinary blocks.

“Since roads are usually paved with concrete and asphalt, I thought we could do something about it,” Nishiwake, of Matsuo Corporation said. Then he added, “In our concrete blocks we create water-retaining voids, so they can be used as vegetation blocks too.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We, who know God, are on our way to a city where there are no such problems!

***The main street of the city was made out of pure gold, as clear as glass*** (Rev. 21:21, NIV).

The crystal-clear golden roads of the city of heaven, where we will some day walk, will be more wonderful than these cleverly designed water-retentive roads in Japan!

Hallelujah!

JULY 28

## ***FIRE FLOW IN RIVERS***

Most people do not know that there are 6,852 islands in Japan, of which only 432 are inhabited. Some travelers have attempted to visit all 432 inhabited islands, but only one, Shuji Motoki, a retired schoolteacher, has succeeded. It took him 40 years of island hopping to visit them all.

A strange experience triggered his urge to travel. While still a young man, he read a composition by a student who lived on one of these islands: “Fires are flowing in the river!” The child was describing how lava was gushing from a volcano.

“That child suddenly awakened me to the truth that I did not know much about Japan,” Motoki said. “For me, a river is a place with clear water and fish. For a child on a volcanic island, a river means something completely different!” Feeling the need to broaden his knowledge he started traveling from island to island.

“One imperative for me is to wear a shirt with a suitable breast pocket. I put my notebook and a pen in here,” he said patting his shirt. “When I buy a new shirt, I always check the size of the pocket.”

His detailed notes are stored in fireproof steel cabinets on each of the islands he visited.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

The young boy from the lonely island will likely never know that, many years ago, he gave a lifelong vision to Motoki.

***Samuel, though only a child, was the LORD's helper*** (1 Sam. 2:18, NLT).

In choosing His servants, God is more interested in willingness than in age. Samuel was a young child, and yet he was called ***the LORD's helper***.

Are you keen to be God's helper?

JULY 29

## ***MR. POT MAN***

After graduating from school, Nobuo Murakami worked in a restaurant. His first job was to clean pots, so they called him *Mr. Pot Man*. He was looking forward to a chance to taste the sauce remaining in the pots so that he could steal his senior chefs' cooking techniques, but they mixed soapy water in the pots to protect their recipes. The 18-year-old *Mr. Pot Man's* shoulders drooped in despair. He felt lonely and useless! He could not even make a proper omelet when he tried.

"How can we serve stuff like this to a customer," scolded his senior cooks. "You are a shame to our profession!" They ordered him to eat his worthless flops. One day, he had to eat 20 omelets in front of the ridiculing senior cooks.

In spite of such beginnings, success eventually smiled on him for many years. At one stage, Murakami was head chef at the Imperial Hotel, one of the most prestigious hotels in Tokyo. He was also the head chef of the Olympic Village at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Murakami retired and died in August 2005. In his sunset years, he reportedly took pleasure in cooking sumptuous meals for his pet dog, Koro.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Murakami prepared extravagant feasts for thousands of people during his lifetime! It is a reminder of the greatest feast yet to come! I would not miss it for anything that the world can offer me! What about you?

***Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet*** (Matt. 22:4, NIV).

You are an invited guest to the wedding feast of the Lamb of God! If you have not done so, I solemnly urge you to make your reservation as soon as possible!

JULY 30

## ***180 TIMES A MINUTE***

For the infantryman Mr. Adachi, Christ was a reality.

After he found Christ as his Savior, he walked with Him daily and was a real and fresh witness to his comrades.

He made it a point every day to march and run with his God.

“Every step I take is to God’s glory,” this common soldier said. His unit marched 114 steps a minute. With every step, he praised God.

“When we pick up speed, we might do 180 paces per minute,” he reckoned.

“I do not mind speed, because then I can get in many more ‘Praise the Lords!’”

How many times do you praise God every day?

Seven times?

A hundred and eighty times a minute?

What does the Bible encourage us to do?

***Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws*** (Ps. 119:164, NIV).

How wonderful to know God so intimately that we can praise Him seven times a day or more!

The phrase, *seven times a day*, according to The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, actually means ‘often, many times beyond what is expected’.

***Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever*** (Ps. 107:1, NIV).

I pray that as you travel on the highway of life, every step and everything you do and say will be intermixed with such genuine praise to God that it might bring glory to His wonderful Name!

JULY 31

## **TREE-CLIMBING ADULTS**

Many grown-ups in Japan are now in the tree-climbing business!

Why not try scaling an 80-meter giant redwood tree, as one physically handicapped woman did?

In Japan, recreational tree climbing (with safety gear) has been gaining popularity among adults, including the disabled.

The first school for tree climbers was founded in the year 2000. So far, about 7,000 people have participated in the school's courses all around Japan.

Basic climbing equipment includes ropes, a helmet, a pair of gloves and a saddle-type harness to support the climber's weight in midair.

"It doesn't matter whether or not you can climb quickly or skillfully. The winner is the person who has the most fun in the trees," said Mr. Saito, who is seriously into tree climbing.

"To climb high up in a tree and view the world from such great heights will help rid you of stress related to your job, family, money and other relationships," explained another tree climber.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I know of an experience much more exhilarating than tree climbing!

***So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore–fig tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today"***

(Luke 19:4-5, NIV).

Zacchaeus' kind of tree climbing really paid off! That day, Jesus transformed him into a new man, and Zacchaeus put his black past right by repentance and restitution!

Put Jesus Christ in total control of your life!

AUGUST

AUGUST 1

## ***BARKING CHILDREN***

Canine life is sweet in Japan because owners lavish goodies on their dogs!

“I spend a lot of money on my dogs but it’s still much cheaper than having children!” says Miss Hatsuka, a popular singer in Japan. “Dogs don’t need to go to school, and I don’t have to pay for their education.” Hatsuka dotes on her dogs, as do many dog owners in Japan. They shower their pets with gifts such as a specially baked birthday cake or a wrapped bone under the Christmas tree. Just when a pet owner has coughed up the cash for every ridiculous luxury available for an unappreciative pet, goods that are even more expensive hit the market.

Specially tailored dietary programs are no longer the only thing ‘special’ as these ‘barking children’ must also have a unique look. They receive individual beauty therapies and wear clothes unavailable to the average mutt!

Some owners have tripped over the line, which demarcates rational behavior from the bizarre. In the presence of such owners, try not to call their animals ‘dogs’. Even calling them ‘doggies’ may land you in hot water. These canines must be referred to as family members called by their proper names!

*Source: Asahi News*

It is impossible to overstate the passion of some dog owners in Japan. They are caught up in the frenzy of ‘dogs rather than children’. No wonder the population in Japan is decreasing!

Only a fool would compare a dog to a child. Jesus places enormous value on children!

***Whoever welcomes one of these little children  
in my name welcomes me*** (Mark 9:37, NIV).

Children have eternal value!

AUGUST 2

## **FENDING OFF BIRDS**

Professor Yukio Hirose created a bronze alloy that repels birds, based on his investigation of the materials in a bronze statue in Kanazawa City, Japan.

At the age 18, Hirose wondered how a statue in a park near the university managed to remain completely clean of pigeons' droppings while nearby trees and other statues were painted white with them.

Many people had brought the issue of bird droppings to the attention of Professor Hirose hoping he could offer a solution. In response, he created copper alloy plates with the same composition as the copper statue he had observed in the park.

He placed the copper plates in front of Kanazawa Railway Station, where pigeons usually flock. Not a single pigeon dared to come within a meter of the plates, despite their favorite food being scattered on the ground. Next, he placed the bronze plates near garbage piles and a cowshed, as well as on the roofs of factories where numerous crows often gathered. Crows also chose to stay away from the metal plates.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Yes! God even gives sparrows instincts to avoid danger!

***Not one sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it***

(Matt. 10:29, TLB).

*God's eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me! – Civilla D. Martin*

***So don't worry! You are more valuable to Him than many sparrows*** (Matt. 10:31, TLB).

Do not be concerned! God looks after you down to the last detail, even keeping count of every strand of your hair!

How mind boggling! Nevertheless, it is true!

AUGUST 3

## ***TRAFFIC SAFETY DOG***

Every morning at 07:00, a dog wearing a police hat and a placard around his neck hops onto a special stand in Urasoe city, Japan. The police at the Urasoe Police Station have entrusted him with a special public education role. He reminds drivers to drive carefully. His presence proclaims the need for traffic safety.

Bogey takes the stand for 90 minutes every morning. Primary school students stop to greet him, and drivers pull over to have their picture taken with him. His reputation has gone throughout the country, attracting visitors from all over Japan to come and meet him.

Bogey, once a scraggly-looking stray dog, has blossomed and is now quite famous.

In the summer of 2003, the Urasoe municipal government recognized his activities and granted him a certificate of residence for promoting road safety awareness!

Bogey also waves his tail in traffic safety classes held in primary schools.

“There have been lots of sad incidents in life, but Bogey encourages people and heals their spiritual wounds,” Tedokon, Bogey’s ‘boss’ said. “I hope, through contact with Bogey, people will become less tense and thus avoid traffic accidents.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Bogey aims to please, encouraging people around him. He has received recognition for a job well done!

People too should be recognized for encouraging others. Paul of the Bible said:

***For they refreshed my spirit and yours also.  
Such men deserve recognition***

(1 Cor. 16:18, NIV).

May the Lord help us to be encouragers! People will greatly appreciate us as we lift them up, and God approves too!

AUGUST 4

## **PANIC ATTACKS**

Makoto first noticed signs of panic attacks when he was in the middle of his first entrance exam. He found himself in the same situation in all five exams and the tension forced him to make many trips to the toilet.

After graduating from university, Makoto threw himself into his company job and willingly worked extra hours. He worked well into the night, missing the last train home. He would nap at a nearby capsule hotel and be back in the office first thing in the morning.

One day while traveling home in a state of utter exhaustion, an ‘unpleasant feeling’ came over him. His breathing quickened and his palms began to sweat! Soon Makoto could not even ride the subway to work.

Now, fearing another panic attack, he will not even go to a barber’s. Instead, for an additional fee, he hires a stylist to come to his home.

“My wife says it’s a waste of money,” he says. “A healthy person can’t possibly understand. Imagine a person, who seems perfectly normal, and yet can’t even get on a train or go to a barber’s.”

Current estimates suggest that 3-4 percent of Japanese people suffer from a condition known as panic disorder (PD). Panic engulfs them.

*Source: Asahi News*

The Bible contains ALL the answers you need in life, even for panic attacks! Let us go to the Bible and seek God’s help!

***God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind***

(2 Tim. 1:7, NKJV).

We do not need to be afraid or timid if we trust God. He is quite able to help us to be bold, strong, and sensible!

AUGUST 5

## ***CONVEYOR-BELT SERVICE***

Shiraishi Yoshiaki invented the idea of serving hungry customers quickly by way of a conveyer belt.

In a traditional sushi bar, freshness is the key. Sushi is never prepared until someone has placed an order. However, if the orders come in hard and fast, the restaurant must hire more staff, and that means more money spent on wages. Mr. Yoshiaki wanted to find a way to avoid the extra expense.

After four years of trial and error, the first conveyor-belt sushi bar opened in 1958. As the little dishes pass by on the conveyor belt, (also known as a ‘sushi go-around’) you take what looks good. These unique restaurants became so popular that within a few years, Yoshiaki had a chain of 240 outlets all over Japan.

There is a new variant of the conveyor-belt sushi restaurant, which provides a touch screen monitor at every table. It displays a virtual aquarium and the customer orders sushi by touching the type of fish he wants and soon the conveyor belt delivers it to up.

“If I can make my customers happy, I’m happy too,” he said. Yoshiaki added modern technology to a traditional Japanese meal and spread it to different parts of the world such as the United States, Britain, France, China and other countries.

*Source: Nipponia*

I admire Yoshiaki for his vision and ingenuity. However, I have something better to ‘sell’ to Japan and even to the whole wide world.

***Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation*** (Mark 16:15, NIV).

How we yearn to bring the Good News to everyone, everywhere!

AUGUST 6

## ***ELDERLY LIFE BEHIND BARS***

“I’m comfortable with prison life. I have clothing, food and housing, and I am taken care of when I get sick. Prison life to me is like a strict nursing home,” a 76-year old man said in a relaxed voice.

The gray-haired inmate, who has spent 20 years of his life in prison, is now serving his fourth prison term, this time for theft.

Onomichi Prison has about 400 inmates. Fifty of them are elderly and are unable to keep up with the other prisoners due to disabilities or illness.

The prison provides special care for such older inmates. At 06:40, the wardens go to each cell and talk individually to them.

“Some have poor hearing and others have been diagnosed with dementia. We need to personally wake them up,” said Mr. Hayashi, one of the assistant directors. “Roll call is always after the prisoners have made use of the toilet.”

Menus take into account individual considerations. Jobs for the elderly are limited to light tasks, such as tying strings to luggage tags.

They also get a chance to walk in the sunlight.

“The prison may at times resemble a nursing home,” Hayashi, said. “Essentially, our job is to return them to society in good condition.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Being a prisoner in Japan may have certain advantages, but freedom is not one of them. In the temple, Jesus read and said of Himself that it was his purpose to bring freedom to the world!

***The Spirit of the LORD is on me . . . He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners***  
(Luke 4:18, NIV).

We were prisoners of sin, but knowing the Word sets us free!

AUGUST 7

## ***COUNTERFEIT DOLLARS***

God wants us to bear fruit in godly living, but there are those who are hell-bent on doing evil.

About 80 percent of all counterfeit bills, which come to light worldwide are American dollars.

One of the most potent weapons against these counterfeitors is a detector manufactured by Japan Cash Machine in Osaka.

Some ‘super-bills’ are so well done that they are extremely difficult to detect. Yet, this company’s machines can tell ‘super-bills’ from the real thing. Why is this small company in Japan so far ahead of its competition?

“To detect a fake American bill, one needs to compare the data on each suspect bill with the data on a real bill and also with data on bills forged in the past,” their representative explains. “We have already amassed a vast quantity of data. We keep inputting all the latest information from financial institutions so that our machines can detect new types of counterfeit bills very rapidly.”

*Source: The Internet*

Man is good at counterfeiting – and not just with money!

He speaks of love, but often means lust. He gets what he thinks is joy through strong drink. He clamors for peace but does not know the meaning of it.

God gives us gifts through the Holy Spirit that are genuine and activated in the life of a Christian!

***We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the LORD and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God***

(Col. 1:10, NIV).

God wants us to live in such a way that we are kind to those who come across our path. We will then grow rapidly in the wonderful understanding of how God functions!

AUGUST 8

## ***BOTTLE SAVES SAILOR***

A 28-year-old deckhand who fell off a tanker into the sea off the coast of Kamaishi, Japan, managed to survive his ordeal by using an empty PET bottle as a float.

According to the coast guard, the man fell off the *Sakura Maru* tanker at 22:30 that September night in 2005. They failed to find him during a search operation, but a fishing boat came across him floating in the sea about 08:30 the next morning.

The man was not wearing a life jacket when he fell off, but he soon found an empty PET bottle with a handgrip floating nearby. He used the bottle as a float.

When the fishermen found him, he was holding on to the bottle with one hand and waving to them with the other.

“A two-liter plastic bottle is sufficient to keep an adult afloat,” the coast guard said. “In addition to his finding a plastic bottle in the open sea, the waves were gentle and the sea temperature was relatively mild. He was really lucky.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

To be alive has nothing to do with luck, for it is an undeniable fact that life is very uncertain!

***Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*** (James 4:14, NIV).

There is no guarantee that you will be alive tomorrow!

***Our days on earth are like a shadow***  
(1 Chr. 29:15, NIV).

Always be ready to meet your Maker and be ready to give an account of your life on earth!

AUGUST 9

## ***DEADLY FESTIVAL***

Life in Nada, Japan grinds to a halt every October to make way for the *Fighting Festival*. It is an exercise in damage infliction.

Local primary and middle schools are closed on October 14 and 15, as 200,000 visitors attend the festival.

At the festival's climax, three portable shrines, symbolizing the three deities of the local temples, 'wrestle' in the hope of ensuring a bountiful harvest the following year. Forty men, ready to fight, hold aloft these two-ton shrines from each temple.

People think, the greater the damage the shrines sustain during the clashes, the more delighted the deities are.

Men prepare and plan for this fight all through the year. Indeed, it is a rare and dangerous opportunity for them to test their strength.

One particular year a participant actually died. The men shouldering the heavy portable shrines are often severely injured. Therefore, first-aid staff and ambulances are always on stand-by, as are the riot police.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Each one of us selfishly decides how to use our time and talents.

Unlike the festival's deities, God wants what is best for us and longs to help us gain what is excellent, if we but follow his instructions.

***I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my LORD, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ* (Phil. 3:8, NIV).**

All the things of this world are worthless trash when compared with the priceless Christ. It is a high privilege to re-dedicate all our time and talents to Christ and to embrace Christ!

AUGUST 10

## ***BIGGER GIFTS FOR BIGGER FAMILIES***

To retain and attract talented workers in a very competitive industry, Softbank Corp. offers generous congratulatory gifts for the births of their employees' babies. Bigger families benefit especially.

Softbank, heavily into Internet ventures, pays ¥1 million to an employee when his or her third child is born. Moreover, it provides ¥3 million in gift money for a fourth child and ¥5 million for a fifth.

Softbank says it not only wants to secure talented employees, but also desires to provide an environment where male and female employees can comfortably balance their careers with childcare.

*Source: Asahi News*

***Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven*** (Col. 4:1, NIV).

In the modern set-up this verse means, “Employers, treat your employees with care”.

***“So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against those who defraud laborers of their wages, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty*** (Mal. 3:5, NIV).

Throughout the Bible, there are references about the rich exploiting the poor – this problem is prevalent in our day too!

Do not exploit those who work for you, because one day you will have to give an account of your actions to God Almighty!

We are bound to reap in eternity what we have sown in this life and this includes our conduct towards those who work for us!

AUGUST 11

## ***KNIFE-FORK-SPOON – ALL IN ONE***

Chopsticks have been the eating implements of choice in Asia for a millennium – a knife, fork and spoon all in one. Older Japanese who do not understand the mechanics of cutlery provide disposable chopsticks for all their guests. For their own use, each family member has a personal set of chopsticks that are washed and stored in specially designed containers. Some of these chopsticks' designs approach the realm of art.

Artisans customize chopsticks for an individual's needs. Eating a plate of green peas with off-the-shelf chopsticks can be a severe test, as not all people are created equal.

When designing a set of chopsticks for a particular customer, artisans take gender, body weight, and the length of the hand into consideration. For a strapping six-foot male, the chopsticks will be more robust than the ones designed for a petite female.

Chopsticks serve as an extension of the body and are a very important tool for daily use. As no two persons are alike, designing a set of chopsticks is an intricate process. The simplest style of making chopsticks takes 11 steps. There are about 200 styles to choose from.

*Source: Mainichi Views*

***Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them . . . in proportion to our faith*** (Rom. 12:6, NKJV).

God does not give us all the same gifts or treat us as ready-made off-the-shelf beings! To each individual God gives different talents for use in His service.

In David's hand, God placed a sling and a pebble to slay the mighty Goliath.

In a little boy's hands, a few sandwiches fed a multitude.

In Moses' hand, a finely-tuned rod performed many miracles.

What has God put in your hand?

AUGUST 12

## **CYBER-WATCHING PARENTS**

*Sakura Kindergarten* in Tokyo is one of a growing number of Japanese daycare centers using the Internet and other information technology to keep parents happy and worry-free.

*Sakura* has eleven cameras in its kindergarten and adjacent facilities so that the parents can monitor their own kids from a computer or cell phone. The cameras operate in such a way that parents can directly watch their children's activities.

"I'm relieved and happy just to get a glimpse of my son when I take a break at work," a 33-year-old father said. "My parents in far away Nagasaki also enjoy watching their grandchild!"

Child safety became a major concern for parents when child-abuse incidents occurred at some day-care centers. The camera system helps to deepen mutual trust between the school and parents.

"Since we are always being watched (by parents), the system helps us improve the quality of the day-care service," the principal of one school said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Just as these teachers are conscious of the parents' eyes on them at all times, so we should be conscious of God's eyes resting on us at all times.

**"Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD**  
(Jer. 23:24, NIV).

There is no corner where we can hide from the all-seeing eyes of God! He ever watches and listens to assist the needy! Not a groan or a moan escapes his ears.

**The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry**  
(Ps. 34:15, NIV).

AUGUST 13

## ***LOWEST TO HIGHEST***

When he stood in front of his first class of freshmen at Toyokawa High School, Tetsuya Miyamoto wrote on the blackboard the names of the five major subjects that they would be studying – Japanese, Social Studies, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and English. Then he scribbled a ‘1’ (one) under each subject.

“What do you think these figures mean?” Miyamoto asked the students. There was dead silence. “This is my school record in my first year of middle school,” the 37-year-old teacher said. “A ‘1’ was the lowest grade students could get on their report.”

When Miyamoto was in elementary school, he hated it and was not interested in studying. At 16, he left school to be a carpenter, but quit his job at 17. After that, he tried to kill time in various ways, but at 23, he suddenly realized with a shock that he was squandering away his life.

“I want to go to university,” he announced to his family. It meant he had to go to night school to finish his primary and secondary education while working. In his second year of high school, he got the highest score in math in a countrywide test.

He entered Nagoya University at the age of 27, and spent nine years working through graduate school.

“As I was a bad student, I know how students feel when they fail; therefore I think I can help them.” He now teaches at the very school where he failed so miserably.

“I want to help my students find their purpose,” he said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Everyone should have an honest purpose in life! However, the overriding purpose of our lives should be to please God!

***So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God***

(1 Cor. 10:31, NIV).

Whatever we do, may our overriding purpose in life be for God’s glory and not just our accomplishments or satisfaction.

AUGUST 14

## ***CELL PHONE ADDICTION***

Gazing into tiny mobile phone screens and tapping away on the phone's keys is now a regular pastime on the trains, in the streets and shops as young people in Japan exchange e-mail messages with friends.

Many view their cellular phones as extensions of their bodies. If they forget their phones at home, they may start to panic. This phenomenon is a form of 'mobile phone addiction'.

As 16-year-old Rie waits at a railway station, she frequently glances at and holds her cellular phone. When there are messages, she quickly responds with mini e-mails.

She sends an average of 20 e-mails per day. If she does not receive any e-mails, she feels ignored and sends e-mails to invite a response. She even secretly sends e-mails during class time.

"I don't care if I don't get replies to all of them, but I get depressed if I don't get any. I feel as if I don't exist," she moans.

If not in contact at all times, young folk feel unneeded, as if they are nobodies. As a result, their addiction to mobile phones only escalates.

One high school girl sends 'Good night' e-mail messages to all her classmates every night. She feels a pressing need to confirm that they are still her friends.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

There is something of greater importance, which we need to treasure every day! The Word of God has a message that clearly speaks to us concerning our walk before Him!

***I haven't disobeyed God's commands. I've treasured his words more than my daily bread***  
(Job 23:12, NIV).

Let us reflect on the Word of God more than on our cell phone messages!

AUGUST 15

## ***HANDS OF CELEBRITIES***

A fire during the 1995 *Great Hanshin Earthquake* destroyed the famous Taishosuji shopping arcade in Kobe.

The arcade, built about 80 years ago, was 330m long and included about a hundred shops. The quake and subsequent fire destroyed 90 percent of the shops.

Ceramic tiles, bearing handprints and messages from 80 celebrities now enhance the entrance to the newly built shops to honor those who helped support earthquake victims.

The ceramic tiles, 30cm by 30cm are cemented into the main thoroughfare of the arcade to serve as a reminder of the importance of helping others in times of trouble.

“Our town disappeared instantly in the quake,” Ueda said. “I hope that for generations to come, when people touch and feel the warmth of the handprints it will prove to them that human kindness will never die.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

If people can be that kind, how much kinder can God be!

Listen to what God said to Israel and to us:

***I have written your name on the palms of my hands*** (Is. 49:16, NIV).

When God takes our names into His hands it means we are his beloved and He will never ever forget us!

What is more, God engraves our names into the book of life!

***He who overcomes, I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels*** (Rev. 3:5, NIV).

We are secure in Christ!

Hallelujah!

AUGUST 16

## ***FLY-BY-NIGHT ARRANGERS***

Running away from one's problems is hardly unusual, but some people in Japan pay professionals to arrange such flights for them.

Fly-by-night arrangers (*yonigeya*) are professionals who help the desperate escape creditors, elude stalkers, break affiliations with the mob or flee abusive husbands.

For added security, *yonigeya* do not tell their clients the intended plan until the day of escape. Ideally, clients take nothing more than a small bag with them and leave behind credit cards, driver's licenses and other identification.

On the appointed day, family members follow usual routines. Then, at a pre-arranged time, the father heads out on a concocted sales call, the mother goes shopping and the children leave school for a 'doctor's appointment'. Operatives pick them up at agreed-upon locations.

Once safely out of harm's way, the emphasis shifts to staying hidden. It is possible to hide for years, arguably for a lifetime, but it takes more discipline than most people have.

It requires cutting all ties with the past, never driving a car or renewing a driver's license, never using bankcards and never putting one's children in a public school. Only low-grade jobs are advisable since identification is not required.

*Source: Los Angeles Times*

Professional *yonigeya* believe they excel in hiding people from people, but they cannot hide anything from God. He watches the affairs of all human beings, even in the deepest darkness!

***His eyes are on the ways of men; He sees  
their every step. There is no dark place, no  
deep shadow, where evildoers can hide***

(Job 34:21-22, NIV).

How often we want to hide from God, not realizing that His all-seeing eye watches us day and night.

AUGUST 17

## ***DRILLING FOR HOT SPRINGS***

Hot spring spas are opening in Japan all the time, even in the middle of Tokyo and other big cities. Tone Geo Tech, a company founded in the 1920s, has helped develop more than 1,800 hot springs in different parts of the country.

It takes at least a year and a half to transform a hot spring into a useable spa. Japan is a country rich in hot springs – so rich, that no matter where you drill you are likely to hit one. However, it is a challenge to find one suitable in terms of temperature, size and cost feasibility.

“I remember the time when we drilled the deepest mineral hot spring well in Japan,” said manager Kenji Watanabe, one of the managers said. “We had to go down 2,714m!”

Even small towns, and villages thought to be without hot springs, have discovered their potential as spas by using Tone Geo Tech technology.

“When we hit a good spring, clients are all smiles and that makes me happy, too,” Watanabe said.

*Source: Nipponia*

Hot springs are great, but nothing compares to the rivers of living water flowing within us once we trust God!

***On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”*** (John 7:37-38, NIV).

May the streams of the life-giving water of the Holy Spirit spill over from your innermost being to others around you!

*Flow, river, flow!*

*Flood this land with your grace and mercy! – G. Kendrick*

AUGUST 18

## **TREES IN THE DESERT**

“Japanese people, especially the younger ones, are missing opportunities to feel things through their bodies, as I always felt when I was in the woods,” Sayuri Kanai said. “When kids try to understand what a tree is, they have to see, touch, and smell it!” Kanai sees nature as an educational tool for sharpening the senses. She grew up in a large farming community where a grove of trees was her favorite playground. Her friends were trees and woodland creatures. Her childhood experience affected her so profoundly that it led to her current vocation – planting trees all over the world.

“My family did not like my work as it kept me away from home, even on holidays,” she admitted. It took her husband and children two years to understand her goals. Now her family is in the ‘tree planting’ business with her.

Kanai started planting trees in 1993. The first project was planting trees in the south of China, which has seen 3,600km<sup>2</sup> (1,390 square miles) of grassland overtaken by the Gobi Desert every year. Teams of 20 to 30 volunteers stayed in the region for about a week at a time. So far, about 800 people have participated in the program planting more than one million trees.

“Temperatures hit minus 30 °C (22 °F) during the winter, but the trees we plant stay put no matter what happens with the weather,” Kanai said. “I admire the strength of trees so much!”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Indeed, when I read this article in a newspaper, I immediately thought how reassuring it is to know that we too can be like strong trees.

***He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf  
does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.  
Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the  
wind blows away*** (Ps. 1:3-4, NIV).

Those who live for God are like strong, useful trees.

AUGUST 19

### ***A NAVIGATION AID FOR THE DISABLED***

The Police Agency in Japan has developed a high-tech navigation system to help disabled pedestrians avoid traffic accidents.

Using portable devices, pedestrians are able to receive accurate moment-by-moment up-to-date information by satellite.

A device designed for visually impaired people conveys audio information about traffic light color changes.

For those in wheelchairs and those with hearing difficulties the device displays a map on the screen. The map shows the area within a 500-meter radius and indicates paths that are easily accessible by wheelchair. It also locates bus stops, train stations and landmark buildings in the area.

In addition, the portable device allows users to extend the time of a green light so they can cross the street safely.

In Japan, there are about 650,000 people with seeing and hearing challenges, and about 1.6 million people with walking difficulties who will benefit from this new system.

*Source: Asahi News*

This reminds me of God's guiding systems for us who are in utter darkness about the future.

We do not even know what tomorrow will bring!

We need God's guiding light every step of the way.

***Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God*** (Is. 50:10, NIV).

How wonderful to know that the Lord guides me steadfastly into the dark unknown of my tomorrows!

There is no need to grope in the dark if we lean on our God!

AUGUST 20

## ***REMOTE EYES FOR THE DISABLED***

The Tokyo Rehabilitation Center has developed a system that enables the visually impaired to get prompt help.

A video camera, the size of a pencil, records what is happening around the person, transmitting it to a helper in a remote location. Paired with glasses or earphones, its built-in microphone and speaker are quite unobtrusive.

A helper in a remote location watches a computer screen and offers guidance on the basis of what is transmitted by the visually impaired person's 'glasses' or 'earphones'.

Up until now, a helper has had to accompany the disabled person, placing a heavy burden on them both; but with this new system, helpers assist visually impaired people without physically accompanying them.

When 'eyes' are needed, the disabled person sends the image of his or her surroundings informing the helper about the problem. The helper can see the situation and can immediately give advice.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

On our own, we are spiritually blind, but our God is always so near to help us.

***I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them*** (Is. 42:16, NIV).

In spite of our limitations and ignorance of what lies ahead, we can believe in an all-seeing God who will straighten the way before us, making our path bright and smooth!

AUGUST 21

## ***THE OWL'S LATEST HOOT***

Pictured as wide-eyed and wise, the venerable owl has come into its own here in Japan: round owls with goggle eyes have captured the imagination of the urban public. They are associated with happiness and good fortune.

Maruzen, a large bookstore chain, has touted the owl as its official mascot for many years. In its showcases and displays, many saucer-eyed owl ornaments are prominent.

“Our sale area for owl-related goods is five times as big as it was two years ago,” a sales clerk said. “Young female customers especially have been snapping up the birds”.

The owl is known for its wisdom – an owl is a long-time symbol for *Reading Week* aimed at encouraging the public to bury their noses in books.

Tetsuo Tino, professor at Tokyo University, has poured over more than 10,000 owl-related documents and publications. He concluded that the recent boom in owl goods reflects people’s fundamental desire for happiness.

“Although owls are birds of prey, they make people feel relaxed with their charming expressions. As the economic outlook continues to look bleak, a lot of people are turning to these lucky birds for happiness,” he said.

*Source: The Yomiuri News*

The key to true happiness lies not in the possession of some unique object but in serving God.

***Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations***

(Ps. 100:4-5, NIV).

True happiness is found in a union with God, discovering His eternal purposes!

AUGUST 22

## ***WEAPON AGAINST POLLEN ALLERGIES***

In 2005, Japanese cedar trees released 10 to 30 times more pollen than they did in the previous year, largely due to the latest summer heat wave. Unfortunately, those who suffer from allergies faced a miserable few months.

A new weapon to fight hay fever is on the horizon. A *lactic acid bacterium*, used in making yogurt, has recently drawn attention as a new countermeasure against hay fever.

*Lactic acid bacterium* performs a vital role in keeping the gastrointestinal tract healthy, and some scientists concluded that it is effective in controlling pollen allergy symptoms.

Recent research into the bacterium has shown that it performs a variety of functions to maintain health such as reducing cholesterol and blood pressure and eliminating stomach ulcers.

Yogurt makers, who handle *lactic acid bacterium*, reported similar improvements in allergies and are eager to develop new products.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is good to strive for the best of health, but health in the spiritual realm is of the utmost importance.

***Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well***

(3 John 1:2, NIV).

My dear friend, may you be in good shape physically, have good fortune in every respect, and spiritually be in tip-top shape!

AUGUST 23

### ***A SOCIETY OF UMBRELLAS***

Normally, Japan is a safe country, but on March 20, 1995, 12 people died and over 5,000 were injured.

In a doomsday cult's diabolical plot, evildoers dispersed deadly sarin gas in the subway system during Tokyo's morning rush hour. Members of the Aum cult brought plastic bags filled with the gas into the subway cars and punctured the bags with umbrellas, randomly targeting innocent people!

Using such a commonplace item as the umbrella is what made the attacks so frightening:

In Japan, umbrellas are like community property. If you find yourself leaving an office building during a rain shower without an umbrella, you can help yourself to one of dozens usually piled up in umbrella stands near the door.

Aum turned this symbol of sharing and unity into a weapon of mass destruction. Nothing was the same again as suspicion reigned in the minds of people. Who knew if the nearby man on the morning train was just a droopy-eyed salary man? What was really inside his lunch box? Was his umbrella a weapon?

Panic gave way to suspicion, leading to mistrust, and finally to pessimism.

*Source: Time Asia*

People might have reason to despair, but we believe, together with the 300,000 Christians in Japan, that an exceedingly bright future lies ahead of us.

***He has given us new birth so that we might share in what belongs to Him. It is a gift that can never be destroyed. It can never spoil or even fade away. It is kept in heaven for you***

(1 Pet 1:4, NIV).

We are on our way to our homeland, which is heaven!

There, nothing can harm us and everything will be ideal!

AUGUST 24

## ***A SCIENTIST'S HOME***

Professor Katsushi Ikeuchi, a 57-year-old scientist, believed that Japan's nuclear energy policy cannot guarantee a steady power supply. Therefore, in 2002, he constructed a new home for himself with a solar power generator on the roof.

"Japanese homes last on average only 26 years," he said. "Building a house is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I wanted a house that would last 100 years, even if it cost more." Not only did he build a sturdy house that would house his family for generations to come, but one that is scientifically designed far beyond anything in ordinary homes.

The 24m<sup>2</sup> of solar panels on his new home generate up to 3.2 kW of electricity. Ikeuchi sells the surplus to Kansai Electric Power Co. and purchases power from the utility when the panels do not generate sufficient electricity. He believes that human beings need to curb their energy consumption due to what he calls 'environmental pressure'.

*Source: The Japan Times*

Ikeuchi's house might be nice, but wouldn't you rather live in an eternally permanent place, so wonderful you will never need any form of electricity or light; where there will never be any darkness – not even the slightest shade or dimness in any corner ever?

***The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there*** (Rev. 21:23-25, NIV).

What a wonderful prospect we as Christians have for our living conditions in heaven! It will be out of this world!

AUGUST 25

## ***RICE PADDY GODS***

Belief in special spirits that guard the rice paddies and allegedly bring a bountiful harvest is common among farmers in Japan.

A small mound of sand, in which sacred paper cuttings and a sprig of pine are visible, represents the rice spirits.

Each rice paddy spirit is thought to serve and protect a single small farming hamlet. In autumn, after the rice harvest, the spirits move into the nearby mountains. They return the following spring, just before the farmers fill the paddies with water to prepare for transplanting the seedlings.

In Kyushu, however, stone gods placed on high mounds overlook the paddies. These rice paddy gods typically hold a bowl of rice in one hand and a wide wooden rice spoon in the other.

When a particular hamlet suffers from several bad years in a row, the people sometimes ‘steal’ the rice paddy god from a more prosperous hamlet. Later, the ‘thieves’ return the statue along with gifts of rice and sake.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Idolatry in the West might not involve the adoration of images, but it could focus on things like riches or power!

Therefore, we all need to follow the advice of scripture!

***We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them*** (Acts 14:15, NIV).

Do not be deceived; anything you care for more than God is an idol! When you are face-to-face with these false gods such as possessions, position, or whatever, you turn your back on the true and living God.

Abandon them! Rather, turn your face to God and seek Him with your whole heart!

AUGUST 26

## ***SPIDER SILK PROTECTION***

Spider Silk is a coveted substance. It is a light, thin material such that a given weight of Spider Silk is five times as strong as the same weight of steel.

The problem from a technological point has been in finding a way to produce Spider Silk in industrial quantities. Since spiders are territorial carnivores, they are not suited to farming.

Nevertheless, a sock wholesaling manufacturer in Nara, Japan and Prof. Masao Nakagaki, an insect genetics researcher at Shinshu University are working together to produce stronger, more elastic socks using a new type of silk thread made by incorporating spider thread genes into silkworm eggs.

Genes are extracted from spiders and injected into silkworm eggs. Silkworms hatched from the eggs spin thread, about 10 percent of which is made up of spider thread material.

The professor said that the new thread is twice as strong and elastic as conventional silk thread and the new thread can be used in various non-textile products, such as sutures for surgery, fishing line and body armor for troops.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

When thinking about bulletproof vests for police and soldiers I remembered that nothing is stronger or finer than the armor of God. It is designed for a far greater combat than the war of flesh and blood!

***Put on the whole armor of God, that you may  
be able to stand against the wiles of the devil***  
(Eph. 6:11, NKJV).

Take everything God has set out for you: well-made weapons and clothing of the strongest materials. Then you will be able to defend yourself against the devil's tricks.

Do you want a 'power suit'?

Jesus has just the right fit for you!

AUGUST 27

## **BRAILLE KARAOKE SOFTWARE**

Like many other visually impaired people, Rieko Nakayama enjoys belting out a few songs at a *karaoke* sing-along.

However, the 40-year-old homemaker was limited in what she could sing since she could not see the lyrics on the screens of the *karaoke* machines. She always lagged behind others in her singing.

Nippon Telesoft Co. has solved this problem. They developed Braille *karaoke* software that transcribes the lyrics on a screen into Braille in a Braille pin device. Pins on the device move up and down, and slightly ahead of the song to form the words in Braille.

The visually impaired singers read the words with their fingers and are therefore able to sing in harmony with the music.

“Now I can sing without falling behind,” rejoices Nakayama.

The software makes it possible to transcribe about 100,000 songs on the *Joy Sound System* into Braille.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Spiritually, visually impaired people can experience a bright future of joy with Jesus Christ.

***In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel***

(Is. 29:18-19, NIV).

After a lifetime in gloom and darkness, the religiously blind can obtain sight as they fix their eyes on Jesus, who is the Creator of all light!

Even down-and-outs can see the true Light and will be able to laugh and dance for joy, whatever their circumstances might be!

Do not allow Satan to keep you in his dark domain!

AUGUST 28

## **SUMMER SCHOOL DIARIES**

Every year towards the end of August, no matter how hot it is, the normally crowded public swimming pools in Japan empty out.

“What happened?” you might ask the lifeguard. “Why isn’t anyone here today?”

“Oh, school starts in a week,” he might say, as if you had asked a stupid question. “All the kids are at home trying to finish their summer vacation homework.”

Although the summer vacation is a scant six weeks, all students have homework during the holiday. Assignments vary by school and teacher.

Typical homework includes keeping a brief one-line daily diary. The main point is writing practice, but the diary assignment exerts subtle pressure on both parent and child to make good use of the summer vacation.

Children should not have diary entries such as “Slept until noon!”, “Watched TV until dinnertime!” or “Too hot outside, so I played video games inside all day!”

Therefore, many visit museums and go hiking. They bike to the pool and library and before they know it, the 42 days of summer vacation have gone!

*Source: The Japan Times*

Speaking of diaries, God keeps a diary of our activities, whether they are good or bad; and He is going to hold us accountable!

***So we will all have to explain to God the things we have done. Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put anything in your brother’s way that would make him trip and fall*** (Rom. 14:12-13, NIV).

May we live in such a way that when the inevitable Day of Judgment comes, we are able to give a good report!

AUGUST 29

## ***SELF-CENTERED BUGS***

In the year 2000, there was an explosion of youth violence in Japan, causing deep unease among its citizens. It seems that the situation has continued to worsen.

A 17-year-old bludgeoned travelers with a baseball bat at a Tokyo subway station after a fight with his father.

A schoolboy hijacked a bus and killed a passenger because his parents ignored him.

A third boy stabbed an elderly neighbor. He wanted to experience killing someone, but not someone with a future!

A fourth killed his mother so she wouldn't learn he had been fighting at school.

"They seek to bury their sense of emptiness through crime," Dr. Junsuke Kageyama, a criminologist said. "Spoiled children are reluctant to accept the limitations of adult life."

This new breed of teenager is called *jiko-chu* (self-centered). Some go further and call them *jiko-chu* bugs. They are a nuisance, making and receiving phone calls in the crowded trains; sitting in the way of travelers on the cement floors at the stations and smoking when they walk in the crowded streets.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Rather than criticize, let us love 'self-centered bugs' more than they deserve.

***You are God's chosen people. You are holy and dearly loved. So put on tender mercy and kindness as if they were your clothes. Don't be proud. Be gentle and patient***

(Col. 3:12, NIrV).

Dress from the wardrobe of clothes that God has chosen for you to wear! Clothes of compassion, lowliness, meekness and longsuffering could win some for Jesus Christ!

Kindness is the love of God in work clothes!

AUGUST 30

## ***ERGONOMIC EXCELLENCE***

Ergonomics is a field of engineering that involves analyzing the human body and the ways it moves, and using these findings to help design and make easy-to-use products.

The science of ergonomics has resulted in a wide variety of commercial products that enhance user safety and comfort while also increasing user productivity.

An electric screwdriver is a good example of ergonomics. Previously, functionality was a top priority. Usability is now more of a focus and sales of this screwdriver are up 30 percent.

Jam maker Aohata Corporation uses ergonomics in the design of its jars. Since using data based on the hand sizes of people of all ages and both genders, it is now easier for anyone to open the newly designed jars. Consumers report happily that their children have no trouble opening the jars.

Stationery maker Kokuyo Co. released the *Slim B5*, a notebook designed ergonomically with pages narrower than usual so that a user can read the entire page without any need to move his head.

A growing number of companies are putting ergonomics in the forefront when designing and developing such things as car and airplane seats.

Companies are competing with each other to make products more user-friendly, suggesting that ease of use will be of growing importance in developing new products in the future.

*Source: The Internet*

***To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds***  
(Dan. 1:17, NIV).

Wisdom and skills are gifts from God to his creatures!

AUGUST 31

## ***SMILE DETECTOR CAMERA***

Sony Corporation released a digital camera that can detect a person's smile and automatically shoot a picture when – and only when – the person smiles.

The smile shutter feature works on a single face, even in a group picture. It picks the subject whose smile presses the camera into action.

It can check when the subject's cheeks and cheekbones are moving higher. The camera is more likely to detect a broad smile when teeth are showing. Sony says smile-detection accuracy also rises if your subject narrows his or her eyes, which happens often when people smile.

It is tough enough to get kids to pose for pictures, much less smile in front of the lens. Sony built the smile shutter around the intriguing notion that the camera will automatically snap a picture the instant your main subject cracks a grin. Fretting about shutter lag or other distractions will be a thing of the past!

Forcing a smile out of your children or the famously stone-faced guards outside Buckingham Palace remains a quest. In other words, the camera is useless without a beaming subject.

"It helps users capture moments with their children and special occasions like weddings," a Sony sales clerk said.

*Source: Asahi News*

Indeed, smiles are always so much better than frowns!

***A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit*** (Prov. 15:13, NIV).

Rather than being overwhelmed by adverse circumstances and sadness, we who belong to God can even smile through the pain!

Brighten the way for those you touch with cheery smiles. God wants to use you as you are, and He wants your smile!

# SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 1

## ***PRESUMED DEAD***

A 60-year-old shipbuilder went home to find preparations in progress for his own funeral. He had been presumed dead!

After the police in Omishi town misidentified the victim of a traffic accident, they handed the body over to the wrong family. The victim was in fact a 66-year-old unemployed man who also lived in the neighborhood.

The assistant police inspector made the erroneous identification despite being an acquaintance of the shipbuilder. He assumed from the body's features that it was that of the shipbuilder and accordingly notified the family.

The family, including his 62-year-old wife, also misidentified the body at the hospital and claimed it.

"The victim and my husband are both slender and grey-haired, so I thought he was my husband," the wife admitted. The shipbuilder came home at about 15:30 to see a body laid out in the living room and his tearful family members busy with funeral preparations.

"It gave me a terrible shock!" he said, "but I was very grateful that my time had not yet come!"

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Death is inevitable! Let us be ready for that day.

***Then I heard a voice from heaven. "Write this," it said. "Blessed are the dead who die as believers in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Holy Spirit. "They will rest from their labor. What they have done will not be forgotten"*** (Rev. 14:13, NIV).

Jesus conquered death so that mortals can look forward to that appointed hour of death with the knowledge that they are going straight into the presence of their Lord and Savior.

SEPTEMBER 2

## ***EYE DROPS FROM UPSTAIRS***

In Japan, the history of eye drops dates back to the 16th century. In those days, people suffered with sore eyes from smoke produced by burning firewood.

To ease their distress, they wrapped ointment in a piece of cloth, soaked it in water and then squeezed the liquid from the cloth into their eyes.

The first commercial eye drop product appeared in 1867, inspired by the famous American missionary James Hepburn.

Probably at that time the Japanese idiom, *Nikai kara megusuri*, was coined, literally ‘administer eye drops from the floor above’, meaning ‘to do the virtually impossible’.

Nowadays, with the widespread use of computers, eyes are taxed to their limit. Just about everyone in Japan uses eye drops.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Today, more than ever before, we need eyes to see whether something is true or false!

***Buy from me healing lotion to put on your eyes. Then you will be able to see***

(Rev. 3:18, NIrV).

How we need to pray that God will anoint our eyes with discernment to distinguish between good and evil!

Nowadays, discerning between what is from God and what is from the devil is getting more and more difficult; but as we read His Word, He enlightens our minds clearly to distinguish between right or wrong!

***The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple***

(Ps. 119:130, NIV).

Meaningful answers are seen in the Word of God!

SEPTEMBER 3

## ***AROUND THE WORLD AT 71***

A tiny boat sailed into Osaka harbor, ending a trip that had lasted almost a year. At the helm was Ikuo Kashima, of Osaka. He traveled 54,870km (34,290 miles) around the world on his yacht. The 71-year-old adventurer was then the oldest man to have completed the voyage.

What prompted a man of Kashima's years to undertake such a trip? He had a comfortable job as harbormaster of a yacht club in Osaka, but he also had an urge to encourage the elderly.

"I wanted to show that even in my 70s I was tough enough to make a round-the-world trip in a yacht by myself."

"Whenever large waves crashed over my small craft, I shouted loudly to encourage myself," he related.

By means of a laptop computer, Kashima sent information and pictures to his website, which was visited by some 80,000 people.

"The cold almost devastated me," Kashima reported. "To stave off the frigid winds, I placed four disposable chemical heaters inside my clothes. When I saw the sun for the first time in 10 days, I was overjoyed!" he said.

*Source: Mainichi News*

Kashima's feat encourages both the young and old in Japan.

We also need to encourage others we touch in our walk through life.

***The Lord and King has taught me what to say.  
He has taught me how to help those who are  
tired. He wakes me up every morning. He  
makes me want to listen like a good student***  
(Is. 50:4, NIV).

Is anyone happier and encouraged because their path crossed yours?

SEPTEMBER 4

## ***CURRY FOR A COIN***

*Matsumotoro* is the name of an old established restaurant in Tokyo. It is a frequent venue for important meetings held by politicians and intellectuals.

Recently, for example, the Prime Minister of Japan hosted a national banquet there to welcome the Chinese President.

Once a year, the 100-year-old restaurant serves *Beef Curry & Rice*, one of its popular dishes, to 1,500 customers for only a 10-yen coin on a first-come-first-served basis.

If they wish, customers may make an additional donation on top of the ¥10. By 11:00, there is usually a long queue at the start of the charity event.

“We launched the yearly ¥10 curry charity in 1973 as a way to show our gratitude to customers who have been supporting the restaurant,” Kosaka, the president of the restaurant said.

“Many people pay much more than ¥10 and the proceeds go to a charity.”

According to Kosaka, the popularity of the ¥10 curry charity event is rising and people come from near and far to take part.

“In addition to the curry itself, people are able to spend a fun time together, while making charitable contributions,” Kosaka said with a smile.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

A gourmet meal sustains us for just a very short time, but God’s fare satisfies for all eternity!

***If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will let everyone who wins the victory eat from the life-giving tree in God’s wonderful garden*** (Rev 2:7, CEV).

There is a distinct possibility that you too can enjoy the best food available to all humanity!

SEPTEMBER 5

## ***WORKING HOUR HABITS***

Kaori Sasaki's habits set her apart from the majority of Japanese corporate executives. She has dinner every evening with her family rather than her business clients.

In a country where a corporate boss is expected to work until 21:00 or 22:00 to keep clients entertained, Sasaki's lifestyle is highly unorthodox, devoting her weekends to her two children rather than to entertaining clients at nightclubs or on golf courses.

Sasaki runs an Internet and communications consulting company. She usually leaves her office around six or seven in the evening. This means her average workday is only 10 or 11 hours long.

"That's very, very short," she laughs. "I encourage my staff to do the same."

Sasaki said she wants the 'woman's way of thinking' to have a positive influence on the Japanese business world, making it healthier and more balanced.

The 45-year-old entrepreneur has created an open and flexible working environment. She allows her employees to take time off work to visit schools or daycare centers if they need to look after their children. There are no low ranking 'tea ladies' at her office. Whoever arrives first in the morning – usually Sasaki – makes the tea for everyone.

*Source: Tokyo Globe*

Jobs are necessary but they are not life. Freedom is too precious to lose to a job.

***Christ has set us free. He wants us to enjoy freedom. So stand firm. Don't let the chains of slavery hold you again*** (Gal. 5:1, NIV).

Never allow anyone or anything to put a harness of servitude on you! Christ has gloriously set us free so that we may enjoy the benefits of freedom!

SEPTEMBER 6

## ***ROBOT CONVERSATIONALIST***

The Tomy Company of Japan is marketing a robot it has developed which has artificial intelligence capable of recognizing words in a conversation.

When the robot hears a sentence, it picks out two words in the sentence and responds appropriately.

“I’m going out on a date tomorrow,” a lady might say. The robot is capable of recognizing the words ‘going out’ and ‘date’. It can then try to confirm a man’s name or respond with a question such as, “Where will you go?”

Since the robot remembers past conversations, it can continue communicating with remarks such as, “You were late for your last date with him, weren’t you?”

Capable of memorizing some 20,000 words, the robot can form two billion sentences.

The robot can also remind you of any appointments since it remembers your schedule.

*Source: The Japan Times*

The reason why this type of robot is so popular is that there are many lonely people desperately looking for company.

To look for friends is human. The Bible recognizes the need for true friends!

We cannot afford to go through life without true friends. It is one of the sweetest joys of life.

***Two people are better than one. They can help each other in everything they do. Suppose someone falls down. Then his friend can help him up. But suppose the man who falls down doesn't have anyone to help him up. Then feel sorry for him! (Eccl 4:9-10, NIV)***

True friends are worth their weight in gold!

SEPTEMBER 7

## ***PRECIOUS PAPER FAN***

*Hi Neil,*

*I am Janet Grant and I am enjoying your e-mails and would like to send you a little story from my time in Japan as a gift back to you:*

*When I was a senior year student 53 years ago at the Foreign Studies Department at Kansai Gaidai University, I had the chance to meet many Japanese students on campus.*

*One day I talked to a very stylish young girl. Anxious to be kind, I complimented her on her hand-held paper fan that she was using to stay cool in the hot August weather. I had completely forgotten my Oriental Art History professor's warning to beware of complimenting someone on something that they owned, as they might feel compelled to give it to you. Lo and behold, she gave it to me. She kindly asked me to receive it as a gift. As she slowly handed it to me, I realized what I had done and tried to refuse it but she would have none of it. I smiled and thanked her for the gift.*

*After more than half a century, I still have the fan in a display case in my family room as a reminder to me that possessions are of no importance in life in comparison to the need to be kind to another.*

***But though I appreciate your gifts, what makes me happiest is the well-earned reward you will have because of your kindness***

*(Phil. 4:17, TLB).*

Janet was not looking for a handout when she received this precious gift, but it resulted in lasting blessing for the receiver and, I believe, for the giver too!

Giving, as well as receiving, is part of the believer's walk in Christ!

SEPTEMBER 8

## ***REALIZED WISHES***

Kota, a boy who had yet to attend his first kindergarten class, was dying of cancer. When his mother, Michiko Yahata was told of her son's condition, everything seemed to black out.

"Every time I saw his face I would start crying," Michiko said. Friends encouraged her to do everything in her power to make her son happy for as long as she would have him with her.

She contacted the people at Make-a-Wish, first established in the United States, but now having affiliates in 27 countries including Japan. The Make-a-Wish staff comes up with a tailor-made plan to actualize each seriously ill child's dream.

Clad in his favorite T-shirt, jeans, socks and shoes (all emblazoned with his favorite character 'Thomas the Tank Engine'), Kota Yahata, the boy from Hiroshima, left on a magic trip to Thomas Land, an amusement park in Japan.

The night before his three-day trip, Kota was so excited he did not fall asleep until 02:00.

When Kota and his parents arrived at Thomas Land, he was the 800th child in the country to have his dream come true through the auspices of Make-A-Wish of Japan.

For Michiko, the trip gave her the courage to look her son in the eye again.

*Source: Asahi News*

My one spiritual wish is this: to continually experience and see the beauty of our Creator-God in the world and in my life!

***Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart*** (Ps. 37:4, NIV).

What more could I desire than to delight in His incomparable perfection and glory?

SEPTEMBER 9

## ***TRACKING TRASH***

As early as 2005, some garbage collectors in Japan adopted a new garbage tracking system that allows companies to confirm that their hazardous wastes, such as used medical supplies, are properly disposed of.

The cell phone-based system helps to ensure that sensitive wastes, such as documents containing customer information, are not stolen during transportation. It also prevents illegal dumping of waste or leakage of sensitive information that could damage a company's image.

Clients monitor the movements of garbage trucks on their personal computers with a GPS and a camera. Notification goes out to the client and the collection company's office if the truck deviates from a planned route or stops at unscheduled locations. An alarm is set off on the driver's cell phone, telling the driver to report to the office.

When wastes are successfully unloaded at a specified dumping ground, e-mails are sent out to all the clients including pictures of the waste and information about the number of boxes of waste and their weight.

*Source: Asahi News*

God needs no tracking system to know the detailed movements, actions and thoughts of all His creatures!

No created thing can escape His scrutiny!

***Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*** (Heb. 4:13, NIV).

No one on earth can hide from the eyes of God! Everything and everyone everywhere is completely exposed before God!

What a sobering thought!

May it motivate us to walk carefully before His all-seeing eyes!

SEPTEMBER 10

## ***GUIDING THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED***

For many years already, the visually impaired of Japan have been guided with a variety of slightly elevated dots and stripes on bright yellow tiles in all public walking areas. They can read the signs with their feet as they negotiate their way.

A new voice guidance system at railway stations guides them around train stations by giving them spoken directions. It can help them find their way through the many automatic ticket gates to the right platform.

Positional information for ticket gates, platforms, kiosks, and other facilities is transmitted to a terminal in the pocket of the user via the user's walking cane, which also serves as an antenna. This terminal converts that information into directions and then 'speaks' to the user in a synthesized voice.

If the user says to the terminal, 'Platform one,' the terminal picks up information on the user's current position via the cane, maps out the best route, and proceeds to give vocal directions, such as 'Turn left' or 'Go forward 20m'.

Many visually impaired people say that the danger of falling from the platform makes them very nervous, but that the new system assures them of safety as it assists them in getting around platforms.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc*

Spiritually, we human beings are blind, but how wonderful to know that God guides those who depend on Him by His Word and His voice.

***Whether you turn to the right or to the left,  
your ears will hear a voice behind you,  
saying, "This is the way; walk in it"***

(Is. 30:21, NIV).

Rely on God to guide you into an unknown future!

SEPTEMBER 11

## ***HIGH TECH FOR HEALTH***

Many in Japan are using high-tech devices for health in their homes!

In the toilet area, soft music starts to play as the user enters. An automatic ozone deodorant and flushing system quickly eliminates smells.

Toilet seats are adjustably heated and some lids close automatically, while others glow in the dark and have air conditioning below the rim for hot summer days. Talking toilets that greet the user have also started to appear.

Mikio Matsuzaki, aged 60, has his health condition checked, not by a doctor, but by a unique 'Intelligence Toilet' system. He enters the bathroom and uses a blood-pressure measuring device mounted on the wall. With another device, he checks his blood-sugar level. Standing in front of the washbasin, a device beneath the floor automatically measures his weight and body fat levels and sends the data to his personal computer. The figures help him detect abnormalities in his health.

Researchers have added medical sensors to these toilets, which can send blood sugar data obtained from the urine, pulse rate, blood pressure, and the body fat content of the user to a medical facility.

"Using the data, together with diet and exercise, I can maintain good health," Matsuzaki said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I pity human beings who are concerned about bodily health, but neglect their spiritual well-being!

***Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*** (1 Tim 4:8, NIV).

As I pray that physically you might have a clean bill of health, I earnestly hope that your soul might be in tip-top shape!

SEPTEMBER 12

## ***CHIRPING IN CONCRETE JUNGLES***

In Japan, as far as the eye can see, concrete pierces the skies. Walking among these skyscrapers in the city of Osaka one can hear the chirping of a variety of birds. Japanese bush warblers are also singing at the top of their voices. It is impressive, but quite artificial as there are no birds other than sparrows in these concrete jungles. Fortunately, there are wooded areas in Japan where the most beautiful chirping of quite a variety of real birds can still be heard.

Of all birds, Japanese bush warblers have the most exquisite voices. They are not much bigger than sparrows and yet they produce astounding music. Japanese bush warblers sing during the day, but frequently sing at night too. Their song is loud, with an impressive range of whistles, trills and gurgles. Japanese bush warblers sing even more loudly in urban or suburban environments in order to overcome the background noise.

We human beings can also sing to our God in very dark and trying situations.

By our actions of love, we can bring to God a sacrifice of praise.

***Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name*** (Heb. 13:15, NIV).

To bring a sacrifice however, can sometimes be a heart-rending experience. Think of Abraham when he expected to sacrifice Isaac! He did not waver but put his trust fully in His God.

When everything is against you and you do not feel connected to God – that is the time to bring a sacrifice of praise to God!

May God help us every day, in everything that is coming our way, to have a steadfast joyful spirit, even when it seems to be ever so difficult!

SEPTEMBER 13

## ***A TWIN OF THE EARTH***

In 1997, a team of Japanese engineers dared to imagine a computer so powerful that it could keep track of everything in the world at once: steaming rain forests in Bolivia, factories in Mexico belching smoke, the jet stream, the Gulf Stream, the works. What is more, they dared to build it.

The most powerful supercomputer ever built was designed for a single purpose – to create a virtual twin of our home planet. The Earth Simulator is the size of four tennis courts, runs at more than 35 trillion calculations per second, and is as powerful as the next 12 fastest supercomputers in the world put together.

Scientists have already completed a forecast of global ocean temperatures and a full set of climate predictions for the next 50 years!

Policymakers will be able to plug their parameters into this virtual Earth and skip ahead 1,000 years to get a handle on what effects their policies might have.

*Source: The Internet*

Who needs a computer the size of four tennis courts? God has been doing a great job of running the earth, and He will still be doing it long after the computers are rusty hulks.

It may be good to get to know about the workings of our terrestrial planet, but if we are willing subjects, God will teach us everything that is essential and advantageous to our well-being.

***But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what he hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you***

(John 16:13-14, NIV).

For the future, let us utterly rely on our God!

SEPTEMBER 14

## ***JOGGING ROBOT***

Japan ranks among the world's most advanced nations in robot technology and illustrated it in 2003 with Sony Corporation's child-shaped, bubble-headed, glowing-eyed robot that also jogs.

It took the developers ten years to get their robot *Orio* to walk and several more years to get it to jog!

The ingenious thing is getting the machine to jump off the ground for a fraction of a second. Running differs from walking in that both legs must be off the ground at the same time. That moment lasts for one-hundredth of a second for *Orio*, as it jumps 0.5 cm off the ground.

The previous versions of *Orio* recognized faces, responded to simple conversations, broke its fall by reaching out with its arms and getting up on its own, but now it can run!

*Orio* has not entered any races since it can only move at a speed of about 14m per minute, but that is more than twice as fast as its previous version.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Nowadays robots can do all kinds of things!

Man is trying his level best to create a robot in his own image. In one day, the Divine Creator easily made man in His own image, filled him with life, and gave him dominion over Planet Earth.

***Then the LORD God formed a man. He made him out of the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into him. And the man became a living person*** (Gen. 2:7, NIV).

There is nothing wrong with making robots out of metal, but it is grievously wrong when man does not recognize that God created man in one miraculous act: He formed man out of the dirt of the ground and breathed life into his nostrils!

SEPTEMBER 15

## ***THE COST OF OVERSLEEPING***

In Osaka, the West Japan Railway Company canceled an early morning train between two stations. It was big news in the newspapers. Trains have to run accurately to the second in Japan or else the whole system is affected.

“Even leaving one minute late makes a big difference to the efficiency of our system,” an official said with disappointment. Officials promptly canceled the train because it could not leave on schedule at 06:04.

The 34-year-old conductor did not report for duty at 06:00. He overslept by just a few minutes and his officials decided to cancel the train rather than letting it run late and delaying many other trains.

The unnamed conductor told officials that he had been woken up by his inflating air cushion (a wake-up timer), but then he had dozed off again.

“The conductor overslept by 3 minutes,” the officials complained.

The cancellation of that first train inconvenienced about 3,500 passengers on connecting trains, and the officials severely reprimanded the conductor for his lack of consideration for the passengers on his train.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

A correlation exists in the spiritual realm!

We should always stay vigilant because before we know it, we might become ensnared and adversely affect not only ourselves, but also the lives of many around us.

***Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak*** (Matt. 26:41, NIV).

Let us be consistently on the alert!

SEPTEMBER 16

## ***SLICK ATTACKER***

The Shimosawa residents of Japan are asking who is smarter: the police or a monkey that has eluded 150 riot police dispatched to capture it.

The primate attacked twenty-three women in one week. It bit the legs of at least seven of them.

An emergency dispatch of riot police went out to look for the 70cm tall monkey. They set up patrols to capture it and about twenty worried officials patrolled the town.

The police set up six traps baited with apples throughout the town to ensnare the monkey, alas to no avail. The dragnet also failed, and residents have been quick to compare the intelligence of the police officers and town officials with that of an ape!

Meanwhile, the police have asked girls in the area to wear long pants to minimize possible injury, should the monkey attack them. They have also asked students to carry umbrellas to scare off the monkey, should it attack.

The authorities cannot figure out why the monkey only attacks women as no one believes it is attacking them for sexual reasons. Perhaps it thinks they do not look as strong as boys or men.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Monkeys in Japan are supposed to be fun, but this serial attacker instills fear in the residents of Shimosawa!

Today, there is too much fear over too many things in the world. Some of us are so afraid that we cannot even sleep. Instead we ought to entrust ourselves to God!

***You will walk safely and never stumble; you  
will rest without a worry and sleep soundly***

(Prov. 3:23-24, CEV).

No one is more able than God to deal with our fears.

SEPTEMBER 17

## ***61-YEAR-OLD SURROGATE MOTHER***

A 61-year-old surrogate mother in central Japan has given birth to a surrogate child for her daughter. Her daughter longed to have a child of her own and her mother wanted to do anything she could to help her realize her dream. With gynecologist Yahiro Netsu's full support they went ahead with a very unusual solution.

"She is likely to be the oldest surrogate mother yet recorded in Japan," Netsu said after he performed the operation. The mother became pregnant with an egg from her daughter who has no uterus and a sperm cell from her daughter's husband. Soon and with joy, her daughter welcomed a baby of her own.

The Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, a powerful body with over 15,000 members, discourages such procedures, but they are legal and individual clinics are free to perform them—though few actually do. Dr. Netsu is keen to help surrogate mothers who have kinship ties with the biological mother.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

However man-manipulated, the birth of every baby is a magnificent miracle of God.

Yet no human birth is as great a miracle as the spiritual birth of a child of God!

***Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3, NIV).***

The Holy Spirit brings about the radical transformation in which a sinner becomes a new person!

***For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God***

(1 Pet. 1:23, NIV).

Are you born again?

SEPTEMBER 18

## ***THE GIANT SANDAL FESTIVAL***

Every October, residents of Daio-cho in Shima, Japan partake in the annual *Waraji* (straw sandal) *Festival*. The local people set a huge straw sandal adrift in the sea hoping to scare away evil spirits and secure peace on land and sea.

The festival has its roots in a folktale about a giant named *Daidarabocchi* who rises from the sea and raids the community. The villagers decided to make a huge straw sandal and set it adrift in the sea hoping that the giant would think another giant was living there and so return to the sea.

During the festival, people pray for peace and a good fishing season. Six young men from the town carry the straw sandal, which measures about 3m by 1.2m, to dedicate it at the Nakiri Shrine. Then then carry it to a nearby beach and set it afloat as they sing folksongs.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

In their ignorance, many Japanese worship idols of many kinds and shapes believing that they contribute to their health and wealth.

They also go to incredible lengths to secure peace and prosperity, not realizing that they can enjoy a long and happy life by simply following the living God and His instructions.

***If they obey and serve Him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge*** (Job 36:11-12, NIV).

Do you listen to God and obey Him?

The only sure way to unclouded fellowship with Him is obedience. Such fellowship provides a daily experience of well-being now and for all eternity, no matter what your state of affairs might be!

SEPTEMBER 19

## ***THE FIVE OATHS***

Japan's first expedition to the Antarctic was in 1912, under the leadership of First Lieutenant Nobu Shirase.

When aged only eleven, Shirase heard tales of polar exploration that set him dreaming. Repeatedly, the young boy asked his teacher, "How can I become an explorer?" The precocious boy was persistent and tried the teacher's patience. Exhausted his teacher told him to observe five rules:

- I shall not drink rice wine.*
- I shall not smoke.*
- I shall not drink tea.*
- I shall not drink hot water.*
- I shall not warm myself at the fire.*

With firm resolve, Shirase vowed to keep these five rules. Forty years later, an expedition headed by Nobu Shirase hoisted the flag of Japan on Antarctica for the first time.

Later, when commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Antarctic expedition, he referred to the vows he made as a child.

"The five oaths I made as a student were easy to say, but keeping them has been the most difficult achievement of all my life, I am now 76 years old and I still never indulge in rice wine, tobacco, tea or hot water. I never use any heaters to warm myself, even in the depth of winter."

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Shirase has done for his country what he could. What have you done for your God?

***She did what she could*** (Mark 14:8, NIV).

This widow poured her most precious perfume on Jesus! She did what she could. Today, followers of Christ all over the world still remember and emulate her actions!

SEPTEMBER 20

## **SEEING-EYE HORSES**

“Stop!” Morozumi orders Charm as they reach a traffic light. Others train seeing-eye dogs, but she trains a three-year-old miniature horse to be a help to blind people. Australian miniature horses have come to Japan to assist the blind.

“Charm is getting accustomed to lots of humans around him and is not frightened by cars anymore,” Morozumi says. Charm has yet to learn how to use elevators, escalators, public transport and taxis.

“The most important thing for guide dogs is not their instinct or their intelligence, but their ability to patiently wait on their owners for extended periods of time and to stop at bumps and steps,” Morozumi explained. “Horses also have these characteristics.”

Horses have advantages over other animals in that they have a lifespan of up to 50 years, whereas guide dogs only live for some 10 to 12 years. Besides, horses also do not bark, growl or have strong body odor.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Morozumi can only train her horses if they are willing to listen to her. In the same way, God wants to train us in heavenly ways, but we must not resist His designs for us.

Unfortunately, many people have made up their minds not to take any advice from the Word of God!

***You will say, “How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly”*** (Prov. 5:12-14, NIV).

Rather than meet with disaster, listen to God’s word and the advice of wise spiritual counselors. Follow God with all your heart and you will be glad for all eternity!

SEPTEMBER 21

## ***BREAKING WINDOWS***

We live in a time when people do not want any kind of authority over them. Everyone wants to do his or her own thing!

“What would you do if your school was like ‘the free plaza?’” a teacher asked children at a private primary school in Tokyo during a moral education class. The ‘free plaza’ is a fictitious place where there are no rules concerning moral issues.

The students eagerly raised their hands.

“I would stop studying and spend all my time playing,” one child said.

“I would play the survival game,” another child added.

“I would break as many windows as I could,” responded another.

The teacher was shocked!

“Freedom should come with a sense of responsibility!” the troubled teacher retorted in a raised voice.

Children prefer not to listen to teachers preaching about morals. Some 650 public primary and middle schools in Tokyo participated in similar programs, and these teachers too were shaken by the responses of the children.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Human nature has not changed since the days of the Bible! The people of Israel were leaderless and everyone became his own authority and acted on his own opinions of right and wrong. This produced horrendous results.

***In those days, Israel did not have a king. The people did anything they thought was right***  
*(Judg. 21:25, NIV)*.

Our world is similar. People have made themselves the final authorities without reference to God.

Oh, that men and women would bow in reverence and be obedient to the authority of God and His Word!

SEPTEMBER 22

## **CAT STATION MASTER**

A money-losing Japanese train company has found the *purr-fect* attraction to draw crowds and bring back business – tabby Tama.

The 9-year-old female cat sits all day long by the entrance of Kishi Station in western Japan wearing a black military cap and posing for tourists who come flocking in droves from around the country.

Tama has been doing such a good job of raising revenue for the troubled Kishikawa Line that she was recently promoted to ‘Super Station Master’.

“She never complains even though passengers touch her all day long. She is an amazing cat, full of patience and charisma,” a spokesperson for the railway company remarked. “She is the perfect station master.”

In December 2007, Tama received her reward in bonus pay – in cat food.

People are snatching up novelty goods – postcards, erasers, notebooks and pins – decorated with Tama’s photo. There is even a special book of photos called, *Diary of Tama, the Station Master*.

*Source: Japan News*

Appointing a cat to help turn fortunes around makes cultural sense in Japan where cats are considered good luck and are believed to promote business.

Sadly, today in Japan almost everything is about making money! However, there are things of greater importance than financial gain!

***The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold*** (Ps. 119:72, NIV).

The truth from God’s own mouth is much more valuable than trillions in gold and silver!

SEPTEMBER 23

## ***AUTOMATIC FEVER DETECTION***

Singapore is the first country in the world to use a thermal imaging system at its airport, following a serious SARS outbreak in 2003 when 13 people died.

A large walk-through heat detector checks to see if any arriving travelers have a fever. Today it is in use in most airports in the world.

Before installing the detectors, Singapore officials required nurses and military medics to take the temperature of arriving travelers, but this proved time consuming.

With the thermal imaging system at the airport, passengers merely walk past the machine. The thermal scanner shows if a person has a higher body temperature than usual – one of the symptoms displayed by people with SARS.

If a person is feverish, reddish spots over his face appear on a screen.

*Source: Science Reporter*

We can quite easily hide our fevers from people around us, but from God, we can hide nothing! Before we were born, God knew everything about us, even the smallest details.

***Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be***

(Ps. 139:16, NIV).

God carefully watches the goings on of human beings and He knows it all. Be careful of your daily actions!

***Your eyes are open to the ways of all mankind; you reward each person according to their conduct and as their deeds deserve***

(Jer. 32:19, NIV).

Nothing you do escapes the eyes of God!

SEPTEMBER 24

## ***SECURITY IN ONE'S FINGERTIP***

For the next generation's security, Bionics Company in Osaka has developed a device that scans finger blood vessels. As each individual has unique finger blood vessel patterns this device never mistakes one person for another.

With ever more sophisticated criminal methods, security systems must also become more advanced.

House keys can be lost or the wrong person might make duplicates! It is more convenient to be able to enter a home, a car, or an office simply by having a finger scanned!

Neither key nor card is necessary for the firm's personal identification system. A lock equipped with the device opens condominiums and offices within two seconds of a person inserting their finger into the scanner, making it especially convenient for the elderly and children.

The device is also handy for credit-card transactions, automated teller machines, immigration purposes, personal seals, driver's licenses, and time clocks.

The Orix group owns an office building that uses no keys for its locks. When the first person in the morning arrives at the building and unlocks the door using their finger, the elevators, air conditioners, and lighting automatically turn on. When the last person leaves the building, everything switches off.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

In life, there are doors to open and doors to shut! I am so glad God is in charge of opening and shutting doors for me!

***I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name*** (Rev. 3:8, NIV).

When God opens a door for me, no one man can slam it shut!

SEPTEMBER 25

### ***CANDY BETRAYAL SCANDAL***

The year 2007 was supposed to be a celebratory year for Akafuku, a confectioner who has sold bean-jam sweets in Japan since 1707. On its 300th anniversary, the company was preparing to celebrate the sale of its top-selling sweets – indispensable gifts to bring back home after trips.

Alas, instead of a time of celebration, the Akafuku Company lay exposed for lying about the contents of its products and for tampering with expiry date labels. Akafuku was found to have systematically reused up to 90 percent of its unsold products.

The authorities ordered the business to cease operations on October 19, 2007.

Consumers of Akafuku confectionaries who had long been willing to pay premium prices were shocked! Beyond question, the custom of giving gifts has helped knit together the fabric of Japanese society. The company, deeply entrenched in the gift-giving culture, had a store stocked with delicately packaged sweets and cakes in every airport and major train station in Japan.

Japanese associated these products with ‘sunny days’ when birthdays were celebrated, or when husbands and fathers returned from business trips with presents.

“There is a strong feeling that we are now denied these happy episodes,” one of the customers expressed in her horror outside a shuttered shop. “It’s as if the sunny days were all rotten after all.”

*Source: The New York Times*

Those who violate trust are despised as betrayers.

***Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody*** (Rom. 12:17, NIV).

Focus your actions on what is honest, right and honorable in the sight of God and man!

SEPTEMBER 26

### ***TRIVIAL CALLS DILEMMA***

Police in Japan are increasingly perplexed over whether to send officers to respond to every emergency call or not as they are inundated many frivolous calls!

“My wife is a bad cook. You must do something,” one caller said nonchalantly, expecting action from the police.

“My parents are arguing over which TV program to watch,” a homemaker complained to the police after making a 110 call to emergency services.

The police rushed to an emergency caller’s house to discover that the 28-year-old man and his brother, 26, were having an argument over a bowl of instant noodles.

“I can’t believe that they asked a policeman to intervene in such an argument,” one of the police officers said.

“My 6-year-old is unruly and out of control,” a mother complained. On arrival, the child acted quite normally and the police could only plead with the mother to call them only when necessary.

The police cannot afford to ignore such calls as they might spiral into something more serious if they do not respond. However, these trivial calls take up resources that could have been used on far more pressing cases among the 37,639 calls made in 2007.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

If we give way to our own desires, we are just as selfish and egoistic!

***For everyone looks out for his own interests,  
not those of Jesus Christ*** (Phil. 2:21, NIV).

Rather than our looking out for ourselves, may the Lord help us to be alert to the things that matter to Jesus Christ.

SEPTEMBER 27

## ***BLIND SOCCER PLAYER***

“Being visually impaired needn’t diminish a player’s participation in and fascination with soccer at all,” said 30-year-old Teruo Ishii.

He used to enjoy playing, but stopped after he lost his eyesight to glaucoma.

One day, using voice software, he came across information about soccer for the visually impaired. Players use a ball with bells inside it and follow the tinkling sound as they kick the ball. Each team has five players and all of them wear masks to ensure they are equally visually impaired.

“I was so scared the first time I played. I thought I’d never be able to make out the ball.” Ishii recalled, but the feeling of freedom that came from running around the field helped him overcome his fear. He built up his confidence and was even able to play in a match in Seoul, Korea.

People have played blind soccer in South America and Europe for more than two decades.

Japan formed its first blind soccer association in October 2002 and interestingly, four of its teams participated in a championship held on the roof of a department store!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Ishii and his friends overcame their handicaps to the point at which they could enjoy playing soccer with abandon.

How much more wonderful it is for human beings who are spiritually impaired, to be overcomers in the spiritual realm!

***For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God*** (1 John 5:4-5, NIV).

We can all gloriously overcome the evil of the world with the help of Jesus!

SEPTEMBER 28

## ***RICE PLANTING ROBOTS***

The essential job of planting rice seedlings in Japan has been backbreaking work since ancient times. Farmers spend many hours stooping over muddy paddies inserting the seedlings one at a time. The job requires experience and well-honed skills.

Mechanization introduced some time ago has helped farmers somewhat, but in 2005 scientists at the Agricultural Research Center introduced new robots to do the hard work of planting rice in water-filled paddies without any human intervention.

To find its way around, the device relies on the global positioning system (GPS). Computer controlled tilt sensors and other instruments calculate the angle and direction of the machine's movements.

It is able to move across muddy paddies very precisely within a margin of error of a few centimeters. Once it reaches the edge of a paddy, the machine makes a U-turn onto the next row. In addition, it plants much faster than human hands.

Robots have appeared at just the right time. The rice-planting robots help those who are aging by taking some of the strain off farm work and by presenting farming as more attractive and interesting to the younger generation.

*Source: Web Japan*

However, there is a kind of sowing, planting and reaping which robots will never do!

***Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*** (James 3:18, NIV).

When planting seeds of peace, expect to reap a harvest of goodness!

SEPTEMBER 29

## ***EXTREME RELAXATION***

Every night after his wife and two sons drop off to sleep, Mr. Yoshino visits his aquarium to watch his tropical fish. It is one of the few pleasures in the life of the 42-year-old employee.

“I’m not sure why I relax so completely when watching my fish,” Yoshino said. “Around two years ago when I began worrying about my future, I started this therapy.” He could not think of any other way to relax and be happy.

Apparently in the late 1990’s, an increasing number of discontented people sought relaxation by watching fish. More than 15 pet shops specializing in aquarium fish opened in Tokyo.

Other disgruntled workers buy ‘character goods’ to relax.

In 1998, a fanciful animal character called *Tarepanda*, became a hot item, not only among children but also among adults. The character currently appears in and on more than 500 items such as stationery, toys and clothes.

The *Tarepanda* image is one of extreme relaxation. The character represents the tiredness of the Japanese people amid the poor economic situation. Many people feel sympathetic towards the “worn-out” panda character.

*Source: Asahi News*

I am so glad to propagate the very best in relaxation and peace available through Jesus!

***“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33, NIV).**

It is truly a gift from Jesus, to be able to relax in the face of stressful situations.

Finding Him, we have no need to seek peace, for He Himself is our peace!

SEPTEMBER 30

## **MARATHON RUNNER AT 67**

Mr. Maezawa, a former primary school teacher lives in Tokyo and still has a spring in his step at the age of 67. The Yomiuri newspaper reported that Mr. Maezawa, who took up long-distance running at the age of 50, had just completed his 181<sup>st</sup> marathon. Including unofficial meets, he has taken part in 238 marathons.

At first, he started to run 10km every morning and took part in several races hoping to meet the challenges of long-distance running. He has run at least one marathon every month for the last 17 years.

He became the first chairperson of a group of citizens aiming to complete 100 marathons.

“There are people who have finished a lot more marathons than I have, but I am probably the only one that started at 50 and still runs a marathon every month,” he said.

“I would like to continue running at my own pace and maintain my strength,” he added.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Christians are also into marathons. Listen to what Paul said about the race we need to run!

***Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith***

(Heb. 12:1-2, NIV).

Paul threw all his weight into the race of life! Nearing the end, it is no wonder that he declared, ***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*** (2 Tim. 4:7, NIV).

Let us run at full tilt toward the finish line!

OCTOBER

OCTOBER 1

## ***SECURE AND CLEAN PLAY***

An increasing number of indoor play facilities in Japan strive to meet the demands of safety that parents expect today. At *The Amazing World* facility in Machida, Tokyo, where the average number of visitors on a busy day is about 2,000, there are 14 security cameras watching over the children.

In the arcade games section children race cars and play slot machines. In another section, girls try on a variety of colorful dresses.

Meanwhile, parents or guardians can relax in free electric massage chairs and read magazines.

“These days, parents are not only interested in safety and security, but are also very concerned about the cleanliness of the play sets their children use,” said Mr. Takada of *The Amazing World*.

For the sake of cleanliness, the facility uses special anti-bacterial sand with wood charcoal at its base in the sandbox. Germ-free sand attracts parents to come with their smaller children.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is good to see parents wanting the best for their children, but many need to realize the importance of bringing their children to the Savior who loves them ever so much!

***One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that He would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: “Let the children alone, don’t prevent them from coming to me. God’s kingdom is made up of people like these” (Matt. 19:13-14, MSG).***

We have a responsibility to point our younger generation to Christ, the Lover of children.

OCTOBER 2

## ***EGGS WITH GREEN DEADLINES***

Eggs with expiry dates printed on their shells have gone on sale in most shops here in Japan.

According to the Yomiuri newspaper, food manufacturers developed a device that sprays expiry dates in green ink directly onto the eggshells. The old expiry-date stickers that distributors used to put directly on their eggs tended to come off.

The newly developed device gently sprays the eggs as they move along a conveyer belt. The ink is made of a substance extracted from green plants and will not penetrate the shell. Even when an egg is boiled, the ink will not run or dissolve in the water.

These stamped eggs remind me that we all have God's 'expiry date' printed on us.

The difference is that our 'expiry date' is invisible to us and to others! We do not know when we will expire.

Many of us do not want to think about our 'expiry date', but we ought to prepare for that day. It approaches faster than we might think.

When Jesus comes to meet us, it could turn out to be one of the most trying times; but for any follower of Christ it will certainly be the most glorious day. Paul's message for us regarding his own magnificent 'expiry date' declares:

***I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is a crown waiting for me. It is given to those who are right with God. The Lord, who judges fairly, will give it to me on the day He returns. He will not give it only to me. He will also give it to all those who are longing for him to return*** (2 Tim. 4:7-8, NIV).

If you have committed your life to Christ, your arrival in heaven will be most glorious!

OCTOBER 3

## ***ROBOTIC LION PET***

Sony's first version of a robotic pet in 1999 was a dog-like toy called *Aibo*. With a production limit of 3,000 units, it sold out in just 20 minutes. Bristling with Sony's technological finesse, the 1.6kg beast looked like a cross between a dachshund and a racing motorcycle!

It is controlled by a powerful computer chip, its eyes are a camera, its ears are microphones and it has sensors in its paws, and even an antenna-like tail. *Aibo* acts like a pet thanks to 18 small monitors in its plastic body. It remembers how to stand up if knocked over; how to chase after its favorite colored ball; and how to go for a walk. For a machine that is all pretty smart.

Sony's second version of a robotic pet looks like a lion cub. It makes emotional expressions including happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear and dislike. It can understand and respond to about 50 words. For example: it answers to the name given to it by its owner; it performs appropriate actions in response to such orders as 'Sit!' 'Beg!' 'Come!' and it remembers spoken words and can repeat them.

If told to 'take a photo' the color camera behind its forehead takes a picture through its eyes.

*Source: Japan Information Network*

If robot pets can express feelings, what is the world coming to?

We ought to express the right feelings at all times, even if our state of affairs is most trying.

***God's Spirit makes us loving, happy,  
peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle,  
and self-controlled. There is no law against  
behaving in any of these ways***

(Gal. 5:22-23, CEV).

May we reveal these precious traits every day of our lives!

OCTOBER 4

## ***ROBOT PLAYMATES***

“Kota, sit down!” Aika Okamoto the primary school student said to one of her electronic *Aibo* dogs.

“They are members of our family,” she says. “I don’t think of them as robots.” Aika and her parents, living in Tokyo, own four *Aibos* and daily interact with their ‘dogs’.

“Real dogs are sometimes reluctant to play with me,” Aika said. “But *Aibos* never let me down. They always joyfully play with me whenever I want them to.”

“When one is gone to a clinic for repairs, I really miss my *Aibo*”, she said. It seems that *Aibos* are an indispensable part of Aika’s life.

For the Okamotos, *Aibos* are neither toys, pets nor even machines, but something much more – they are part of their family.

Sony produced *Aibos* from 1999 to 2006. They can see via a camera and understand commands in several languages.

These robot dogs were also able to mature based on external stimuli from their owners or otherwise they would sulk.

*Aibo* ware enables owners to bring *Aibos* up from puppies to fully-grown dogs and teach them all kinds of tricks, as the owner interacts with them! When neglected they sulk.

They have proven to be and still are convenient companions for many people in Japan and in other countries.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Aika Okamoto loves her *Aibos*! You can tell a lot about people from the way they care for their pets, robots or otherwise.

***A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal*** (Prov. 12:10, NIV)

We who belong to God are kind to others and to our animals and, I dare to add, even to our robots.

OCTOBER 5

## ***THE WACKY WORLD OF ICE CREAM***

The Japanese have come up with unique flavors of ice cream such as *chicken wing, eel* and *cactus*.

Here are a few more flavors you might like to try out, if you have the opportunity:

*Fish ice cream*, flavored with a kind of saltwater fish popular in Japan.

The taste of octopus has found its way into an ice cream cone.

*Ox tongue ice cream* tastes nothing like beef.

Eggplant is a mainstay of the Japanese diet, appearing regularly on such dishes as pizza and even in sandwiches. Becoming an ice cream flavor was merely a matter of time.

Japan is renowned for its rich array of seafood. Prime amongst delicacies is crab, but *crab ice cream* is not everybody's preferred ice cream flavor.

*Wasabi* with its tingling taste of horseradish makes a delightful addition to raw fish and its tangy flavor makes for a surprisingly edible ice cream.

Most people would be making a report to the health authorities if they found an entire shrimp's body in their ice cream, but for *shrimp ice cream*, that is the norm.

*Source: The Internet*

People's taste buds are different from country to country, but if you want to try something that really tastes good, read in the Bible what King David says about God's words:

***How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!***

(Ps. 119:103, NIV)

The honeycomb was the sweetest substance known to the ancient world. When the psalmist said that Scripture is sweeter than honey, he was saying he valued it above any other pleasure.

Is God's Word sweet and enjoyable to you?

OCTOBER 6

## **NINE-YEAR-OLD INVENTOR**

Nine-year-old Sayuri Itoda of Ashikawa, Japan, came up with a bright idea: a desk with a surface made of whiteboard. It allows one to draw and erase repeatedly with felt tip markers.

She entered her idea in a *Dream Contest* sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Asahikawa City. Sayuri's design won the top prize.

Wako Inc., a local furniture maker, was so impressed with her design that they decided to add the *Whiteboard Desk* to its product line and, to Sayuri's joy, in no time the company sold 20 of them.

"I didn't think my design was all that good, but when I saw the actual product, I thought it was great," said Sayuri. She worked with Wako employees to bring her idea to life.

Every day, Sayuri enjoys drawing on the *Whiteboard Desk* she designed herself.

"I trust that the *Whiteboard Desk* will bring in money for us as well as for the young designer," the sales manager of Wako Inc. added.

*Source: Japan-kids Webpage*

God bestows very special abilities upon us that we may use them to assist others and glorify Him. He gives us spiritual gifts for the same reasons.

***Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms*** (1 Peter 4:10, NIV).

God did not provide us with gifts merely to lavish them on ourselves, but to use them for the good of others!

Are you utilizing the abilities God has so graciously allotted you to the joy and advantage of your fellow human beings?

OCTOBER 7

## ***BEEP! WELCOME TO SCHOOL***

In Japan, high-tech tagging to keep an eye on people made the jump from the grocery store to the schoolyard in 2004.

Every time a student passes through Rikkyo Elementary School's front gate in Tokyo, a small, gray plastic tag tucked inside his or her backpack beams a message to a computer in the school office.

The students are oblivious of this, but the computer logs the time they enter and leave the school grounds. Moments later, their parents receive confirmation by e-mail.

Parents know if a student is late for school and they know if a child takes longer than usual to get home.

Like many children in Tokyo, Rikkyo School's students can take as long as two hours to get to school on busy trains.

"I think the tags are a good idea because my two sons almost never leave school at the same time," said Mrs. Shino, a 38-year-old homemaker who has one son in second grade and one in third. "Now I know when to expect them home," she said of her sons, whose commute to school takes 30 minutes.

"The school has to do all it can to ensure the safety and well-being of our students," explains Mr. Tanaka, the principal of the Rikkyo School.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Even the most advanced technological 'eye' is incomparable to God's all-seeing eye.

***For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD,  
and He examines all his paths*** (Prov. 5:21, NIV).

Therefore, moment by moment, wherever you are and whatever you do or say, be careful!

OCTOBER 8

## **SALARY MEN SEEK SOLACE**

Middle-aged corporate warriors in Japan escape to ‘hiding places for the mind’ far from the stress of work and home.

In the city of Yokohama, a group of white-collar workers gets together. The group includes a dentist, a banker, a police officer, a teacher and a painter. They compose and sing songs that summarize their frustrations over their careers and their bad feelings toward unsympathetic family members.

In Nagoya another singing group regularly shares their miseries in the hope that a better life might somehow be found!

“I want to keep bright, remain healthy and have a forward outlook,” Koji Mikami the group’s leader says. He is a shipbuilder who suffered hardship after he opposed his company.

Many in Japan learn to sing cheerfully about hardships as they try to forget their feelings of helplessness.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Sadly, many in Japan who are desperate for a joyful life do not know how to obtain it. Unfortunately, they do not realize that abundant and lasting joy is possible only in Jesus Christ.

What about you?

Do you look for joy in things or places?

When God transforms you, singing takes on a new meaning. You can happily sing and make a joyful noise to God.

***Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song*** (Ps. 95:1-2, NIV).

When you know who God is, then you understand that nothing is more fantastic to humanity than God. In spite of contrary circumstances, one can sing triumphantly to the Lord.

Every day, choose to be a joyful person in Jesus!

OCTOBER 9

## ***POOR ENGLISH LEADS TO HANDCUFFS***

Boning up on one's English while on a tedious flight overseas might seem harmless. Anybody who knows English, though, would probably think twice before writing the words *suicide bomb* on a flight in the security conscious United States.

That is what a Japanese businessman in his 60s learned after he was spotted with a scrap of paper with those words in his possession by an alert passenger who straightaway reported the matter to flight attendants on the United Airlines flight.

The aircraft returned to the gate. Airport police immediately handcuffed and detained the man. All 120 passengers had to leave the aircraft for a thorough search. Eventually the police realized that the man was only trying to study English and had come across the words in a newspaper. He had simply copied them down to look up their meanings later.

After a delay of three hours, with the misunderstanding cleared up, all the passengers, including the Japanese man, resumed their journey.

Travelers need to be mindful of how they behave on aircraft these days, because airline officials treat potential security threats most seriously.

*Source: Asahi News*

Also, Paul taught us to know how to behave as followers of Christ.

***You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed*** (1 Thess. 2:10, NIV).

He said that he performed his duties to God and man faithfully. We too should be consistent and faithful in our dealings with God and people with whom we rub shoulders every day.

OCTOBER 10

## ***CUBE CHAMPIONS***

More than 250 competitors from 33 countries, including many national champions, took part in the 2007 Rubik's Cube World Championship Classics held in Budapest. This is where Mr. Erno Rubik invented the game in 1974. The cube has six colors. When solved, it has all nine tiles on each side in a single color.

Many showed remarkable skills such as solving the cube blindfolded, single-handedly or with their feet.

Finland's Mr. Vanhala was fastest with his feet at 49.33 seconds even though his favorite customized cube was stolen during the competition. Players customize their cubes with everything from silicon lubricants to talcum powder.

Several Japanese contenders also bagged prizes.

The 16-year-old Yu Nakajima, who won the main event, is a junior at an engineering high school in Kushiro, Japan. He practiced the game five hours each day until he was able to solve the classic 3x3 cube in an average time of 12.46 seconds.

"I could not think of anything to say when I was declared the champion," Nakajima admitted. "I was dumbfounded with joy!"

*Source: Kyodo*

Did you know that God has created puzzles for human beings to solve?

***It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings***

(Prov. 25:2, NIV).

God delights to conceal things, so that man might have as much joy in investigating and discovering them as He had in creating them!

As human beings, we are ever discoverers of God's mysteries!

I think the most wonderful privilege we have as followers of Christ is to make new discoveries in His Word every day!

OCTOBER 11

## ***SOCIAL ISOLATION LEADS TO VIOLENCE***

Violent attacks on innocent civilians are on the increase in Japan. Troubled people are venting their frustration on total strangers.

In the early morning hours in a supermarket parking lot, the passenger of a taxi suddenly struck the driver with a hammer, leaving the 63-year-old driver seriously injured. The attacker, a 57-year-old man, fled in his own vehicle.

“It could have been any taxi driver. I didn’t care,” the suspect said to a senior police officer.

“He had no one to talk to,” the senior officer said. “Frustrated thoughts escalated in his mind and triggered a kind of twisted hatred.” The suspect was unemployed, unmarried and had few friends or acquaintances.

“They prefer to be loners,” Yasuhiko Higuchi, a lecturer at Toyama University said. “After stress is magnified in their minds and with no one to help them get rid of murderous thoughts, they easily commit an extreme crime.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***If one falls down, his friend can help him up.  
But pity the man who falls and has no one to  
help him up*** (Eccl. 4:10, NIV).

How wonderful to know that more than any other friend, God is the one that helps us not to trip up and fall!

***For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from  
death, my eyes from tears, my feet from  
stumbling*** (Ps. 116:8, NIV).

So, commit your life to the living God. He is your Caretaker in every stressful situation!

OCTOBER 12

## ***FROM RAGS TO RICHES***

On April 25, 1980, Makoto Oonuki, was driving his truck and looking for newspapers to recycle when he spied a packet wrapped in cloth. Thinking it might be old magazines he collected it. The packet contained ¥100 million!

In Japan, if money is not claimed within 6 months, finders are keepers.

With a third of the money, Oonuki paid his taxes and with another third of the money, he bought a house, but he never squandered the money.

“He did not even raise my weekly allowance,” his daughter complained.

His friends and enemies multiplied. Some pleaded with him while others threatened to get hold of some of his money.

Oonuki became the most famous truck driver in Japan, appearing on television shows, making speeches and giving lectures.

“Will you be happy from now on?” a journalist asked him on the day when he received the money.

“Only at the end of my life will I know if I found true happiness!” Oonuki replied.

At 62, he died and people speculated about the happiness he might have found in the great beyond.

*Source: Mainichi News*

True joy transcends death and can only be found in Jesus.

***He will bring you into his heavenly glory without any fault. He will bring you there with great joy*** (Jude 24, NIV).

If we are right with God, coming into His presence will be more wonderful than we can ever imagine! He will sweep us into His everlasting presence, sinless and perfect, and with a joy that is unheard of by mortals like us!

OCTOBER 13

## ***I STILL HAVE LAUGHTER IN ME***

The Society of Healing Environment in Japan has trained ‘laughter therapists’ from a pool of doctors, lawyers, professors and homemakers. Kazue Takayanagi, an associate professor of Nippon Medical School, was instrumental in bringing the group together.

After undergoing several months of training in how to spread laughter and hope, the first batch of 49 ‘laughter therapists’ graduated. They felt a mission to bring good cheer to those in hospitals and nursing homes.

“A hospital should be a place that can heal broken hearts, as well as broken bodies,” Takayanagi said.

The therapists do not entertain with slapstick comedy. They slip a bit of humor into casual conversation to induce a chuckle. Often, that is all it takes to cheer someone up.

“There’s no point in exploding into riotous laughter in front of a patient who is depressed. It just makes that person withdraw further into his or her gloom,” Takayanagi said.

“I realized I still have laughter left in me as a treatment option, and I feel much better,” a patient in one of the hospitals said.

*Source: Asahi News*

How sad to meet people who have forgotten the joy and benefit of laughter.

***A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones***

(Prov. 17:22, NIV).

Thousands of years ago, God told us about the relationship between a joyful heart and good health.

Let us banish all gloom and doom from our lives! Let us fill the lives of others with cheer!

Let us be positive – rejoicing in the Lord!

OCTOBER 14

## ***TOY DOCTORS***

A mobile toy hospital, where high school students repair broken toys free of charge, has become a popular enterprise in Toyama City, Japan. The students operate out of a 6x6m tent set up in a shopping mall.

Risako, a 9-year-old girl, brought her tape recorder to them. She received it when she was 2 years old. Even though it had soon broken, Risako insisted on keeping it.

“I’m so happy,” she said, hugging the toy that the ‘doctors’ repaired for her at the toy hospital.

Students, who belong to the school’s engineering club, work as ‘doctors’ at the toy hospital. Some are involved in courses in mechanics and electronics at school.

These volunteers sometimes receive up to thirty orders in a single day and work on a wide variety of toys including model trains and keyboards.

“I felt nervous working at the toy hospital,” said Yutaka, a grade 11 student studying electronics. “But I am so happy to hear the kids say, ‘thank you’!”

“Students in the club learn about the joy of fixing and creating things,” endorses the Vice-Principal, “at the same time, they discover the rewards of thoughtfulness for others.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

A sign at a welding shop reads, ‘We mend anything but a broken heart’. What is more wonderful than Jesus Christ mending a broken heart?

***He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*** (Ps. 147:3, NIV).

People often do not realize how broken they were until after Jesus has made them new.

OCTOBER 15

## ***DOGS THAT SERVE***

“Ted, open the door!” In response to this order, Ted a one-year-old golden retriever opens the door by pulling on a cloth hung from the doorknob.

Support dogs help the physically handicapped in a variety of ways such as helping their owners change clothes, open doors or refrigerators, switch lights on and off and pick up things their owners have dropped.

Most guide and support dogs come from certain breeds, especially retrievers, but dogs for the hearing impaired come from the ranks of strays.

Hearing dogs learn to distinguish certain types of sounds – both useful and dangerous. They are helpful to their owners not only in homes, but also in public places.

Fumiko Suzuki lost her hearing at the age of two due to inflammation of the middle ear. A mother of two sons, her life changed completely when Nana, a hearing dog, came to live with them. Nana wakes Suzuki up when the alarm clock goes off in the morning, tells her when the doorbell rings, and goes to fetch her when a bell indicates that the washing is done.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Traveling by train in Japan, I noticed a service dog with its owner. On its back was a big notice in red: ‘I am on duty!’

Dogs serve their masters with tail-waving gladness. Surely, we should serve our Master with more enthusiasm than dogs.

***Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture***  
(Ps. 100:2-3, NIV).

Let us gladly obey our Creator and Master and come humbly before Him with joy.

OCTOBER 16

## ***THE HA-HA METER***

The Kansai University of Japan has developed a small square-shaped device that measures laughter levels.

The *Laughometer* examines the movement of facial muscles and indicates the level of laughter.

It can measure as many as 3,000 changes per second, allowing the computer to issue a numerical value depending on the level of laughter. The greater the laughter, the higher the number registers on the *Ha-Ha* meter.

The goal of the project is to gain a better understanding of the mechanics of laughter by examining the changes in electrical potential generated when muscles move.

The *Laughometer* is also able to detect if laughter is real or fake by analyzing facial expressions and the volume of the voice.

The operators believe that laughter can help relieve stress and improve the immune system. They aim to prove the benefits of the causal relationship between laughter and health.

“With the data obtained from the instrument we hope to scientifically show that laughter affects a person’s health,” officials at the university said.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Thousands of years ago, God already told us about the relationship between a joyful heart and good health.

***Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength*** (Neh. 8:10, NIV).

God gives us the right to choose whether we want to be sorrowful or joyful and we can choose our thoughts the same way we can choose our friends!

If we choose joy instead of sadness, the Lord will sustain and strengthen us and it will favorably influence our health!

OCTOBER 17

## ***SAVING A POISONED TREE***

The municipality in Katsuragi, Japan, dispatched a tree specialist to revive a poisoned 160-year-old Japanese cedar tree at a World Heritage site. Some wicked person had drilled holes into an exposed root and poured undiluted pesticide into it. Commissioned by the municipal board, Mr. Urashima, a tree surgeon of 70 was sent to save the poisoned tree. He had his work cut out for him.

He cut a five-meter section from the top of the 28-meter-tall tree and removed all the dead branches and half of the remaining healthy ones with a chain saw in order to minimize moisture loss.

“The tree will look miserable for a while, but to revive it, severe measures are necessary,” he said.

From around the nation many people sent messages hoping for the tree’s recovery.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

The Bible tells us about a different tree – this one poisoned the whole of humanity!

***The LORD God gave the man a command. He said, “You can eat the fruit of any tree that is in the garden. But you must not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you can be sure that you will die”***  
(Gen. 2:16-17, NIV).

Through Adam’s disobedience, the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil poisoned the human race, including you and me!

Remember, Jesus is the Antidote! He alone can purify us from the poison of sin that penetrated the whole world.

***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*** (1 John 1:9, NIV).

OCTOBER 18

## ***BEASTS IN THE STREET***

Occasionally, some of Japan's 3,000 bears wander the streets of towns in Hokkaido, Japan.

Two giant brown bears ventured out of their forest home to take a stroll through a town center. Schoolchildren spotted the 300lb beasts taking a 40-minute ramble through the streets. These bears are particularly powerful and aggressive having attacked people more than once.

However, it was an entirely new experience for the citizens of Hokkaido when a crocodile appeared in the streets of Mizuho town.

"There's a crocodile waddling down our street!" a panic-stricken resident informed the police by phone.

When the officers arrived at the scene, the crocodile slithered down into a rice paddy field at the side of the road.

Without any experience catching crocodiles, the police managed pretty well in capturing the 3 feet (90cm) long crocodile within 10 minutes.

Trying to figure out how it was possible for a crocodile to end up on a city street was more difficult. Apparently, the young 5kg reptile-pet had escaped from its owner earlier that day and decided to explore its surroundings.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

As we go into the streets of life, there are surprises in store for us.

***Don't brag about tomorrow. You don't know what a day will bring*** (Prov. 27:1, NIV).

Therefore, we need enter every day with God!

OCTOBER 19

## ***FESTIVALS FOR FIREFLIES***

Festivals featuring fireflies have been one of the most popular activities of the early summer in Japan.

For a week or so during June or July, an awe-inspiring show of fireflies mesmerizes tourists as well as locals.

Enthusiasts plan firefly-viewing nights far in advance. It seems that fireflies have disappeared from many areas and locations for firefly watching are limited.

Some local residents are committed to caring for the fragile insects but the details of firefly sites are kept secret to prevent ‘poaching’, for in many cases swarms of the bugs are captured to be released at the event sites.

It is funny to see people mesmerized by these tiny bugs, barely more than 2cm long and alive for only a week or so. The luminous show – a result of their courting behavior – is simply captivating.

Fireflies hide beneath leaves until twilight when they become active and venture out to hover.

The fireflies’ blinking light patterns has a soothing effect that eases tension.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

A luminous firefly show is spectacular, but there is a Light that is far more superior and able to completely dispel the darkness!

***You, LORD, are my lamp; the LORD turns my darkness into light*** (2 Sam. 22:29, NIV).

When we look at the function of light, we observe what the Lord does for us: He turns our spiritual darkness into brilliant noonday brightness!

He speaks sunshine into my often-dreary existence!

OCTOBER 20

## ***A SHARP-EARED ROBOT***

The engineering research center at the Tokyo University has tested a self-guiding underwater robot that can distinguish and track the calls of whales by listening to their cries.

The ongoing research on whales has been difficult, as their life patterns are not fully known. Tagging whales to follow them via satellites or in boats has limitations.

The robot, designed to study whales is 3m long and can function at depths as great as 2,000m. The self-propelled machine can travel at a speed of 3 knots for up to 16 hours and is the latest hope for tracking the mysterious whale.

The innovative robot will serve as a valuable means of observing and listening to these large mammals.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

The ears of intelligent people are always open to new ideas. In fact, they listen out for them.

***The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out***  
(Prov. 18:15, NIV).

Spiritually, we need wide-open ears to hear God's input in our lives.

Not once, but seven times in the first chapters of Revelation, we read how important listening ears are!

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*** (Rev. 2:17, NIV).

Open ears to God are necessary at all times to hear as He rebukes, elevates, and comforts Christians!

The ear of the wise is attentive to our overruling God for direction!

OCTOBER 21

## ***CELL PHONES THAT LISTEN***

Audience, a California based startup company, has made a noise-canceling chip for cell phones that also improves voice-recognition systems. Its first customer was Sharp, using their Japanese phones made for NTT DoCoMo.

For two decades, Lloyd Watts, of the Audience Co, studied the mechanics of the human auditory pathway. In 2008, they rolled out their first chip for mobile phones that cancels out background noises including loud public-address systems.

Watts and his team made computer models of the cochlea, the inner ear, including the fine hair cells that detect different frequencies of sound. Using this information, they were able to build a chip that deletes noisy audio streams, leaving only the sound of a speaker's voice.

"The technology literally replicates the human hearing system," Watts said. The company claims that its system can suppress 25 decibels of noise, versus 6 to 12 decibels with conventional methods.

*Source: Dean Takahashi*

May you, in the noise pollution of our age, recognize God's voice when He wishes to speak to you.

***The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening"*** (1 Sam. 3:10, NIV).

Listen to God – He wants to speak to you!

***When he has brought all of his own sheep out, he goes on ahead of them. His sheep follow him because they know his voice***  
(John 10:4, NIV).

You can hear God's voice as you read His Word.

OCTOBER 22

## ***CUDDLY ROBOTS***

In a Neyagawa Osaka nursing home, pet robots named *Ko-chan* are used. They are cuddly, huggable and look like teddy bears.

*Ko-chan* is equipped with an answering machine function. Family members can call the robot and leave messages that elderly relatives can access at their leisure. The robot is also linked to a hospital and a pharmacy in case of emergencies.

“Since all the rooms of our nursing facility are single-occupancy, many residents here feel very lonely,” the director said. “Vocabulary is limited, but *Ko-chan* is a good partner that provides the occupants with conversation at any time of day or night.”

The participants at the nursing home seem to be very dependent on their *Ko-chans*. Sometimes there are tears when a *Ko-chan* has to go in for repairs!

They use these tiny little robots almost all day long. At the nursing home, the conversations with *Ko-chan* start with “Good morning” and end with “Good night”.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We might admire the progress science has made in attempting to deal with loneliness, but fellowship with the living God is much better than talking to a mechanical robot.

Listen to what God is saying to you:

***He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him* (Ps. 91:15, NIV).**

When you talk to God in times of loneliness and trouble, He is very, very near to you. He rescues and honors you with His presence.

Cherish the gift of God in your loneliness!

OCTOBER 23

## **CARDBOARD PUPPY**

Two cardboard boxes and three black dots – essentially that was all there was to it.

A boy used these simple elements to create a cardboard puppy with black eyes and a black nose because he could not have an actual dog in the apartment he was living in.

The boy named the puppy *Hakoinu* – literally ‘box dog’ – and would rarely let it out of his sight. Nevertheless, when the boy’s family moved, *Hakoinu* was left behind! The boy was heart-broken.

The media of Japan picked up this heartbreaking story and the dog’s simple, funny design, and changed it into a ‘healing’ character for despondent people. *Hakoinu* has become very popular, especially among sad and miserable people.

All kinds of stories and exhibitions emerged from the incident. Downloadable images of the cardboard dog are available for cell phones and *Hakoinu* stuffed toys are on the market for children.

*Hakoinu*’s popularity probably stems from the loyalty of character that the cardboard dog shows the boy who created him, but at the same time *Hakoinu* is a lonely character.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

The emphasis the media is taking seems to be on the loneliness of *Hakoinu* and of its master.

Human beings are lonely creatures, but nothing cures loneliness better than the care of our God who created us.

***He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness*** (Ps. 107:9, NKJV).

Even among people, you might still feel lonely!

The best way to deal with sorrow and the feeling of loneliness is to invite God in and watch as He fills your life with good things!

OCTOBER 24

### ***A PARROT PARROTS HIS ADDRESS***

(Sent in by Prof. Nik Lee, Australia)

Police rescued an African gray parrot from a neighbor's roof in the city of Nagareyama, near Tokyo. After spending a night at the station, the police transferred him to a nearby veterinary clinic.

"I tried to be friendly and talk to him, but he completely ignored me," Officer Uemura said. The parrot kept mum with the cops, but began chatting with the veterinarian.

"I'm Yosuke Nakamura," the bird told the vet. He also provided his full home address, down to the street number. When Yosuke, got lost, the little guy did exactly what he had been taught: recite his name and address to a stranger willing to help.

"We checked the address and what do you know, the Nakamura family really lived there. When we told them we had found Yosuke, they were elated," Uemura said.

*Source: Internet News*

Just like this parrot and like lost sheep, we have all gone our own way and have completely gone off course!

***We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all***

(Is. 53:6, NIV).

Even though we may be more intelligent than parrots and sheep, God longs for us to find our way back to Him!

***If you seek the LORD your God, you will find Him if you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul*** (Deut. 4:29, NIV).

If you have not yet found God, search for Him with your whole being! You will never be sorry!

OCTOBER 25

## ***SOLAR KID-POWERED BIKES***

Kids Web Japan, tells the story of fourth graders in an elementary school in Anjo, Japan, who turned old and battered bikes into solar-powered bicycles.

The children brushed off the rust and painted three old bicycles gold, silver and light blue. After removing the pedals, they mounted small motors to the frames and attached solar panels measuring 90cmx73cm behind the seats. Finally, they connected the solar panels and wheels to the motor.

“Mounting the solar panel was the most difficult job as they are heavy. It took six of us to hold it and bolt it on,” says Sayaka Izumoto.

On July 16, 2003, they tested the bikes. Everyone took turns riding the shiny bicycles. The sunlight falling on the solar panels generated about 60 watts of electricity that moved the bicycles at 8km/h without the need to pedal.

“It felt great to ride a solar bicycle that we made ourselves!” said Ryoko Tsuzuki. “I was very happy that we’d done it so well.” The kids were not the only ones having fun. That day, after the children had gone home, the teachers also took turns test-riding the solar bicycles.

The next dream on the list of these fourth graders is to make solar bicycles that elderly people at nursing homes can ride.

*Source: Kids Web Japan*

Solar power is great, but the power of God unto salvation is most essential and greater by far!

***I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is  
the power of God for the salvation of  
everyone who believes*** (Rom. 1:16, NIV).

The power of God is awesome in its transforming power from sinner to saint.

OCTOBER 26

## ***SILENCING LAND MINES***

The *Yomiuri* newspaper reported on a computer optics company that has developed a robot that can detect and dispose of land mines without the need to detonate them.

Japan is playing an important role in the disposal of land mines in Afghanistan where millions lie buried throughout that country.

A device attached to the robot can detect mines and determine their type, including anti-personnel land mines, anti-tank mines and unexploded shells. After determining its precise location, the robot covers the mine with a protective alloy cowl measuring 25cm in diameter.

A hydraulic-operated hammer positioned beneath the cowl crushes the mine, but due to the hammer's high velocity, it does not explode. The hammer can strike at velocities of up to 3m/s.

Not only are the 3.5m-long robots 10 times more efficient at detecting and disposing of land mines; they are also much safer for the operators.

"We want to contribute to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan by combining the knowledge and expertise of private firms and universities," a government representative said.

It is so good to hear of the desire to help the people of Afghanistan. May this inspire us as followers of Christ to glorify our Master and Lord and help serve others!

***Don't just talk about love. Put your love into action. Then it will truly be love. That's how we know that we hold to the truth. And that's how we put our hearts at rest, knowing that God is watching*** (1 John 3:18-19, NIV).

Let us show love by our actions as we rub shoulders with others in our work, play and studies.

OCTOBER 27

## ***STANDING TOO TALL***

More than in any other country, platform shoes lined with brick-sized soles were the rage in Japan in the late 1990s. Some of these shoes went as high as 20cm (8 inches).

Young women believed it made them appear taller, made their legs longer and their faces smaller.

Of all women's shoe-related accidents, the ratio of those involving platform shoes shot up. The shoes weigh two to three times as much as normal shoes and walking in them is quite an art. Needless to say, they inflict an extra burden to the legs and contribute to an unsteady gait.

The first victim, a nursery-school teacher died after suffering a skull fracture from a fall from her 13cm high platform sandals. The second victim was a passenger killed in a car crash when the vehicle hit a concrete pole. The driver, a 25-year-old office worker was unable to hit the brake because her 20cm heels got in the way.

A student tumbled down a flight of stairs because of her platform shoes.

The government considered a law to limit the wearing of such shoes – but was afraid it might cost them too many votes!

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Spiritually speaking, if we walk with God even at precarious heights we can be sure of where our feet stand!

***He causes the good to walk a steady tread,  
like mountain goats upon the rocks***

(2 Sam. 22:34, TLB).

With the support of God, it is possible to walk with grace and safety in dangerous regions!

OCTOBER 28

## ***BLUE LIGHTS***

“We introduced blue lights to deter suicides at train stations,” a company employee in charge of safety operations said.

Since Japan Railways set up blue lights at 38 train crossings, there have been no suicide attempts involving cars ramming into trains.

The Nara Police set up blue streetlights in crime prone areas and found the number of crimes decreased by about 9 percent.

After installing blue lights in a neighborhood trash-deposit area, the volume of garbage brought in by outsiders decreased by more than 20 percent.

“There are numerous pieces of data that indicate blue has a calming effect upon people, but it is a little risky to believe that the color can prevent everything,” Professor Tsuneo Suzuki, of Keio University said. “However, it’s an unusual color for lighting, so people may not feel like committing their crimes under such unusual illumination.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Rather than blue lights, I would like people to be turned on by the great Light that the Bible talks about!

***The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned***

(Matt. 4:16, NIV).

People need to see Jesus, the great Light.

***The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world*** (John 1:9, NIV).

Does Jesus, the true light, shine in every nook and cranny of your life?

OCTOBER 29

## ***MOST POPULAR JAPANESE PRODUCT***

Now here is a question for you – Do you know which made-in-Japan products are the most popular all over the world?

The Sony Walkman? Toyota cars? Think again!

Instant noodles (*ramen*) topped the list as the most successful product of the 20th century! Karaoke came in second, and portable-stereo headphones came in third.

The Japanese love affair with *ramen* began in the early seventies.

Now there are 140,000 noodle restaurants in Japan and customers often endure a 20-minute wait.

Instant noodles have become an international food. More than 43.7 billion units are consumed worldwide each year.

Japan is a country filled with *ramen* fans, *ramen* connoisseurs, and certifiable *ramen* maniacs.

There is even a ramen town! An entire museum is devoted to the noodle. Next to a replica of the first ramen dish ever eaten by a samurai some 343 years ago, is a ‘portrait’ of the modern ramen cup (the kind where you pour boiling water directly on the noodles in a styrofoam cup).

In Japan, noodles are celebrated as one of the most dramatic technological achievements ever!

*Source: Japan Information Network*

Pray that, in this *ramen*-crazed world, you and I would be able to whet the appetite for spiritual food to every one that comes across our path. Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy:

***It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes  
a steady stream of words from God's mouth***  
(Matt. 4:4, TMSG).

Often these life-giving words flow through God’s instruments –our lips – to those on the way to hell.

Do your words move people to Christ?

OCTOBER 30

## ***CHILDREN HELPING ELDERLY***

Primary school children are bringing a breath of fresh air into the lives of elderly people at a day care center in Mito, Japan. Second to fourth graders are called *Kid Helpers* and they chat with and massage the shoulders of senior citizens at Otafuku day care center.

The idea for the project stemmed from a male nurse, Mr. Takahashi. He saw a twinkle in the eyes of patients when they met his 8-year-old daughter at the hospital.

“Although they usually stare blankly into space, they became livelier when my daughter approached them,” Takahashi related. “They are withdrawn with the nurses, but they were quick to chat with my daughter.”

The children visit the center on weekends, often helping to wash the backs of the residents and massage their shoulders.

“Thanks to the *Kid Helpers*, my world has changed,” 74-year-old Mrs. Nakamura said.

Mr. Takahashi reminds the children that this is an important job and not just for fun, although fun they certainly have.

“It’s cool talking to granddads and grannies while eating with them,” said 9-year-old Hironori.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Let us honor and enjoy God while we are young and vigorous!

***Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”— before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain***

(Eccl. 12:1-2, NIV).

Do not drag your feet until you are feeble-minded and so set in your ways that changing becomes impossible!

OCTOBER 31

## ***THE 03:00 SYNDROME***

“If you wake up between 02:00 and 03:00 and cannot go back to sleep because you cannot get worries off your mind, you may be afflicted with the ‘03:00 syndrome’, Maki Shiozaki wrote in a police-related magazine to encourage worried police officers to seek professional help. As a public health nurse for the National Police Agency, she helps Japan’s 290,000 police officers to be in the pink of health.

“Police officers are told to be patient, hard-working, determined and strong,” she said. “Because of that, many of them are hesitant to confide in people around them about their problems.”

Shiozaki lists a number of initial symptoms of mental ailments suffered by many in the Police Force. Among them is the ‘Go back home syndrome’, in which sufferers experience palpitations and cold sweats as they near their workplace, making it impossible for them to go to work comfortably. The ‘morning paper syndrome’ refers to an ailment that makes them so depressed that they do not even have the energy to read the morning paper.

“You should never lock up your mind so tightly that you refuse to seek help,” Shiozaki advises those in trouble.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

If you obey God, your peace is like an ever-flowing river and your righteousness is as the waves of the sea that continually rolls onto the shore.

***If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea*** (Is. 48:18, NIV).

This good advice was given to Israel and to us too.

Let us pay attention to God and attain lasting peace!

# NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 1

## ***REWARDED IN SMILES***

When Yoji Matsuda first went to Nepal in 1993, he had no inkling that he would visit the country 47 times and still be hoping for the next opportunity to visit.

On his 23<sup>rd</sup> visit in November 1998 Matsuda held his first eye clinic. Little did Matsuda know that by 2010, he would have provided free eye care to more than 5,700 Nepalese people and raised thousands of dollars in donations for orphanages.

“On the first day 300 people arrived at the makeshift clinic. We brought volunteers from Japan to help out, but on the second day we were overwhelmed by 1,200 people,” Matsuda recalled with a wide grin. Such a huge turnout had not been expected, and many people had to be turned away.

After each clinic, Matsuda places orders for eyeglasses with shops in Katmandu and flies back to Japan once the eyeglasses have been delivered to the villagers.

What reward does Matsuda get from helping the villagers?

“The smiles that appear on the faces of poor people always come back to you,” he says, “It keeps me happy.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Cheerful smiles are the well-appreciated reward for Yoji Masuda who rendered his services without charge. How much more grateful should Christ-followers be as He, the Creator of the universe smiles his blessings down on us?

***The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace***  
(Num. 6:24-26, NKJV).

I believe that God is radiant with joy when we commit our lives to Him and follow the commandments of Jesus, his Son!

NOVEMBER 2

## ***WHEELCHAIR TO SADDLE***

Nana's House, based in Tokyo, is fully equipped to provide horseback riding for children and even offers the same exercise for disabled people.

To help a disabled person get on a horse, caretakers were lifting him or her onto the saddle while standing on empty beer crates. However, disabled people are prone to lose their balance and the heavy lifting put a heavy strain on the backs of the able-bodied helpers.

Nana's House developed a mounting ramp, but it took five or six hours to assemble and disassemble it. In order to overcome these setbacks in their goal to help the disabled enjoy the sport, the staff at Nana's house built a new ramp that fits onto the bed of a mini truck.

The ramp on the truck bed is at saddle level and caretakers can move a disabled person from the wheelchair to the back of a horse safely and without much strain.

Horseback riding not only improves physical strength, but also has the therapeutic benefit associated with being in direct contact with animals.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is very good for the disabled to enjoy a better quality of life through horseback riding, but there is something still far better to strive for!

***Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God***  
(Ps. 20:7, NIV).

Some brag in their polished chariots and well trained horses, but we pride ourselves in the superb Name of the Lord our God.

Trusting in the wonderful name of the Lord enables us to enjoy life on a spiritual level and gives us everything we need to flourish in progress towards our God.

NOVEMBER 3

## ***PAWS ON TRAINING***

Eru, a dog, was being trained to help care for the aged and handicapped in a nursing home in Togochō, Japan.

It was her first on-the-job training session in communicating with aged people. Previously, she had been trained by the animal protection center as a ‘petting dog’ for children.

The aim of Eru’s training is to improve the health of the elderly as they touch and pet her, an activity proven to have therapeutic effects.

Eru is a two-year-old Labrador who roamed the streets prior to being taken into custody. Two months later, she was one of the first selected for training.

“Eru is an active, curious and friendly dog,” a center official said. She finished basic training in obeying voice commands such as ‘sit’ and ‘heel’ and underwent advanced ‘petting-animal’ training to become familiar with being touched by people of all ages.

To check her reaction to being handled by strangers, Eru was taken to a nursing home. About 40 residents encircled her – tossing a ball for her to fetch, rewarding and patting her back and head as she retrieved it.

Eru passed her training and was donated to volunteers engaged in ‘petting-animal’ activities.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Can Eru’s willingness to obey teach us a lesson? Certainly!

***Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you***

(Heb. 13:17, NIV).

Let us obey our spiritual leaders and those whom the Lord has appointed over us with gladness!

NOVEMBER 4

## ***WHEELCHAIR-BOUND DOG***

Champ became a member of the Miura family at the age of 2 months. When he was 2 years old, a car hit him right in front of the house and he suffered a severe spinal fracture.

The veterinarian who treated Champ suggested that the dog be put out of its misery and pain, but Mr. Miura said he ‘could read the will to live’ in Champ’s eyes, and decided to give his dog a chance to live.

One day the idea of a canine wheelchair came to him. It was hard to stand by and watch Champ bravely dragging himself along the ground using his front legs.

The wheelchair made a world of difference to Champ’s quality of life and once again he enjoys walking with his beloved master.

At the age of 15, the equivalent of 80 human years, Champ died.

“I often talked to Champ about the happenings of the day while massaging his legs,” Mr. Miura recalled. “Champ enjoyed living. His strength and positive attitude provided me with comfort.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

If a dog with such disabilities can encourage his master every day, how much more we can do to encourage those we rub shoulders with on a daily basis.

Paul of the New Testament invites us to do likewise.

***Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness***

(Heb. 3:13, NIV).

How blessed to be encouragers to those who are low in spirit!

NOVEMBER 5

## ***ASPIRIN CAFES***

In collaboration with two popular restaurants in Osaka and Tokyo Japan, a doctor who specializes in curing headaches launched two Aspirin Cafes that aim to provide food believed to prevent headaches.

The chefs of these restaurants produce menus according to guidelines established by Dr. Keiichi Igarashi and a number of dietitians.

According to Igarashi, most headaches are closely related to diet. Vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin B2 and magnesium, are effective in preventing headaches.

The dishes served at these restaurants use far less fat, which can be bad for migraine sufferers.

“There are many foods that trigger migraine headaches, but a culinary life can become bland and quite dull if these foods are avoided,” Igarashi said. “So, we focus on tasty foods that will relieve the symptoms and provide a delicious meal.”

Dishes include pumpkin potage with parsley, raw spring rolls of burdock and eel, and salads containing various grains, all accompanied with a choice of herbal teas.

A combination of black rice, brown rice, oats, soybeans, lentils and vegetables flavored with grilled bacon bits and aromatic olive oil is one of the satisfying favorites on the menu.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

***There is wine to make people glad. There is olive oil to make them healthy. And there is bread to make them strong*** (Ps. 104:15, NIV).

We need more than foods intended for our physical bodies; we need wine, olive oil and bread from heaven. For our daily spiritual needs, we need the sustaining energy of the food of heaven, given to those who hunger for God's best!

NOVEMBER 6

## ***RESENTMENT HAS A STRONG MEMORY***

A desperate woman wrote to the advice column as follows:

*My boss treated me badly. I did my work just like everyone else, but he often gave me stern looks and yelled at me.*

*At other times, he ignored me or put me down in front of others. That really upset me – so much so, that more than once, I fell sick from lack of sleep.*

*The boss in question has now moved to another office, but I'm still full of anger. I still bear a grudge against him and I can't forget what he did to me, no matter how hard I try. How can I find peace of mind?*

*Source: Yomiuri News*

How sad! There is no torment like hate. In addition, it does more harm to the one who hates, than the one who caused it. I come across hatred in one form or other in so many people with whom I rub shoulders.

“You need to pray to God that He help you to forgive the perpetrator,” I recently advised a lady who had been robbed the previous night.

“I can assure you I will pray,” she said. “But I pray to God to give me the right words to properly curse that awful burglar.” She would have sent him straight to hell if she could.

There is a lot of anger and resentment in the world, but let it not be even the smallest part of your life.

***Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude*** (Eph. 4:31, CEV).

Let's make a clean break from backbiting and anger and be tenderhearted toward others.

There is no place in the life of a Christian to be rude to any human being.

NOVEMBER 7

## **PUPPY LOVE ACROSS THE SEA**

Years ago, Mr. Nakamura from Aka Island came to visit Zamami Island with his dog Shiro. Shiro fell in love, at first sight, with a dog named Marilyn.

After that, local people often saw Shiro swimming across the 3km strait between the two islands, to visit his girlfriend.

His story was reported country-wide, and his single-minded behavior touched many people.

A movie titled *Marilyn ni Aitai* (I want to see Marilyn) was produced and Shiro starred in it.

Marilyn died in August 1997 and Shiro died in November 26, 2000, at the age of 17 which made him the canine equivalent of an octogenarian.

The people of Aka were very sad. Voluntarily they set up a committee to honor Shiro. After all, he introduced the beauty of their island's nature to many visitors.

They erected a monument at the beach, from where Shiro would depart to see Marilyn. Meanwhile, people on Zamami Island built a statue of Marilyn to face Shiro's statue across the strait.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

The love between two dogs captivated the imagination of these islanders.

May we, who are of a much higher order than animals, show a more caring attitude for our own fellow human beings.

***A true friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need*** (Prov. 17:17, TLB).

The greatest evidence of genuine friendship is loyalty and availability in times of distress or personal struggles.

Let us not be fair-weather friends but let us be true friends.

NOVEMBER 8

## **DUMPED DOGS WORKING**

An unusual facility In Yokohama, Japan, trains abandoned dogs to become service dogs. Socially isolated young people who are cocooned at home, become ‘hearing’ dog trainers for these dumped dogs.

Service dogs actively assist in the daily lives of the hearing-impaired, informing them about ringing doorbells, fire alarms, washing machine and stove alerts, and any other noises.

In Japan 2008, only 18 ‘hearing’ dogs were in service, but about 10,000 hearing-impaired people nationwide were left without help. Many abandoned dogs could surely provide this much-needed service.

Students at a dormitory follow a six-month course studying dog-training techniques by actually working with a dog for three hours a day. The first three dogs trained at the school were abandoned animals.

“I hope the facility will raise people’s awareness about the potential of abandoned dogs being trained as ‘hearing’ dogs,” said Mr. Tamotsu Sengoku, head of Japan Youth Research Institute and the school’s principal.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Training these dogs is an incredibly difficult task – and who is doing it? Socially rejected young people!

***But God chose the foolish things of the world  
to shame the wise; God chose the weak  
things of the world to shame the strong. He  
chose the lowly things of this world and the  
despised things—and the things that are not  
—to nullify the things that are***

(1 Cor. 1:27-28, NIV).

God uses the insignificant and deliberately overlooked ones to accomplish amazing tasks. Therefore, if you feel weak, be encouraged! God wants to use you in some very special way.

NOVEMBER 9

## ***JUBILANT CICADEAE***

On a summer day in a wooded area of Japan, Peggy and I heard thousands of cicadas singing. Cicadae have organs at the side of their bodies whereby they produce an astounding level of sound.

“This type of cicada sleeps for 17 years in the ground,” Peggy informed me. “Then they pop out of their shells to sing ecstatically for five weeks before they expire in the hot summer sun.”

Cicadae are glad all day long. The warmer it is the more jubilant they become. They sing until their last breath. Once home, I checked up Peggy’s statement and found it to be true.

Like cicadae, the sinner sloshes around in the muck and mire of sin for years, until the Lord lifts him up and dresses him in festive attires of joy. Gone are his graveyard clothes!

***I will put beautiful crowns on their heads in place of ashes. I will anoint them with oil to give them gladness instead of sorrow. I will give them a spirit of praise in place of a spirit of sadness. They will be like oak trees that are strong and straight. The LORD himself will plant them in the land. That will show how glorious He is*** (Is. 61:3, NIV).

Even in mourning, we Christians can dance for joy.

May God give you gladness in sadness.

May God cheer you even in your heartache.

May you sing out in gladness to Him!

It is wonderful that believers, even under very trying circumstances, have a joy in their hearts that no man can take away.

We experience joy because we believe in the Word of God, which gives abundant joy regardless of circumstances.

NOVEMBER 10

## ***CITIES GROW UP AND DOWN***

Since the 20th century, architects in Japan have used innovative construction techniques to develop artificial space in large cities. New space is created by building office skyscrapers, high-rise apartments and underground passageways.

By building, both up towards the sky and down below ground level, urban land becomes very effective.

Pleasant underground concourses offer cascading waterfalls to counteract the usual impersonal atmosphere of underground passageways and can be found in the center of almost every large city in Japan.

The Rocket Plaza in Namba, Osaka, features a rocket about 33m tall beginning at the underground level and reaching up toward the entrance hall ceiling. This provides ample space for great numbers of fun-loving people.

There are also subterranean shopping districts stretching from one underground railway station to the next. These underground ‘streets’ use valuable space efficiently and offer attractive venues for relaxation.

*Source: Nipponia*

Eventually all created beings in heaven and on earth and even those underground, alive or long ago dead and buried, will bow the knee to Jesus.

***At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is  
LORD, to the glory of God the Father***  
(Phil. 2:10-11, NIV).

Rather than wait for the day of His second coming to bow in worship to the Lord Jesus – why not choose to do so now?

Jesus is calling you to surrender your life to Him.

NOVEMBER 11

## ***PET ROBOTS CHEER UP THE LONELY***

As the sole surviving member of her family, Akemi Komiyama lives a quiet life in a traditional wooden house in the residential area of Ikeda, Japan. At 80, she continues to care for herself.

Along with other testers, Komiyama is at the forefront of technological developments in robotics as a volunteer to a pet robot that lives with her and resembles a wombat. The project is to develop information systems that support social welfare.

The robot, *Wonder Child*, communicates with Komiyama in its own unique way.

“Good morning,” it chirps in a high-pitched childish voice when Komiyama turns it on. The robot has about 800 preprogrammed words, phrases and songs making conversation possible.

“It often responds with irrelevant answers,” she said, “but it’s only a robot, so I don’t mind.”

*Wonder Child* receives daily news and information from a cable television network to deliver for Komiyama. It will also signal officials should any abnormal situations occur in the home.

People who have participated in the test feel like they are living with a ‘Wonder Child’, rather than just a robot.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

If it is good for Komiyama to talk to *Wonder Child*, wouldn’t it be infinitely better for her to be on talking terms with the God of the universe?

***God, who has called you into fellowship with  
his Son Jesus Christ our LORD, is faithful***

(1 Cor. 1:9, NIV).

How wonderful to be warmly invited to converse with Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. Let us not spurn this invitation!

NOVEMBER 12

### ***AIR-CONDITIONED TREATMENT BY POLICE***

It is very pleasant to work and live in Japan.

Some time ago, two foreigners came to Japan and decided to hitchhike to Tottori. They waited in the sweltering heat at an entrance to one of the expressways, holding up a sign written in the Japanese characters for Tottori. No one stopped, except a police car that took them to a nearby police station. Questioned extensively in broken English, the two gathered it was illegal to hitchhike in such a location. They had no idea what to expect next and images of deportation loomed in their heads as the police ordered them back into the patrol car.

The police drove through tollgates and pulled off to the side of the road. Another patrol car stopped in front of them. The two foreigners remained sitting in the back seat of the air-conditioned police car as instructed, while the police officers stood out in the heat checking the license plates of every vehicle that passed through the tollgates. When a truck with a Tottori license plate appeared at the most distant tollgate, the police forced all the traffic to stop so that the truck driver could pull over next to the police car. The poor driver did not know whether to be relieved or worried when two big foreigners climbed out of the police car and into his passenger seat. They got their ride to Tottori.

This type of thing can probably only happen in Japan. We find the Japanese people so kind and gracious; we desire for them to get to know the true God, the kind and gracious Creator of the universe.

***Suppose an outsider lives with you in your land. Then do not treat him badly. Treat him as if he were one of your own people. Love him as you love yourself*** (Lev. 19:33-34, NIrV).

How do we treat strangers in our country?

NOVEMBER 13

## ***FLAMING RED HAIR***

In Japan, dyeing one's hair brown was once considered a form of rebellion among young people.

It originated among high school girls to defy their parents and an education system that stifled them with rules and regulations. School uniforms, as an example, did not allow them any room for self-expression, so students colored their hair brown to assert their individuality.

Imagine a girl with naturally black-colored hair coming down to the breakfast table with her new hairstyle of bright brown. This caused an uproar in many homes!

Surprisingly, dyeing one's hair brown has spread from high school girls to people of all ages whether male or female. It also includes a variety of other shades.

Women in their twenties have decided that flaming red hair augments their clothing style, matches their make-up or flatters their suntans.

Today, customers of both sexes often ask for a textured look with several different color combinations – even shocking purple and bright green!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

When parents and society accepted brightly colored hair, it lost its effectiveness as a tool for rebellion. Young people, not to be outdone, quickly found other ways to disrupt the peace in their homes. I wish to give them this biblical advice:

***Love each other deeply. Honor others more than yourselves*** (Rom. 12:10, NIrV).

Let us adopt a life-style of kindness!

NOVEMBER 14

### ***A FLAME THAT ALLEGEDLY HEALS***

Candles have made inroads into the everyday life of the Japanese not only as objects in interior decoration, but also as therapeutic items.

Some claim that the scents from aromatic candles not only provide relaxation, but a power to heal.

“The slow wavering of the flame is a soothing rhythm for humans,” a candle enthusiast declares, “the orange light from the candle helps people relax and raises their senses.”

The most popular aromatic candle is lavender with its tension-easing fragrance.

Some believe that grapefruit’s sharp refreshing smell helps them to concentrate.

“I became hooked 10 years ago,” actress Asaka Seto said. “Candle flames react beautifully to any air movement and they are fun to watch and when I watch the flames, I feel my heart is being purified.”

*Source: Asahi News*

The occult movement has exploited candles and claim that its light can purify and heal one’s heart.

Take note of the error of such a claim. Only the Light of Christ can purify and heal.

***For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe*** (Phil. 2:13-15, NIV).

Jesus is the True Light, shining through us – accept no counterfeits!

NOVEMBER 15

## ***TWO DESPISED CROWS***

Not so long ago, I had the privilege to admire one of the most beautiful landscaped gardens in the world, but I was distracted when I saw a woman feeding two crows. This was a most unusual sight, considering how hated these birds are in Japan!

Until recently, the habitat of crows had been forests and mountains, but since man had encroached on their terrain, they have returned the favor. They came down in swarms into suburban areas, quickly adapted to concrete surroundings with its high-tension electrical wires, and now live and breed in every nook and cranny they can find.

They pounce on trash with their sharp beaks and strong talons, tearing bags to pieces within seconds to get to some tidbit. They leave a shredded mess in the streets and open trucks are not safe from their scavenging habits.

Considering how the Japanese try and keep their streets and parks so neat and clean, it was utterly strange to come across this lady feeding crows!

“I have been feeding them every morning for several years,” she said. “To provide food for these elderly despised crows has become one of the important tasks in my life.” As I walked on, I thought deeply about this woman’s mission.

Often we human beings act more objectionably than a crow does. We do not deserve it, but every day God reveals His love and mercy to obnoxious people like us.

***Here is how God has shown his love for us.  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.  
The blood of Christ has made us right with  
God. So we are even more sure that Jesus  
will save us from God's anger***

(Rom. 5:8-9, NIV).

God’s loving-kindness begins afresh every day for us – how we praise Him for His wonderful mercies!

NOVEMBER 16

## **SUSHI GOES HI-TECH**

Conveyor-belt sushi restaurants are as popular as ever in Japan, and have spread far and wide to cities, such as Paris, London, Amsterdam, and New York. Conveyor belts bring the food to the customers so that they need only reach and take any dish.

The basis of sushi is rice. A rice portion of sushi is slightly compressed in a lightly clenched hand to form a cylindrical bed of rice. A touch of *wasabi* and a piece of freshly sliced fish on top, rounds off a typical piece of sushi.

Recently, however, the quality of sushi made by robots is comparable to that achieved by veteran chefs. Sushi robots can prepare the rice two to three times faster than veteran chefs can.

Sushi-making robots were already available in 1981, but were initially kept tucked away out of sight in the back kitchens for fear that customers would lose their appetites if they saw rice being shaped by a metal contraption. Now, in modern Japan, shiny sushi robots do their work in full view of the customers.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Sushi may be popular worldwide, but the most important and sustaining food for humankind is not available in any restaurant!

Life-giving Bread came down from heaven!

Jesus said of Himself: “***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world***” (John 6:51, NIV).

Christ is the supplier of true spiritual nourishment. He is the Bread of heaven!

Make sure to partake of the food that will satisfy your hunger forever! You will find it in Jesus Christ Himself!

NOVEMBER 17

## ***MONKS HIT THE CATWALK***

In an effort to revive Buddhism and win new believers, a fashion show opened in Tokyo.

As prayers were chanted, nearly 40 monks and nuns walked the runway decked in elaborate robes. They wrapped up the show in a grand finale of strewn lotus petal confetti.

Traditionally, Buddhist monks wear simple black robes, but to appeal to the more fashion-conscious youth, these monks wore green and yellow outfits, some with gold embroidery. Finely decorated multilayered robes were also on display.

“Their robes were gorgeous,” said Sayaka Anma, a member of the audience in her 20s. “I was a bit surprised in the beginning, but it was very moving.”

More than 1,200 years after arriving from China, Buddhism in Japan is in a crisis.

Almost three-quarters of Japan’s population of 127 million are registered Buddhists, but for many, the only time they enter a temple is to attend a funeral. That has sent many of the country’s 75,000 temples into financial trouble.

“We wanted to show the young people that Buddhism is ‘cool’, and temples are not only places for funerals,” said Koji Matsubara, a chief monk at Tsukiji temple.

*Source: The Internet*

Whatever we do, may we cry out for garments given by the Master’s hand.

***But the Father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet’*** (Luke 15:22, NIV).

Only Father-God supplies the right kind of wardrobe for His children.

NOVEMBER 18

## ***CHILDREN AS TEACHERS***

Fourth grade students at a primary school in Oda City, Japan, taught a personal computer course to older local residents.

The PC course was so popular that the principal scheduled it again for the following academic year. The students ranged in age from 40 to 80.

The elderly claim they feel more relaxed with child-teachers as opposed to adult instructors. The fourth-graders pair up with students from the neighborhood and work together in front of a computer.

“Press here when you want a print out,” said one of the teachers. The student clicked the mouse at the right place. “I can’t do anything on this computer by myself,” admitted Mr. Takeshita, the oldest student at 77. “How grateful I am for my teacher. When teaching me what to do, he is kind and fun!”

The elderly need more time to get used to the electronic gadgetry, and their teachers show lots of patience.

“I usually don’t prepare much for school,” said Saya Gobara, a 9-year-old. “But I do prepare well in order to teach in the computer session, because I like computers.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Wow, Saya, at your age you are already a teacher! You teach grown-ups many things by the way you show your love and interest in them.

***I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven***

(Matt. 18:3-4, NIV).

May we learn from children to be pure and unsophisticated in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

NOVEMBER 19

## ***PAPER BLOUSES & BAMBOO SKIRTS***

As of the year 2000, hot new textiles are in Japan: fabric made from bamboo or handmade rice paper (*washi*). It exemplifies and continues the Japanese tradition of using native materials.

An exclusive manufacturing process makes it possible to create a highly breathable, absorbent fabric entirely out of bamboo fiber.

A series of coats and pants made of bamboo are selling at department stores and women's boutiques. Bamboo fiber has a distinctive softness and a cool, light texture.

Paper clothes are also on the market. Apparel makers offer a line of garments knit from fibers made of delicate Japanese paper. Jackets, sweaters, and pants are readily available. The 100 percent handmade rice paper fabric is light and breathable and feels like linen.

Other natural materials that have garnered attention over the past few years include grass – even charcoal mixed with polyester. It reportedly has deodorizing properties.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

We should be more interested in outfits that do not wear out, rather than in garments that will be eventually reduced to tatters.

Job in the Bible, the man burdened with enormous troubles wore such splendid 'clothes.' Read what he said.

***I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban*** (Job 29:14, NIV).

In the Bible, God often compares behavior with clothes.

God is keen to remove filthy rags of unrighteousness. He desires to dress those ready for a life-changing experience, into garments of righteousness!

Did you put in a request for a change in your wardrobe?

NOVEMBER 20

## ***IT STARTED AS A PHONE***

A gadget that began its life as a mere phone has evolved into a pocket-sized computer. Some can be used as TV remote controls. Others feature fingerprint recognition, which prevents others from accessing addresses or other information stored on their phones.

One of the most innovative new features is a speaking phrasebook that "says" useful expressions in English, Chinese, or Korean and helps users perform tasks such as booking a hotel room or shopping when traveling abroad.

Most pocket-sized computers also use the global positioning satellite data. At the press of a button, the user can gauge his exact location, display a map of the surrounding area, and then e-mail the map to other phones, making such computers ideal for those meeting up in crowded or unfamiliar places.

Meanwhile, for people who want to know that their phones are within reach at all times, the wristwatch type PHS (personal handy phone system) is a popular choice. It changes shape into a regular handset at the touch of a button.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Nowadays, most of us cannot seem to do without cell phones – this is no problem as long as we do not forget or forsake what is the most important thing in life.

***"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her"*** (Luke 10:41-42, NIV).

Mary chose that spiritual portion which endures forever.

Not material things, but our relationship with Jesus is what is of the highest importance.

NOVEMBER 21

## ***THE ONE MILLION MAN***

Fuji Television Network, Inc. of Japan ran a reality program called the *One Million Man*. In the program, a man must spend ¥1 million within five hours. He must spend it all on himself as a television crew films his efforts.

“I cannot understand why the contestants need so much time to spend the money,” the young man said. He found out.

Even though he did not really need one, he bought a computer and then a set of DVDs. By that time, over an hour had passed and he still had more than half of the money left to unload. In a mild panic, he took a cab and wasted 45 minutes changing his mind repeatedly, indecisive as to where to go. He ended up in a watch shop and bought a Rolex he did not need.

Then he jumped into another cab looking for more shops and then to the waterfront where he took a suite of rooms in an expensive hotel. He had just 11 minutes to wolf down a room-service meal.

He barely made it. He felt guilty and said he did not enjoy spending the money at all. The reality-TV show’s aim to prove that money makes ‘fools’ out of human beings was readily made.

The disillusionment that overcomes these men as they try to spend their windfall meaningfully is heartbreaking. It shows clearly and without any editorializing, that money does not buy happiness.

*Source: Japan Times*

The love of money turns us away from God.

***No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money***

(Matt. 6:24, NIV).

May money never become more important to us than God!

NOVEMBER 22

## ***SECURITY STREETLIGHTS DETER CRIME***

Some residents in Osaka can now summon police at the touch of a button located on a streetlight.

Such streetlights are the latest in street-alert technology and more effective than making an emergency phone call if a robbery takes place or one becomes victim to a purse-snatcher. Pushing the emergency button on a streetlight triggers an alarm and a security camera attached to the top of the pole. The streetlights have an intercom for conveying vital information to a police dispatcher.

“The advantage of this system is that we can view the scene immediately,” said a police officer. Once activated, the streetlight is visible to the police and eliminates the need for information regarding the whereabouts of the crime. Location is normally required and that wastes precious time.

An officer checked on a case and stumbled upon a car theft and, in another case, he broke up a fight.

“I get all tensed up when I’m ordered to go to check out a streetlight,” he joked!

*Source: Yomiuri News*

God who is over everything has placed all governments, their officials and their police forces over us. Good citizens need to abide by laws and rules!

***Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God*** (Rom. 13:1, NIV).

Remember to pray for our police officers – they are Godsends.

NOVEMBER 23

## ***A SURGEON'S HOT SPRINGS***

Dr. Seki Akira practices preventive medicine at Shuzenji hot springs, which he opened in 1997. He combines western medicine with traditional hot spring therapy.

"I came here more than 20 years ago and haven't had to take a day off since," he claims. "I am convinced that my good health comes from bathing in the hot springs. I believe it has medicinal value and prevents illness, and that is why I opened this therapeutic spa. I offer a modern version of the hot springs bath."

He offers nine different types of pools including an herbal sauna and an outdoor pool where bathers walk through the water. Many people come hoping to relax the mind and cure the body.

"We know that hot springs emit carbonated gas which improves blood circulation, and there are many other possible benefits yet to be scientifically comprehended," Akira explains. "The psychological release you get at a hot spring is receiving plenty of attention these days."

*Source: Nipponia*

The relaxation and measure of peace that you receive at the hot springs cannot be compared to the supernatural peace that Jesus gives.

***I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace*** (John 16:33, NIV).

We might all have this "***in Me you may have peace***" experience if we surrender our lives to Jesus.

Why delay receiving the peace that Jesus longs to give you?

NOVEMBER 24

## ***CANINES TACKLE TRUANCY***

An elementary school in Tokyo has managed to eradicate truancy thanks to a dog named Buddy.

The private school adopted Buddy as part of its animal intervention educational program. The intent was to do away with truancies by introducing a canine ‘friend’ into the classroom environment.

Buddy, a 5-year-old Airedale terrier quietly waits in the classroom during lessons. The sixth graders are responsible for giving her a 15-minute walk each day on the school grounds. They are also in charge of cleaning up after her.

Buddy has been a part of the children’s lives since she was a 2-month-old puppy. Now, she is a mother of 11 puppies.

The idea for the program came from Mr. Taro Yoshida, the teacher in charge of religious instruction. He felt that a dog would give problem children such as those who regularly skip school, an opportunity to grow emotionally.

Initially, Yoshida feared the students would be too excited around Buddy to do their work but, on the contrary, they quiet each other down because they don’t want any noise to upset Buddy.

Yoshida has observed that children who have had positive experiences with dogs also build a positive image about themselves.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Dogs are God’s creatures and they assist people in many ways. God is the only one Who can truly help us with our problems in such a wonderful way that we experience his total peace.

***Now may the LORD of peace himself give you  
peace at all times and in every way. The Lord  
be with all of you* (2 Thess. 3:16, NIV).**

NOVEMBER 25

## ***SHOUTING FROM ROOFTOPS***

A small group of young white-collar workers, overwhelmed by their high-pressure routines, is scaling Shanghai's skyscrapers. All the members of the group are adventure sports enthusiasts and use ropes to climb multi-story buildings. They pitch tents on the roof and camp out for the night. Seven young women, most of whom work executive jobs by day, belong to an outdoor sports club and describe their extreme brand of urban camping on the highest buildings of the city, as 'exciting'.

"It's a good way to release stress. It's relaxing to sit on the roof, look up at the sky and chat with intimate friends," says Gong Ying, 25. The constant throb of the metropolis below is a distant memory for stressed-out office workers camping on the roof of a high-rise building.

Feeling choked and enslaved by their busy city lifestyles, workers develop escape techniques, like using small rubber stress balls. These litter the Shanghai subways.

It seems that violence also is a way to calm these worriers down. A newly opened restaurant in Beijing encourages their customers to throw plates and cause damage, so long as they pay for the costs.

"Pressure may bring us distress, but it doesn't mean we can't find ways out," Chen says. "Life should be imaginative."

*Source: China Daily News*

When stressed out, it is wonderful to count on God!

You don't have to climb a building or risk your life to find help.

***The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights*** (Hab. 3:19, NIV).

Like a surefooted deer, God is able to bring you safely over any pinnacle of difficulty!

NOVEMBER 26

## ***SHINY MUD BALLS***

Fumio Kayo is a professor of psychology at the Kyoto University of Education. He spends a lot of his time making *Dorodango* (mud balls) from dirt and water. Some people think he is crazy!

It all began when he encountered a 5-year-old boy crying because his mud ball had fallen apart. Kayo immediately made him a new one.

He devoted himself to developing techniques to make and polish mud balls. He discovered a way to polish them to a shine by rubbing their surface until a smooth film appears.

On Sundays, 50 to 70 children and parents spend time with professor Kayo learning his technique. Interestingly, the fathers are particularly keen and seem to have more fun making balls out of dirt than their children.

Kayo is a committed researcher. He even established a website and released an instruction manual with a 30-minute video to illustrate his techniques of making shiny mud balls.

“It took me about two years to really understand my research material,” Kayo said. He made as many as 200 balls before he determined the best way to make mud balls.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I admire Kayo’s persistence in earthly things. May we be just as determined in heavenly matters!

***If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God***

(Prov. 2:3-5, NIV).

If you make insight your priority, searching for it as you would for lost money or hidden treasure, then believe me, you will come upon the knowledge of God!

We all need heavenly insight and discernment!

NOVEMBER 27

## ***HERO FOR THE PLANET***

A 12-year-old Japanese girl was named one of *Time* magazine's *Heroes for the Planet*.

Haruka Maruno came up with an innovative way to clean up after a dog. She invented a 'disposable pooper-scooper', made from an empty milk carton.

The idea came to her when she walked her dog and had to deal with the dung. "It was a gross experience", *Time* quoted her as she recounted the incident.

She was overjoyed when she got a special award for *Haruka's Paperscoop* at a local exhibition of inventions.

Her dad Isamu helped her commercialize the idea by assisting her in setting up her own company. With future inventions in mind, she called the company, "Haruka Family."

Now in the seventh grade, Haruka's latest invention is a disposable ashtray made of recycled paper and charcoal.

*Source: Kid's Web Japan*

Every child is a potential inventor. The human race is curious and always looking for something new. In our ingenuity, may we look to our Creator!

***No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God***

(I Cor. 2:9-10, NIV).

I am so glad to be heading to the most wonderful and yet the most mysterious destination that can ever be imagined.

Oh! For a desire and a curiosity to discover more and more of what God has in store for His creatures.

NOVEMBER 28

## ***POWERED SUITS***

‘Powered suits’ that support disabled or elderly individuals in their physical activities are available in Japan.

One type of suit is designed for those who have difficulty walking, standing up and sitting down. The suit supplements the wearer’s physical strength and provides a form of rehabilitation. As the wearer tries to move, the sensors affixed to the skin instantaneously pick up the faint electrical signals transmitted from the brain to the muscles and the suit’s action joins in harmony to complement the motion of the wearer.

There is also a powered suit designed for caregivers, which boosts their strength as they lift up the people they care for. When sensors detect the hardening of their muscles, it inflates the compressed air actuators positioned in the arm, lower back, and knee areas. The inflated actuators support the muscles of the wearer.

In Japan’s graying society and in an increasing number of cases, the only people available as caretakers are family members who may be elderly themselves. Caring for someone is physically demanding work, and cases of physical injuries such as strained backs are on the rise. The suit supports this physical labor by giving wearers twice their natural strength.

*Source: Science of Rehabilitation*

Do you want strength for your weakness?

God says, “***My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness***”

(2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).

If you lean on God, you become powerful!

NOVEMBER 29

## **PUMPING UP VOLTAGE**

According to various newspapers in Japan, the world's first experimental power station that pumps seawater to generate electric power was built in Japan.

The seawater is pumped to a reservoir 150m above sea level, and released to generate electricity at an underground facility before being returned to the sea.

The maximum capacity of this experimental power station is 30,000 kW, enough to supply approximately 30,000 households for six hours.

Seawater is pumped up during the night when electricity-consumption rates are low. The water is released from the storage reservoir to generate power during the day, when consumption rises.

If the trial plant is successful, Japan will be able to find sites for power generators easily along its long coastline. The high cliffs on the seashore of Japan would be ideal for this type of power station.

*Source: Japan Newspapers*

In God's service, we need a different type of power; a power generated by the Holy Spirit.

***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*** (Acts 1:8, NIV).

As followers of Christ, we receive the power of the Holy Spirit to bless others.

Christ qualifies us to bear witness of Him and His atoning sacrifice to all the people of the world. By the help and power of the Holy Spirit, this should be our life work.

NOVEMBER 30

## ***DRIVER EATING RICE BALL***

A 55-year-old freight train driver in Okayama, Japan was eating an *onigiri* (a Japanese rice ball) while driving the train. Little did he know that someone saw him enjoying his rice ball.

A passing motorist on the highway saw the train driver chewing away at his rice ball lunch while he was on duty. He immediately reported the incident to the Japan Railway authorities.

The firm severely reprimanded the driver and suspended him from duty since he so shamelessly breached the rules of the company. They also deemed it necessary to send a notice to each of its districts demanding strict compliance with its rules, which permits drivers to chew gum and drink water, but bans the eating of rice balls.

“I was careless,” the driver admitted, “I’m sorry.”

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We can so easily disobey orders for our own convenience.

When we follow Jesus, how well do we heed His instructions?

***If you love me, you will obey what I command***

(John 14:15, NIV).

Seek to know God better and you will find yourself obeying out of love. Such submission to the truth is by far better than any obedience that comes from a legal motivation.

***Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him*** (John 14:21, NIV).

Such obedience is by far richer, fuller, deeper and will become sweeter as the years go by.

# DECEMBER

DECEMBER 1

## ***SCANNING IRISES***

An e-passport system, which simplifies immigration procedures, has started at Narita Airport in Japan.

Passengers use simplified Passenger Travel Cards containing biometric data about their faces the irises of their eyes.

A passenger places the card in a machine and looks at a camera. The camera scans his or her eyes, and then the machine compares the information on the card with the images reflected in the iris.

Japanese officials are talking to at least ten Asian countries to get such a system adopted. It will also be tested in Australia, Singapore and the USA.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Have you ever wondered about the way eyes communicate what is happening in the inner being? Eyes are powerful in conveying what goes on in the soul! They can flash in anger and sting, or they can beam with kindness and make the heart dance for joy!

***Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness***

(Luke 11:34-35, NIV).

When people look at you, what do your eyes share – darkness or light? As the Light of the world, Christ shines light into our souls. Reflect His light into others and drive away darkness.

Yes, out of the window of our eyes, Christ-like hearts shine light into the lives of people who still dwell in utter darkness.

DECEMBER 2

## ***WHEELCHAIRS IN THE SNOW***

Shigeyoshi Ochiai, who lives in western Tokyo, resigned from his job as a technician in order to develop equipment for disabled people. He said his inspiration came from his quadriplegic son.

One of the first things he did was to remodel a wheelchair for use on snow-covered ground. Now his son can plow through the snow in his wheelchair. He can easily lift the snow treads of the wheelchair out of the way to switch it back to its regular use.

Ochiai suddenly received an order for 120 such wheelchairs from a winter Olympics official. As the wheelchairs were handmade and took much time to produce he was only able to make 20 of them, which he generously donated.

“I have found my mission in life, and would like to continue developing equipment for unfortunate people,” Ochiai declared.

*Source: Asahi News*

Mr. Ochiai is committed to his work. What an inspiration for followers of Christ to accomplish their calling in Him!

Jesus said: ***If anyone wants to follow me, he must say no to himself. He must pick up his cross every day and follow me***

(Luke 9:23, NIV).

Embrace the teachings and guidance of Jesus. Those who follow Jesus must keep close to Him.

Without hesitation, put aside desires and conveniences and carry your cross daily.

Jesus clearly taught that life is not living for self, but in giving of self to the service of God and others.

Forsake your own desires and let Jesus lead you.

DECEMBER 3

## ***STINGY OR FRUGAL***

One proponent of a frugal life style in the City of Osaka is Miss Obata, author of *Super-Saving Tips*.

She is 75 years old and cherishes a pair of shoes she has worn for 60 years. She has used the same vacuum cleaner for 40 years and has turned on the same radio for 50 years.

Water is abundant in Japan, yet Miss Obata uses the same tap water for three different purposes: first to wash the dishes, next to wash the cleaning rags, and then finally to sprinkle the road outside her house to keep the dust down. In Japan with its abundance of water, this kind of thing is unknown!

As a savings expert who racks her brains over whether she really needs an item or not, Miss Obata advises, “Never buy useless items no matter how cheap they are.”

If she judges an item necessary she will obtain it, even if it means a lifetime of payments. This philosophy distinguishes her from a mere miser. Her lifestyle reveals the heart of many people in Osaka.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Do you realize that God wants you to enjoy all the material things He provides for you in an attitude of humility?

***Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share***

(1 Tim. 6:17-18, NIV).

Do not obsess over money which is here today and gone tomorrow. Enjoy everything that God richly piles on you, and be extravagantly generous in helping others!

DECEMBER 4

## ***A DOG THAT OPENS DOORS***

Cynthia is a service dog trained to help disabled people with a variety of daily activities such as getting dressed, opening doors and picking up objects.

“Get keys!” Kouji Kimura says, and suddenly the dog snaps to attention. She hones in on a bunch of keys lying on a table, picks them up delicately in her mouth, and delivers them to her master. Then she sits beside his wheelchair, her tail thumping the floor.

According to Kimura, a 39-year-old computer programmer, Cynthia understands about 50 commands such as ‘Get newspaper!’ and ‘Get socks!’

She switches lights on and off with her paws and delivers items from the refrigerator upon request.

When Kimura goes shopping, he just points to something on the shelf and Cynthia brings it to him. Daiei Inc. started accepting service dogs at more than 8,000 of its department stores and restaurants nationwide.

Cynthia had to take a test conducted by Japan Railway officials to prove her ability to accompany Kimura on the busy and noisy trains absolutely obeying all commands without getting confused. No matter what they did, Cynthia obeyed her master, passing the test with flying colors.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I thought to myself, “If a dog can so explicitly obey her master, how much more should we obey our Master, the God of the universe!”

***Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*** (Matt. 5:19, NIV).

There are great rewards in obeying God’s laws – in this life and in the next.

DECEMBER 5

## ***ETERNITY IN EVERY MINUTE***

One of my Christmas presents in the year 2000 was an alarm clock that I still use. It wakes me up quietly with the chirping of birds and soothing music. It sounds gradually louder and louder if I am sleeping too deeply.

Today, alarm clocks have many sounds by which one can wake up. Many of them talk, sing or laugh until one is thoroughly awakened. A big hit among young people is an alarm as loud as a dozen emergency alarms. Some alarm clocks can scare the living daylights out of one with the sound of a screaming ambulance or rapid machine gun fire.

Japan produces radio-controlled clocks with a margin of error of only one second in every 100,000 years. Who will ever need that?

Radio-controlled clocks are a far cry from the first alarm clock that was manufactured in Japan in 1899. That windup clock produced an alarm sound when a pin hit a metal bell.

All these alarm clocks give us pause to ask, “How do we spend our time?”

Our most precious commodity is time. Eternity is in every little single minute!

***Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*** (Eph. 5:16, NKJV).

God has allotted time to everyone alive a minute at a time. Do we use it rightly?

***Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time*** (Col. 4:5, NKJV).

In this evil world, may God figure high on our agendas!

DECEMBER 6

## **RIDING ON AIR**

Driving a vehicle is naturally associated with the noise of an engine. Indeed, the roar of the engine gives valuable feedback on the vehicle's speed.

In contrast, recently unveiled electric vehicles are almost silent.

"Frankly, we've been working for 30 years to make cars quiet – never thinking they would ever be *too* quiet," said the vice president at a manufacturing plant. "Now we are working to address safety concerns, so that pedestrians can easily know when a car is approaching."

Some electrically powered vehicles are so silent that experts compare their sound level to that of someone whispering.

Following years of trying to make cars sound as if they were riding on air, engineers are bringing back some noise. At present, all hybrids are becoming more audible.

After Nissan gathered evidence that their vehicles' quietness may pose a safety risk, they included in many of their models the use of chimes, melodies, and what they describe as a 'futuristic whirr'.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Machines tend to be noisy, but sadly, followers of Christ often tend to be silent!

We have incredibly good news to noise about. Jesus Christ, the Son of God came into the world to save sinners! How can we be quiet about that?

***Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to  
God with cries of joy*** (Ps. 47:1, NIV).

With the great throng of believers, let us joyfully sound the news abroad!

***Let all who take refuge in you be glad; let  
them ever sing for joy*** (Ps. 5:11, NIV).

DECEMBER 7

## ***TOYS FOR ADULTS***

Toys are not just for kids anymore! Adults are now a crucial target in Japanese toy makers' marketing strategies. Wide varieties of playthings aimed at grown-ups occupy large sections of store shelves.

The manufacturers reckon there are those who want to return to their childhoods to ease stress. These days, grown-ups are not regarded as immature if they play with toy plastic models.

"Some men may be 'taking revenge' by buying products they could not afford when they were kids," a company manager said. His company has released more than 400 plastic models of robot heroes over the last two decades, some of them radio-controlled.

One product consists of nearly 600 plastic parts, which takes at least 8 hours to assemble.

Women are the target of a bear character that shows up on its liquid crystal screen to give beauty advice. There is also a pocket-sized gauge which measures skin moisture.

*Source: Asahi News*

Spiritually, God does not want us to act like little children who are looking to be amused.

There are those who prefer noise and excitement, but God wants us to show greater maturity of judgment.

***Stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults***

(1 Cor. 14:20, NIV).

Yes, be like a newborn in having an infant-like unfamiliarity with all sorts of evil.

Likewise, we ought to free ourselves from wickedness, from any ill will toward another, from envy and every improper passion. Take care to engage in things that properly occupy the time and attention of your immortal mind.

DECEMBER 8

## ***GOD EVEN LOOKS AFTER THE COYOTE***

Quite some time ago, David, my son, and I went on a tour of deputation meetings in the USA and Canada. The Lord certainly taught us many precious lessons during that time.

One early morning, while out for exercise, I suddenly came across a coyote (also known as an American jackal, brush wolf or prairie wolf). I watched him foraging for food, but when I spoke to him in Japanese, he ran for dear life – I guess he had never heard Japanese before!

Coyotes usually cover 15 to 20 miles a day in search of food. However, what they may not realize with their little animal brains is that God takes care of them.

If God has taken care of coyotes for millennia, how much more then has God taken care of us? How He longs for us to walk in His ways!

***Ephraim will have nothing more to do with other gods. I will answer the prayers of my people. I will take good care of them. I will be like a green pine tree to them. All of the fruit they bear will come from me*** (Hos. 14:8, NIV).

Every day we are in His care and we have no reason to crave other gods, as Ephraim did, nor to fulfill our own selfish desires.

Even if we are not conscious of it, we are under the perfect surveillance of the Creator of the universe. What a comforting thought to know that God is everywhere watching over us at all times.

A man decided to make fun of a Sunday school kid and said to her, “Tell me where God is and I’ll give you an apple.” The little girl said in return.

“Sir, if you can tell me a place where God is not, I’ll give you a basket of apples.”

God is everywhere! The Omnipresent is watching over us and He is well able to take care of us!

DECEMBER 9

## ***COZY BABY HATCH IN ACTION***

In Japan, abandoning a baby is punishable by law with up to five years in prison. In 2006, the director at Jikei Hospital obtained permission from the government to open a baby hatch, having convinced them that such babies ought not be considered abandoned since they are under the care of a hospital.

“When a baby is brought to the hatch I feel happy because the mother has left it in a safe place where it will be cared for,” Taji Hasuda, the hospital director said.

He upset many by opening a hatch where mothers could leave babies. Critics say the hatch encourages parents to give up their children instead of learning to love and nurture them. The hospital also started a telephone counseling service.

Many of those seeking help are youths and unmarried people facing unwanted pregnancies. Within a few months, the hospital received more than 400 such calls.

“I’m in labor. Help me,” cried out a panicked girl whose contractions had begun. She was a high schooler who called just before her delivery.

“I am glad you phoned us,” the hospital official replied. “Wait for me! I’ll come over right away.” The official rushed to the site by car and brought the girl and her newborn baby to the hospital.

When the official notified her parents, they refused to believe what they were told, saying they had not noticed any physical change in their daughter.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Those who care for the helpless are blessed indeed!

***Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him*** (Ruth 4:16, NIV).

Let us be a caring people!

DECEMBER 10

## ***WASHING WITHOUT WATER***

Sanyo Electric Co. sells a household washing machine like no other: *Aqua* is the first washing machine to use only air to clean clothes.

It uses the power of oxidization to kill bacteria and eliminate odors. Its air washing function uses ozone, a chemical shown to be effective in breaking down dirt. Despite the machine's name *Aqua*, water is not needed in the process.

With 'air wash', air containing ozone is sprayed on the items inside the machine's drum. Using air to wash things may seem like a strange idea, but *Aqua*'s technology easily handles problems that are difficult to solve with water, such as getting rid of odors from cigarette smoke, sweat and pet bacteria. Within 30 minutes, any odors or bacteria on the items have been broken down.

Special items, like business suits, school uniforms, slippers, and stuffed toys are no problem for the *Aqua* machine since washing takes place while the drum is stationary. A revolving drum could warp the shape of these delicate items.

The *Aqua* has arrived at a time when consumers seem more concerned than ever about hygiene, as can be seen in the plethora of sprays and other products on the market, allegedly useful in removing odors on clothes.

*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

Nonetheless, there is a certain washing of utmost importance.

We need to clean up our act and do away with evildoing.

***So wash your hands. Make yourselves clean.  
Get your evil actions out of my sight! Stop  
doing what is wrong! Learn to do what is  
right! Treat people fairly. Give hope to those  
who are beaten down. Cheer them up***

*(Is. 1:16-17, NIV).*

Wash yourselves of wrongdoing and learn to live right!

DECEMBER 11

## ***STEALING THE ART***

Semimaru was a blind poet and a famous *biwa* lute player of the early Heian period in Japan.

The aristocrat Hiromasa, also a poet, went to Semimaru's house, hoping to be accepted as a student of the *biwa*. Semimaru turned him away but Hiromasa returned the next day and every day thereafter. Though repeatedly rebuffed, Hiromasa stood outside the house daily for three years listening to the master play and going home to practice what he had heard. Finally, Semimaru relented and took Hiromasa as his student.

A master's knowledge is a treasure not to be revealed to the merely curious and idle. If it is worth knowing, it is worth working for and worth waiting for.

Things are not explained and the beginner in any field, from sushi making to *rakugo* (traditional comic story-telling) or motorcycle mechanics, must spend a long time only watching his master at work. Only by seizing every opportunity to observe the techniques of the master, and paying close attention to what is going on, can he hope to learn.

The Japanese have a name for this type of learning: *gei o nusumu* – to steal the art!

“Why haven’t you mastered this yet?” your music teacher of many years might ask. “Why aren’t you ‘stealing the art’?”

*Source: Japan Times*

May we have more respect for the Master of all masters than even the Japanese have for their teachers!

***“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master*** (Matt. 10:24-25, NIV).

Throughout the year, watch the Son of God closely. Listen to Him and imitate Him faithfully.

DECEMBER 12

## ***WI-FI VENDING MACHINES***

There is no denying that Japan is light years ahead of the West when it comes to vending machines.

A recent innovation is facial recognition vending machines. As the vending machine scans the facial features of an approaching buyer, it displays a tempting advertisement deemed an appropriate match for that customer.

Asahi Soft Drinks plans to set up thousands of new vending machines that dispense standard drinks. It will also provide free Wi-Fi hotspots, sending Wi-Fi signals out in a 50m radius.

The new vending machines' Wi-Fi will be accessible to anyone without the need for a pass code or a payment of even a drink purchase.

As of 2012, Asahi hopes to set up 10,000 of these new vending machines throughout Japan.

In addition, the machines will be useful for tourism and shopping. As users log on to the free Wi-Fi they are taken to the websites of local shops and nearby sightseeing destinations.

*Source: The Internet*

***But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days*** (Dan. 2:28, NKJV).

Facial recognition may tell something about you, but God knows everything about you. He deals with us individually.

Are you in close contact with the All-knowing God every day?

DECEMBER 13

## ***SCHOOL MATES FOR LIFE***

Mr. Wakabayashi meets every two years with his fourth-grade classmates. He played with them in Ueno Park more than 65 years ago. They would climb trees and gather ginkgo nuts, smuggling them home in bulging pockets to roast over a charcoal fire. Memories are a precious bond for them.

“I’ll always remember March 10, 1945. It was the start of the B-29 firebombing runs. Their gas bombs ignited the entire neighborhood,” one of his friends said. “We fled with our belongings piled on rickshaws.”

Keiji Miyaji’s memories of being hauled up for misbehaving in class are vivid. “If children made a mistake, teachers would correct them. We’d be hit on the head or receive a slap on the cheek,” Miyaji recalls.

“Teachers were in control and parents expected them to discipline us,” adds someone else. “Now parents are too lax about teaching such things as manners.”

These old friends have seen their old school destroyed by bombs; their learning methods become obsolete, and even the neighborhood change. Today it is a grid of utility pole-lined streets crammed with concrete buildings.

Nevertheless, pleasant memories of pleasant bygone days remain a unifying comfort.

*Source: Japan Times*

It is good to have memories; it is essential. In the spiritual sphere too, we should have marvelous memories of what God has done for us.

***Remember the days of long ago! Ask your father and the aged men; They will tell you all about it*** (Deut. 32:7, TLB).

Even in old age, let us recall the many times God has helped us, both in good times and bad, and let us thank Him!

DECEMBER 14

## ***ROBOTS AS GUARDS***

Not so long ago, robots were little more than products of fantasy in cartoons and science-fiction movies. Robots first appeared in the industrial world to assist or to replace factory workers. Now they are everywhere.

For example, *My Spoon* assists disabled people who find it difficult to feed themselves.

Another robot tells up to 20 different jokes, depending on how much money it is given.

At midnight, *Guardrobo* patrols the floor. A remote control unit guides *Guardrobo* as it moves around the floor ready to detect fires and intruders.

It is pre-programmed and follows a map with the aid of a sensor. After each 30-minute circuit of the floor, *Guardrobo* automatically connects itself to a battery charger, boosting its power levels for another reconnaissance mission.

The robot's loud synthesized voice hollers, “*Kora!*” (“Hey you!”) or “*Dorobo!*” (“Burglar!”) at the first sign of trouble. It would surely stun any potential saboteur into beating a hasty exit.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

I cannot help but be glad that I will soon enter heaven where there will be no need for any *Guardrobos*.

***But nothing unworthy will be allowed to enter.  
No one who is dirty-minded or who tells lies  
will be there. Only those whose names are  
written in the Lamb's book of life will be in the  
city*** (Rev. 21:27, CEV).

Since God inscribed my name into the Lamb's book of life, I have an entrance into His kingdom with its eternal benefits.

Is your name written in the book of the Lamb?

DECEMBER 15

## ***HIGH-TECH SHUTTLE***

The Japan Railway Company has developed a new transportation system, the JR-Maglev MLX01. It reached a maximum speed of 581km/h (361 mph) on December 2, 2003.

This shuttle runs along its course slightly raised into the air, so it is quieter than any other train currently in operation. The vehicle starts moving without any shock or vibration, and provides a very smooth ride. The shuttle floats on a cushion of air the thickness of a business card jetting from its station base. Without tracks, it is able to run over wherever guiding magnetic boards are buried.

Construction costs are only 50 to 70 percent of those for a monorail system, and operation costs are reasonable. The shuttle does not emit any gas, nor does it require any electric cables since it runs on batteries.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Nowadays, transporting people is the biggest business on earth. Millions want to go somewhere.

Spiritually, we are also moving! Let us make sure we are traveling in the right direction and on the best highway possible.

***A good road will be there, and it will be named  
'God's Sacred Highway.' It will be for God's  
people; no one unfit to worship God will walk  
on that road. And no fools can travel on that  
highway*** (Is. 35:8-9, CEV).

No evil-hearted man who is rude or rebellious may travel upon it! This Holy Highway is exclusively for God's people purified by the cleansing power of Jesus Christ!

God is walking with us and makes sure that none can mistake the way because God desires that we go with Him.

Onward! Upward!

DECEMBER 16

## ***500 GRAMS AT BIRTH***

“When Miyuki was born, she was as big as one of my fingers,” her mother said. She was 500 grams at birth. “The first time I embraced her was five months after she was born!” The doctor told Mrs. Inoue that Miyuki was blind in both eyes! She wept but promised herself that Miyuki would grow up and have a taste of everything ordinary children experience.

When Miyuki was about five years old, she fell down the stairs. She cried and called for her mother to help her.

“Miyuki! Get up! It’s time to go to school!” her mother sternly replied. She always steeled herself against Miyuki’s pitiful cries for help and did everything to toughen her up for life.

“Today you are going to learn to ride a bicycle,” her mother announced, taking her to an open lot. Miyuki tried to ride thinking that her mother was holding the bicycle at the back, but there was no one there, so she fell. When she got up, she could not find the bicycle’s handles. Throughout the ordeal, her mother sat on a bench and did not help her once. She kept telling her to get on the bicycle and ride. It took a few days and many falls before Miyuki managed to ride the bicycle.

“Miyuki! To think that you are blind but you can ride a bicycle!” said her mother.

“I have learned a lot from my mother,” Miyuki said. “One of the most precious lessons she taught me is that there is nothing that I cannot do if I set my mind to it!

*Source: Mainichi News*

God has the answer to every problem of life. He holds before each one of us the opportunity for joy and victory if we trust Him.

***I can do everything through Him who gives me strength*** (Phil. 4:13, NIV).

You can face anything through Christ’s power and help!

DECEMBER 17

### ***FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS CLASS***

Masatoshi Koshiba was one of the winners of the Nobel Prize in Physics for the year 2002. “I graduated from Tokyo University’s science department at the bottom of the class,” the 76-year-old professor confessed.

He stressed that academic records are not necessarily a determining factor in setting the course of one’s life.

“The grade on one’s report card won’t guarantee the future,” he said. “Few people believed anyone graduating last on the list could become a professor.” Professor Koshiba decided to make his university grades public because he wanted to motivate students to study.

“There are many things in the world you can achieve despite poor academic records,” he said. “What counts most is adopting an active attitude toward studying.”

According to his classmates, the student Koshiba stood out from his fellows for his vigorous curiosity, extensive knowledge, and diverse interests.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

It is sometimes the weakest that wins the race. Even the lame take the prey.

***That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*** (2 Cor. 12:10, NIV).

No one can truthfully brag about his accomplishments. God’s support makes them possible, even through our hardships and weaknesses.

Trials have a way of humbling us, especially when we are helpless in solving them. God’s powerful influence causes us to rejoice with joy unspeakable, giving Him all the glory.

DECEMBER 18

## ***THE MOST JOYFUL PERSON ON EARTH***

While the half-blind Yuriko Inoue, a masseuse by trade, was kneading the muscles in my back, my wife Peggy remarked, “Yuriko Inoue must surely be the most joyful person on earth.”

Inoue knows her God intimately and her overflowing happiness is clear for all to see.

Her left eye being blind, she can only read with her right eye at a distance of just 3cm, focusing on character after character as she moves the book up and down along her cheek.

“I rejoice in the light which the Lord creates in my right eye,” she said. “It helps me to explore the treasures in the Bible.”

***The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light***

(Matt. 6:22, NIV).

She learned how to praise God under adverse circumstances from the Bible stories in the book of Acts. In prison, Paul and Silas sang praises to the Lord. Beaten and with their backs bleeding, they rejoiced in the midnight hour to their Lord – not fretting about any potential death sentence awaiting them.

It is different with unbelievers. Their joy depends on pleasant conditions. They revel in the good times, but should things turn against them, they are often shattered.

When people see true joy in your life, it promotes Christ in a most marvelous way!

***He gave me a new song to sing. It is a hymn of praise to our God. Many people will see what he has done and will worship him. They will put their trust in the Lord*** (Ps. 40:3, NIrV).

May the Lord so fill your mouth with a song of joy that it will be catching and inspire many around you!

DECEMBER 19

## ***THE FOLDED BUSINESS CARD***

In Japanese, there are no swearwords. The closest to a curse word is *baka*, which means fool. This is not to say that the Japanese do not have elaborate ways of insulting one another. Simply dropping the usual honorific as one addresses someone can be an unforgettable affront.

Politicians in Japan understand the delicate art of insulting each other, but some of their ways are not very delicate.

Mr. Fujii plainly did not like Mr. Tanaka. For a man of Mr. Fujii's generation, personal criticism was unthinkable, so he did the next best thing: He launched a devastating attack on Mr. Tanaka's business card, a most important element in any professional encounter in Japan. The business card is an extension of its owner.

Of course, Mr. Fujii understood this very well. Therefore, when Mr. Tanaka came to visit him, he knew just what to do: He refused his business card.

Mr. Tanaka insisted, and finally Mr. Fujii accepted the card, which brought the knockout blow: He folded the card!

To those who know name card etiquette the insult was unmistakable. In the following days, the story was all over the national newspapers.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We may laugh at these antics, but it reminds us who are not of this world how important our Christian life-style is.

***Be kind and compassionate to one another,  
forgiving each other, just as in Christ God  
forgave you*** (Eph. 4:32, NIV).

Kindness and sensitivity are defining characteristics of God's people and part of God's program for making our world better!

DECEMBER 20

## ***THE DARUMA DOLL***

During the Christmas and New Year's season, the Japanese go on their yearly buying spree. Amongst other things, they pour money into various good-luck charms.

A most popular charm is the *Daruma* doll. It has no arms or legs and can be bought at temples in many sizes – it might be smaller than a thumbnail or as big as a human being.

Other charms can be worn or put on a shelf but the *Daruma* doll has a more interesting life. *Daruma* dolls are usually sold with only the whites of their eyes painted in. Japanese people complete one eye when, for example, they make a wish to pass an exam, to do well in business or to avoid accidents. They paint the other eye in when the wish comes true.

The *Daruma* doll's best-loved feature is its ability to always come up straight again, no matter how it falls. It wobbles back and forth ever regaining an upright position since it has lead built into its base. The *Daruma* reminds the Japanese that even if they meet with some misfortune that weighs them down, they can emulate *Daruma* in finding a way to bounce back up again!

*Source: The Internet*

Every time I see a *Daruma* doll, I thank the Lord that when I fall or am downcast, I do not need a charm to help me bounce up again. I have the Living God who takes my hand, lifts me up and restores my equilibrium in Him.

***The Lord takes good care of all those who fall. He lifts up all those who feel helpless***

(Ps 145:14, NIV).

***My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip —He who watches over you will not slumber***

(Ps. 121:2-3, NIV).

God stoops down in love and mercy to help sustain us!

DECEMBER 21

## ***CHARGE YOUR BIKE UP***

Mr. Tachibana, the factory head of Kawatetsu Galvanizing in Okayama, Japan, opened a bicycle shed that includes a solar-power generator with an electric-bicycle re-charger.

He fixed about 15 square meters of solar panels to the roof of the bicycle shed, generating a maximum output of 1.3 kW – slightly less than that used by a typical household of four.

The shed has charging points for ten electric bicycles, and can recharge all ten in just two hours. The battery-powered bicycles can travel about 30km or two hours before needing a recharge.

When not recharging bicycles, or when bicycles in the shed are fully charged, the solar-panel output feeds other factory operations.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We are surrounded by energy ready to be harnessed; the sun has more energy than can ever be calculated.

Unworthy as we are, everybody profits every day from a fraction of this energy.

***When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Ps. 8:3-4, NIV)***

We are less than dust compared to God's greatness, but every day He blesses us.

Praise His worthy Name for allowing us to enjoy abundantly the blessings He pours out on us!

DECEMBER 22

## ***CHRISTMAS MYSTERY TOURS***

Japan Tour System (JTS) used to arrange ‘Christmas Mystery Tours’ in the 1970s.

Large numbers of people were intrigued and signed up for these unidentified vacation packages. Participants would gather at a Tokyo airport to leave for an unknown destination that included overnight accommodation and a breakfast.

*Source: Japan Tour System*

The tourists who went on these ‘Christmas Mystery Tours’ usually had a good time and enjoyed the thrill of the unknown.

We who belong to the household of God rejoice because we are headed for the most wonderful and yet the most mysterious realm that can ever be imagined by human beings. God lifts the curtain slightly on this marvelous destination in many places in the Bible.

***Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands*** (2 Cor. 5:1, NIV).

May the Lord help us at this Christmas season, as never before, to focus on what is important, in order to be in the company of those heading heavenward.

***One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus***  
(Phil. 3:13-14, NIV).

Let the Christmas season be a steppingstone toward your heavenly habitation. Press on!

DECEMBER 23

## ***JESUS ALLEGEDLY BURIED IN JAPAN!***

Shingo, a remote northern town in Aomori, Japan, has a strange and unlikely tale to tell.

According to its citizens, Jesus Christ did not die on the cross, but came there to live in the mountains and rice fields of Japan. His previously unknown younger brother was crucified in his stead.

After escaping the Romans, so the tale goes, he fled across Siberia to Japan, settled near the northern end of Honshu, the biggest island in Japan, and married a local woman. He fathered three daughters before dying peacefully at the age of 106!

“I don’t exactly think it’s true,” Mr. Sawaguchi a farmer in the area said. “But I don’t exactly think it’s false, either.” His old house has a symbol resembling the Star of David carved into the woodwork.

A peculiar local belief since way back is that making a sign of the cross on a baby’s forehead will prevent illness.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

We know that there are many counterfeit christs in the world. How fantastic it is to know the real Christ.

***We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*** (2 Pet. 1:16, NIV).

We do not believe in fairy tales, but we look forward to the powerful return of Jesus Christ!

Yes, very soon He will be coming back for those who have loved Him and have heeded His commandments.

Will you be ready to meet Him?

May the Christmas season be for you a time of joy and grant you an occasion to set your life in order to live with Christ for all eternity!

DECEMBER 24

## ***IT'S RAINING MONEY***

On December 24, 2003, an unidentified 26-year-old man tossed ¥1 million in 1,000-yen bills from the TV Tower in the city of Nagoya.

He grabbed wads of bills from two shopping bags and pitched them through an open window causing a mad scramble for the cash 100m below. The money rained down on the sidewalks and streets as people chased the wind-blown bills.

Afterwards, the man explained that he wanted to give away some of his earnings from the stock market.

"I have too much money. I don't need it," he affirmed. "I wanted to give some back to the world as a Christmas gift."

Prefecture police official Tatsuyuki Satomi said none of the bills appeared to be counterfeit. The unemployed 26-year-old man had broken no laws.

*Source: Japan Times*

It made me wonder about the meaning of true wealth.

***For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs***

(1Tim. 6:7-10, NIV).

Contentment is a great gift!

Sufficiency in Jesus Christ keeps us in spite of any outward circumstances. Due to a reverent attitude toward God, we develop true inner strength and peace.

DECEMBER 25

### ***A CHRISTMAS TREE SURVIVES THE BOMB***

Nobuaki Iwataki and his family have enjoyed the Yuletide glow of the same Christmas tree for the past 70 years in Hiroshima. The family and its tree survived World War II and the atomic bomb.

"We have put the tree up every year for 70 years," Nobuaki said. His parents bought it in 1937. Since then, every Christmas without fail, even at the risk arrest, the family has put it up.

Nobuaki was raised in a Christian home. He still keeps a photo of the tiny wooden church where he and his five brothers went to services and Sunday school. Christmas was always a special time.

Japan surrendered in August 1945, and Nobuaki returned home to Hiroshima. The Iwatake family home sat in the eastern part of the city behind a small hill that provided a buffer from the atomic blast. The front end of the house was crushed and burned, but the back, where the tree was, stood intact.

"Japan had surrendered, there was no food and nothing to celebrate," Nobuaki said. "Everybody was in shock and in a sad state, but my mother still put up the tree. Christmas became more meaningful," he said.

*Source: Associated Press*

Throughout the war, the Iwatake family remembered the joy of Christmas. The meaning of Christmas was not lost on them as they honored the birth of Christ each year.

***Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city***

(Rev. 22:14, NIV).

Do not miss out on washing your robes in the Blood of the Lamb in order to gain the right to eat of the eternal fruit of the Tree of Life.

Do not drag your feet when it comes to your eternal welfare!

DECEMBER 26

## ***SMILE AND THE WORLD SMILES WITH YOU***

Have you ever heard of ‘smile training’?

Technology can help you achieve the perfect smile and thereby lift the spirits of perfect strangers.

The Japanese railway company has set up innovative *smile meters* – computers installed with smile-rating software and a digital camera – at several of its busiest stations so employees can make sure their grin is ‘correct’ before heading off to face customers.

Just imagine a smile meter on every street corner to help combat even the most serious cases of the Monday blues!

For Christmas and for the brand new year, a wide grin from ear to ear can bring an extra spring to your step. Your happy vibe and positive facial expressions will rub off on others and influence their level of optimism.

Emotions are contagious and a smile can induce a feeling of pleasure in the observer – even a complete stranger.

*Source: Reader’s Digest*

***When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it; the light of my face was precious to them***

(Job 29:24, NIV).

Have you ever experienced encouragement from a smile? Wherever you go, you too can cheer others and give comfort to sad people with your bright smile!

***I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete***

(John 15:11, NIV).

The happiness of followers of Christ is obvious. It is the will of God for you to be full of joy. It might even be catching to those you rub shoulders with.

DECEMBER 27

## **198 FLAT TIRES LATER**

Machii Tsuyoishi, a 30-year-old cycling enthusiast from Japan, embarked on a six-year journey through 117 countries.

He had driven trucks for three years and saved enough money to travel 116,780km – the equivalent of three times around the Earth – on his bicycle.

Setting off from Alaska in April 1992, he cycled for two years throughout the United States. He covered Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Australia during the following four years. He slept under the stars at night.

The bicycle tires went flat 198 times, and he wore out 59 tires during the six-year journey. The repair kit, map, sleeping bag, portable cooking stove, and a stick for driving stray dogs away helped him to survive.

Once, a robber almost strangled Tsuyoishi and made off with all of his money. He managed to borrow money from the kind manager of the inn where he was staying until his family was able to send cash.

He persevered through thick and thin and came back to a hero's welcome on May 12, 1998.

*Source: Yomiuri News*

Seven times in the beginning of the book of Revelation, we read of the marvelous rewards awaiting those who endure to the end. For example:

***He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life*** (Rev. 3:5, NKJV).

Let us not only hang in there in the beginning or until the halfway mark, but right up to the finale. In our Christian walk, we need to persevere right to the end.

DECEMBER 28

## ***WRONG-WAY DRIVING***

The police in Shizuoka, Japan arrested a driving school instructor (of all people) for driving in the wrong direction on a national highway and triggering a traffic accident that involved three other vehicles.

The police took Atsunori Inaba, 36, into custody for violating the Road Traffic Law. They also detected alcohol in his breath.

Inaba drove his car in the wrong direction for about 3km before ramming his vehicle into a truck. Two cars crashed into the truck that had suddenly jerked to a standstill. In the accident, two people were slightly injured.

The driving school instructor was on his way home after celebrating with acquaintances at a party!

Unfortunately, he is now looking for another job.

*Source: Mainichi News*

Even intelligent men make stupid mistakes when under the influence of alcohol.

***Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things***

(Prov. 23: 29-33, NIV).

Being under the influence of alcohol gives false courage, often with far-reaching consequences.

DECEMBER 29

## ***MIDNIGHT FLIGHT***

As the year ends, the Japanese prepare for the year's most important holiday by decorating their front portals with pine and bamboo. On New Year's Eve, millions will prepare buckwheat noodles, signifying longevity and prosperity, and millions more will visit their local shrine or temple.

In another time-honored tradition, a minority will 'celebrate' the year's end in quite a different fashion: they will vanish.

New Year's Eve, being also a time when people clear their debts, has become the most popular night for *yonige*, (the midnight flight). People who have fallen into debt simply disappear into the night to start a fresh life in an anonymous city or country.

So common is the practice that it has spawned an industry of removal companies specializing in midnight dashes called *Benriyasan*, ("Mr. Convenient-for-Anything"), or *Yonigeya* ("Midnight Flight Shop"). These companies are good at organizing disappearing acts.

Once a family has dashed, the *Yonigeya* will clear out the house in 15-30 minutes, storing the contents in a secret warehouse until they can be reunited with their fleeing owners. The *Yonigeya* leases properties and untraceable phone lines in a new city and provides new identities, which is no mean feat in tightly documented Japan.

*Source: Tokyo Financial Times*

We advise believers deeply in debt not to flee but to face the music.

***Come to me, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest***

(Matt. 11:28, NIV).

Do not run from Jesus, run to Him! He will shoulder your burdens and give you rest!

DECEMBER 30

## ***CRYING FOR TOMORROW***

Eighteen thousand American soldiers were standing across the battle lines in Korea, facing 100,000 hardened and fanatical communist Korean soldiers. It was New Year's Eve, 1950 in sub-zero temperatures, as these American soldiers stood beside their armored tanks. A news reporter walked up to a young burly American soldier.

"Soldier, if I were God and could give you that one thing you'd rather have than anything else in the entire world, what would you ask for," he inquired.

"I would ask you to give me tomorrow," the soldier said after some contemplation. The sound of ammunition could be heard and the smell of death was in the air, but asking for 'tomorrow' was a big enough prayer for that day.

From around the nations of the world people all have a cry for tomorrow: a brighter tomorrow, a better tomorrow, a more meaningful tomorrow, a safer tomorrow.

*Source: YouTube*

If you truly follow God, there is no reason to be anxious about tomorrow, even in the most unfavorable circumstances.

***The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day*** (Prov. 4:18-19, NIV).

There is peace in the heart of the believer about tomorrow!

***Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*** (Matt. 6:34, NIV).

***Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow*** (Num. 11:18, NIV).

DECEMBER 31

## ***UNREAL CONDUCTORS***

Pretending to conduct an orchestra is becoming a favorite pastime among devotees of classical music in Japan. Books and computer software, which teach people how to conduct, have become hits. One computer maker has already sold more than 5,000 copies. Some books come with a baton.

You may wonder what fun there is in waving a baton at a stereo set, but it is supposed to be a mode of artistic expression. Wannabe conductors pour tremendous energy into every move, imagining that they are famous conductors – for a short time.

A salaried worker is ‘conducting’ in his home. Solemnly he steps out in front of his stereo set. He lifts his baton in the air. The music begins. He vigorously swings his baton, picturing in his head everything from the position of each instrument to the facial expression of each orchestra member. Nothing can deter him while he is under the spell. The phone may ring or his children may yell at him, but none of this reaches his ears! Then the music ends. The man stops moving. He lets out a deep sigh. Back to reality and out of breath, he smiles and says, “That helped relieve my stress!”

Like most women, his wife thinks it is a somewhat bizarre hobby, but she comments, “If this is all he needs for a stress reliever, I guess it’s a bargain.”

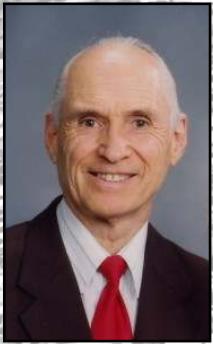
*Source: Japan Echo Inc.*

The more we praise God the less stress we will experience.

***Praise God in his mighty heavens. Praise Him for his acts of power; praise Him for his surpassing greatness. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD***

(Ps. 150:1-2&6, NIV).

Let us conduct a song of praise with heavenly software and experience God in our hearts every day in the next year!



Neil Verwey

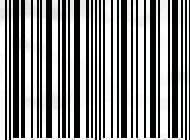
**God's Footprint in the Media** is a devotional based on illustrations which will bless you deeply.

This unique book was written by the late Neil Verwey, who desired to be remembered as a story-teller with a passion to be a blessing to those he came in contact with. Neil dedicated his life to serving the Lord as a missionary in Japan for 61 years (1952 – 2013).

Neil's desire for all who read this book was that they may – “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18, NIV).

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