

# Strong Shoes for Rough Roads



**Neil Verwey**

*Strong Shoes*  
*for*  
*Rough Roads*

*by*  
*Neil Verwey*

Strong Shoes for Rough Roads

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# Japan Mission

Japan Mission was founded by Neil and Peggy Verwey in 1957. It is a faith mission endeavouring to reach the seeking ones among the 127 million Japanese people.

Japan Mission is interdenominational, not forming churches, but rather linking those reached through many avenues of ministry to already existing evangelical churches which believe and teach the fundamental doctrines of the Bible.

The main emphasis of the work is to aid Japan's approximately 7,800 churches, which have an average attendance of about 35 people. Because of their small congregations, the pastors are often in need of assistance with literature and their evangelistic programs.

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## Foreword

Two months before participating in the women's marathon at the Athens Olympics in 2004, Miss Mizuki Noguchi, her running partner, and Mr. Hitoshi Mimura, her shoemaker went to Athens to examine the treacherous marathon course, and especially the slick marble streets.

After Mr. Mimura determined what she needed, he began designing the extra special shoes she would need to win. He decided to use sponge soles to provide the necessary cushion and rice husks to increase traction. He made the upper part of the shoes with mesh since it breathes better than other materials. He produced about 25 prototypes before he was satisfied.

"Shoes need to bear a load 2.7 times the weight of the athlete when running uphill, and 4 times their weight when running downhill," Mr. Mimura asserted. "Many calculations have to go into the shoes to come up with the ideal pair for any given athlete."

Miss Noguchi was very impressed with the workmanship and the lightness of the shoes that she finally received from Mr. Mimura.

"Last night, I slept with the shoes beside my pillow," Miss Noguchi confessed just before the race. Her shoes certainly did not let her down.

"I took off my right shoe and kissed it after I crossed the finish line because I wanted to thank my shoemaker and the shoes that helped me to win on this difficult course," the elated Miss Noguchi said. "Mr. Mimura is indeed the god of shoes!" She did not know it then, but as she was speaking, a well-gratified Mr. Mimura was standing about 50 meters away from her in the excited crowd!

Every tourist and athlete knows how important the right shoes are. The Easterner, too, is concerned about footwear, and so it was in Bible times. Listen to the command of the father regarding the prodigal son when he arrived home from a far-off country with sore and, possibly, bare feet. ***Put ... sandals on his feet*** (Luke 15:22).

Rough are the roads for the faltering feet of those who are called to be messengers of God, and how important it is to have the right footwear: ***and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace*** (Ephesians 6:15).

**NEIL VERWEY**



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## A Teeny-Weeny Job

The motto of our missionary organization, the Japan Mission, is “Called to Serve!” One of the earliest lessons God taught me most vividly as a young missionary in Japan was that I was not called to be served but to serve!

During 1954, after completing two years of language study, I stayed with a world-famous missionary, Rev. Eric Gosden and his wife. They were then very near retirement age, but they were quite willing to teach a young, foolhardy, first-term missionary – like myself – the ropes.

They lived in a large, comfortable, two-story house and hired a very capable live-in, domestic helper. I regarded it as a great privilege to stay with such a godly couple, and to learn from them as much as I could in order to become a successful missionary myself.

Every morning, coming down the steps from my second-story room, I noticed that my shoes were spotlessly clean and well polished. I took this to be the work of the diligent servant in our household. Considering all the snow, rain and mud outside, I appreciated stepping into a clean pair of shoes when it was time to go out. By then, I already knew the aversion the Japanese had for dirty shoes!

One morning, rising earlier than usual, I went downstairs and came across Rev. Gosden himself, on his knees cleaning the shoes of this “pampered” young lad from the Kalahari Desert! I was profoundly embarrassed! It should have been the other way around! I should have been cleaning his shoes!



*The young and inexperienced Neil Verwey*

During the nine months that I stayed with Rev. Gosden, he taught me more through his example than through his powerful preaching. He was a living embodiment of what Christ taught in Mark 10:43 — ... **but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.**

Years ago, God also brought me in contact with Kenji, who learned at an early age how to minister to people.

“Kenji, I pity you! Everybody’s mocking you,” his teacher sympathized with him. “You’re making far too much of your religion!” His teacher liked Kenji very much because he was always very willing to do the dirty jobs, which other students loathed to do.

“Oh no, Sensei, (Teacher) I’m following Jesus,” was Kenji’s bold reply. “I just feel sorry for my friends who do not know any better.”

One day, Kenji’s teacher did not come to school and Kenji heard that he had entered a medical center for cancer patients in a far-away place. He also heard from his teacher’s wife that he had abandoned all hope and was in the depths of despair. Then a letter arrived for Kenji from his teacher, which showed that there was still a flicker of hope in his heart. “I have many times considered killing myself to spare you and our children the burden of supporting me in this place, but I cannot find any solace in that for my soul. Last night, I had a dream that Kenji can help me and I implore you to send him to me.”

The following weekend, Kenji visited his teacher, who plied him with many questions. It gave Kenji a wonderful opportunity to tell his sick teacher the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross for the redemption of all humankind.

This was all new to his teacher! He knew nothing about Jesus, and never paid much attention to sin. After all, everybody commits sin in one way or another; as long as you don’t overdo it, he thought. But listening to Kenji, he began to see God, sin and forgiveness in a new light.

Before Kenji left on the long train journey home, he had an opportunity to point his repentant sensei to Jesus, and what a transformation that brought about in his teacher’s life!

Even in the prisons of Japan, I have come across those that Christ has transformed to such an extent that they are not rebellious any more, but to the contrary, have taken on the form of a servant. This is almost more of a miracle than when it happens outside the prison.

One of the prisoners in Osaka Prison I contacted only recently found Christ as his Savior, and is already moving on an amazingly high spiritual plane. He said that, for him, every day is full of joy. God has radically changed him. Before, he always whined about his long sentence, but with his changed life he says, "How amazing it is that for all the wrong and evil that I did, God allowed them to only sentence me to five years!" His attitude has changed drastically, and he said that his days are no longer mundane. Instead, he is always looking out to see how he can serve others with little acts of kindness!

Even for the dying, if they know Christ, serving Him and others comes first before their own needs.

Some years ago, during a Billy Graham crusade in Japan, the steering committee appointed Rev. Shirai, who had excellent organizational skills, to be chief organizer of the crusade. His wife was ill at the time, but he accepted the appointment. Later on, discovering that her illness was terminal, he wanted to resign his position in order to be at her side, but she was adamant that he continue his work. Even when the crusade was in full swing and she was visibly getting worse, she insisted that he do his share of the work.

"Why are you sitting here with me?" she would ask. "We don't have time for holding hands. The crusade is important; God's work is waiting!"

In spite of his own personal grief, Rev. Shirai attended every committee meeting and most of the crusade meetings too.

"How can you just leave your wife like that?" one of his fellow preachers asked him.

"She's the one who is sending me out," he responded, to their amazement. "She can't bear it when I simply sit with her when it is a matter of eternal life or death for many!"

One of our longtime Japan Mission workers also understood the secret of serving God and her fellow human beings with joy as a retiree, even to the last few days when she was facing

lingering sickness and death. She called herself the Long-Chinned Grandma.

The “Long-legged Grandpa” was a well-known philanthropist in Japan. He had the means to help needy students financially so that they could gain a good education.

“I don’t have long legs or a lot of money, but I have a long chin, which indicates determination,” Mrs. Kazuko Sekiyama told more than one young believer. “So, you can trust me to pray for you as you go on your Christian journey!”

We first met her in a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. In that hospital, she believed in Christ and later attended and graduated from Bible College. She joined the ranks of the Japan Mission and nine years later, married a fellow worker, Mr. Sekiyama. For many years, they served God as evangelists in tuberculosis hospitals.



*Kazuko Sekiyama*

When they finally retired, Kazuko still wrote many letters every week to people all over the country to help them spiritually. She was never physically very strong, and at the end of 2003, being in a lot of pain, her husband took her to a nearby hospital. Even when she was at death’s door, she was cheerful and her laughter often rang out in the hospital. After she passed away, her husband went to the hospital to thank those who had cared for her while she was there.

“You think we took care of your wife?” the nurses contradicted him. “She was the one taking care of us, so that none of us would be discouraged or downcast. What an amazing woman! We have never come across any elderly person like her, laughing even in the face of death!” The presence of Jesus lingered in that ward long after she was gone.

At Kazuko’s memorial service a few weeks later, those attending were amazed to hear for the first time how wide and effective Kazuko’s ministry had been. She always signed her letters of encouragement, “Your Long-chinned Grandma.”

New Year’s Day is the most auspicious of all holidays in Japan. On that day, Thursday, January 1, 2004, God took Kazuko to a greater celebration than she had ever experienced

here on earth, and she is now eternally shining for Him! ***Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*** (Matthew 13:43).

It seemed to me that no one was in a greater hurry to get to heaven than one of our volunteer workers, a retiree named Mr. Sawa! For most of his life, he had worked very hard and indulged in the pleasures of the world to his heart's content, without a thought of the horrible consequences. When he retired, his health had gone and he was flooded with sadness. His wife had departed to another world and he had to continue an indescribably lonely life by himself.

As he sat alone in his little room day after day, remorse began filling his little world. He could have kicked himself that he did not go with his wife when she went to implore Buddha for healing. Now she was gone and he had no one to talk to and no one to reprimand him for drinking and excessively gambling! Life was very unfair to have left him with so many burdens to carry all by himself.

Also, the conduct of their stepson, Hideo, caused him many sleepless nights. Like father like son, he was deep into reckless gambling, drinking and womanising and he regarded his father merely as the source of the income he needed to finance his risky pastimes. Mr. Sawa almost had a heart attack when Hideo became a bouncer at a bar in an adjacent town, and he kept wondering how long it would be before someone discovered that they were related!

One winter morning, when Mr. Sawa was bundled in a blanket, rubbing his hands in front of a charcoal heater, Hideo pushed open the door and greeted him. Usually he was so boisterous and demanding, but in only a few moments, Mr. Sawa noticed that the boy was utterly different, almost as if he was another person.

Mr. Sawa was dumbfounded as he listened to Hideo describing what he called a "conversion" to someone called "Jesus." From bad to worse, Mr. Sawa thought. Now, instead of gambling, drinking and women, he was going after foreign gods! He had to admit, though, that he almost liked Hideo's completely new life style. Hideo did not even want to smoke or enjoy a beer with his father anymore, and to top it all off, he did not even ask him for spending money!

Father and son talked for hours about the renewing that Jesus had brought in Hideo's life, and the following Sunday, Mr. Sawa decided to find out more about the God of his stepson. He attended church with him to try and discover the secret of Hideo's changed life.

I will never forget the day when Mr. Sawa attended a Christian service for the first time with his son. For his age, he was very alert as his constant nodding indicated. Not on that Sunday, but soon afterwards, God truly made him a new creature in Christ.

Hideo's bouncer techniques and hooliganism, as well as his own and Mr. Sawa's love of rice wine, tobacco and gambling, were now things of the past. On Christmas Eve day 1978 they were both baptized into the Christian faith and grew spiritually by leaps and bounds.

One day, Mr. Sawa came to me with a very strange request. "Mr. Verwey, can you arrange for me to die in the service of the Lord?" His request startled me, and I immediately decided not to become involved in such a crazy scheme. Mr. Sawa had high blood pressure, suffered from heart trouble, had prostate problems and other physical ailments, and to me it seemed as if he was going to meet his Maker in the near future anyway. His doctor had also apparently warned him that any unnecessary movement could cause death. What did he expect from me? To burden my conscience by driving him to his death by giving him work that he was not capable of doing anymore?

"The doctor wants me to sit in my room all day, watching TV and reading the newspaper, but I am a Christian now and I have higher priorities," he complained. "Even so, I just can't sit all day long studying the Bible and praying without having anything practical to do. My hands are itching to work," he pleaded.

Convinced but very concerned, I pointed out to him that his fragile physical condition would not allow him to do any strenuous work. He again repeated with absolute conviction that there would be nothing more joyful for him if he could work himself to death for Christ.

"Mr. Verwey, it is in your power to create such an opportunity for me," he persisted. "I do not want to be paid for anything I do! For far too long I earned money just to spend it on my own

selfish and sinful desires. Now, for the rest of my short life, I want to do something for God!”

I thought very deeply about his request, but still did not feel that I could go very far to help him in accomplishing his dream. I just could not force some one in the last stages of his life into the ranks of the Japan Mission, just to help him realize his wish. After all, there are guidelines to be followed. As I sent him off that day, I noticed that his head hung and his shoulders were bent over in disappointment.

My heart ached for him, and that night the Lord did not allow me to sleep until I came into the orbit of His will. He showed me that I had no right to say to a retiree “I cannot help you! Sit and suffer in your little room! Have your nose in the Bible day after day! Pray! But do nothing that could endanger your life!” The next day I phoned Mr. Sawa, and he was overjoyed when he heard that I had started to make plans whereby he could realize his dreams.

Mr. Sawa’s trade was in construction and his speciality was plastering walls, but he was a jack-of-all-trades. From then on, he kept every house belonging to the Japan Mission in shipshape condition. I also arranged for him to render the same type of service to other missionaries, but first I told them all about Mr. Sawa and especially about his physical limitations.

“He can come and paint my house if he’d like to, but I don’t want him to come and fall down dead in God’s service on my premises,” a missionary friend stipulated, having heard that more than once Mr. Sawa had fallen down from a ladder and hurt himself when he had a dizzy spell.

At another friend’s house, the owner later told me, that after Mr. Sawa fell from a ladder, he seemed to be more careful. When painting and feeling dizzy, he would carefully put down his brush, and slowly, one step at a time come down the ladder and lie down on the grass to rest for a while. My friends would then cover him up with a blanket and after a while, he would start again with gusto, painting as if nothing had happened!

During 1983, I was part of a team of volunteers helping to rebuild the facilities of a boarding school for missionary children. It was a two-story building, and the outside walls needed to be re-plastered. All the volunteers tried plastering, but their efforts

looked hopelessly amateurish, and knowing that a lot of people pass by on that road every day, we all felt that our efforts were not glorifying to God.

Mr. Sawa was a plasterer by trade, but I was concerned. Since he could get dizzy and fall from the ladder, I never allowed him to work on two-story buildings, but in my desperation God helped me and my friends to come up with a solution.

In the ranks of Japan Mission, we had a very strong fellow, Mr. Masuno, who I had also roped into this volunteer effort.

“When Mr. Sawa goes up the ladder to plaster, your duty is to go up the same ladder behind him, and if he gets one of his dizzy spells, it is your duty to bring him down safely! Do you think you can do that?” Mr. Masuno was more than willing to do so, and the work progressed according to plan until one day, we had a new shipment of materials coming in and I needed our muscle man, Mr. Masuno to help us unload the truck.

“Mr. Sawa, don’t go up that ladder by yourself. Just take a break for a while,” I urged him. “Mr. Masuno will soon be back to help you.” That was too much to expect from a craftsman! Knowing that the plasterwork high up the wall was drying fast and it still needed some finishing touches, Mr. Sawa took matters in his own hands.

He went up the ladder, dizziness overcame him and he came tumbling down. He had a gash over his forehead and judging by the pain in his chest area, I was sure he had broken some ribs, so I called an ambulance.

“Within ten days I’ll be back!” he called out with a loud voice, as the medical crew slid his stretcher into the ambulance. As I listened to the sirens disappearing in the distance, I just wondered if that was not the end of Mr. Sawa’s dreams. I did not realize how determined he was to be back within the time limit he had stipulated.

On the tenth day, I was not at the building site, but early that morning Mr. Sawa quietly slipped out of the hospital to report for duty. The staff would not allow him to go up the ladder again, but they did let him tile the bathroom floor and walls. That night, when he returned to hospital he collapsed in the corridor. The nurses wanted to know where he had been all day, but his lips were sealed.

I know of a dear missionary who would not slow down in serving others even when he was already in his 90s.

Rev. Herbert Nicholson, a Quaker missionary, taught me a lot about hospital evangelism and I welcomed every opportunity I could get to work with him. He was notorious in the USA for undauntingly sticking to the cause of persecuted Japanese in the concentration camps of America right through the war. This infuriated the FBI, and he had to walk a very thin line.

He became famous in Japan for shipping eight hundred goats to Japan for milk when they had none for their children to drink. His story was featured in one of the primary school readers, and he could walk into any school in Japan, tell the principal he was Yagi no Ojii-san (the Old "Goat Man") and get the whole school to assemble to listen to him.

He retired from active missionary work from Japan when he was 80, and went back to the USA, but that did not stop him from visiting the sick in hospitals near his home in Pasadena, California.

On one of my visits to the USA, when Peggy and I were near Pasadena, I agreed to help him one afternoon with a visiting program in a nursing home. He was then 90 years old and his wife was 93. I immediately asked how many patients there were in the facility. I wanted to know because I had discovered, when working with him in Japan, that our methods of hospital evangelism were vastly different. I would visit a hospital and in one afternoon contact perhaps three or four patients and have in-depth conversations with them.

With Herbert, it was a different kettle of fish. When he visited a hospital, everyone knew he was there, whether there were a hundred or a thousand patients. He always tried to go into every ward, for a greeting and a few words of encouragement. He had the gift of communicating with four or five patients at once and, at the same time, leaving literature on every bed in the room. So, I wanted to be prepared for what was to come, if at all possible, when working with such a fiery evangelist who spoke to every one. Fortunately for me, there were less than 50 patients in the nursing home there!

For him to get to the home was quite an ordeal. His wife, Madeline, had suffered a severe stroke that left her partly

paralyzed and unable to speak, and he had to take care of all her needs at home.

“She took care of me for many years, so now it is time for me to take care of her,” he always said. After he fed and helped her to bathe and dress, they would set out for their weekly visit to the nursing home. When they arrived there, he would bundle her in a wheelchair and let her be part of every visit.

The day when I was supposed to help them, I waited for them at the entrance. Pushing Madeline along the corridor in her wheelchair, he told me that he loved to visit that nursing home because the patients were 80 or older, and one woman was 105. I regarded it a real privilege to accompany Herbert and Madeline on one of their weekly rounds at the home, but I must admit I felt somewhat nervous, not knowing exactly what my task would be.

The personnel warmly welcomed the Nicholsons, Peggy and me. As I was talking to one of the nurses when we were about to enter the first room, she told me clearly that the patient there was in a vegetative state.

“Minister to her!” Rev. Nicholson requested me. Seeing me hesitate, because I had obviously not yet learned how to minister to someone who was quite passive and completely incapable of thinking, Herbert stepped in and very carefully put his big hands behind the immobile woman’s back and gently made her sit up. With his broad smiling face very close to hers, he told her how much Jesus loved her and that He was soon going to take her home to be with Him forever. Then he prayed with her and softly let her recline again on her large pillow. It did not bother Herbert that all her senses seemed to be gone!

On our way to the next patient he quoted to me: ***Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*** (2 Corinthians 4:16).

“She is a precious child of God,” he enlightened me. “I wish you could see inside her. For a short while, her inner being is behind an invisible veil of unawareness and you cannot see her spiritual beauty. Her body might be deteriorating, but not so the eternal life that is glowing within her.” I was still pondering the miracle of God’s renewing and strengthening of our inner vitality on a daily basis, no matter what is happening to our exterior,

when the nurses told us that we could enter the next room with its four bedridden patients. The one at the window saw us first and it seemed as if she had been waiting for us all day long. With one arm, she was beckoning us as she made incomprehensible guttural noises.

“Oh, I know what she wants,” Rev. Nicholson said. “She wants to have fellowship with Madeline!” This I wanted to see! Madeline had had a stroke that robbed her of her speech, and this woman was in a similar state! How were they going to have fellowship? Herbert maneuvered the wheelchair in between the beds and then placed Madeline’s hand in the good hand of the patient that was clamoring for Madeline – and they had sweet fellowship. Tears welled up in my eyes at the sight of it!

Like Rev. Nicholson, Harold also had a similar deep devotion to serving others, regardless of his age! He hailed from New York and worked with us as a volunteer, until he reached the age of 82.

He usually visited Japan for a few months every year and we would find him a cheap room to stay in one of the outlying districts where he fended for himself. He just phoned us every time he ran out of tracts so that we could get a new supply to him. For over twenty-five years, he was engaged in distributing tens of thousands of tracts in various parts of Japan.

On an especially warm summer day, while Harold was busy handing out tracts, he was suddenly confronted by a brightly smiling, middle-aged lady. She tried to speak to him, but having no command of English, and Harold not being able to speak Japanese, they could only communicate by signs and actions. She took him by the hand – which is very unconventional in a conservative country like Japan – led him to a bus stop, and dragged him on to the bus! Harold accompanied her because he felt that she had pure intentions.

At the bus stop nearest to her home, she lead him into her house, and inside the front door took off his shoes, made him comfortable on the biggest zabuton (a cushion for sitting on) and gave him something cool to drink. Then she placed before him her husband’s yukata, (an unlined cotton garment for wearing in the house) indicating to him to take of his dirty clothes and to put it on. In the meantime, she ran a bath for him.

While he was relaxing in the bath, she dumped his clothes in the washing machine and proceeded to prepare a meal. When he had finished his bath and again put on the borrowed yukata, she brought him to a dining table spread with the best she could provide.

After he had eaten a hearty meal, she brought him his clothes, dried and neatly folded. On top of them, she placed some new underwear that her husband had not yet used. While he was dressing in the room, she polished his shoes, which probably had not been polished since he arrived in Japan. She was also seemingly worried that he would not know at what bus stop to get off at on his way back, so she accompanied him again to the spot where she had found him in his unkempt state while distributing tracts in the hot sun. They deeply bowed to each other, both of them most grateful. Harold was most surprised at all the things that had happened to him that day.

Unknowingly, that Christian woman had met Jesus that day. She took Him home, gave Him something cool to drink, and prepared a meal for Him. She had washed His clothes and polished His shoes!

Has Jesus ever visited you? In what guise was He? What were His needs at that time? Was He the hungry beggar at your gate? Did you feed Him? Was He thirsty? Did you give Him something to drink? Was He the stranger to your city, sitting beside the hospital bed of a loved one, not having anywhere to spend the night? Did you take Him into your house? Did you clothe Him when He had nothing to wear? Did you care for Him when He was ill? Did you visit Him in jail? Then you fulfilled what Jesus expects from you in Matthew 25:37-40. ***Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*** (v. 40).

May God help us to recognize Him when He approaches us in some guise or other! We do not spread the Gospel by sermons alone, but by deeds of kindness, compassion and love! Being a Christian is a great responsibility. We need to reveal Christ in us so that others may come to know Him. What about our so-called enemies? Do they respect us for our Christian principles, or would they rather not know our God?

The Bible gives us a very clear order: ***Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*** (Luke 6:27). Jesus Christ did just that! ***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*** (Mark 10:45).

In the early 60s, I visited a town in South West Africa, now called Namibia. I cannot even remember the name of the town, but something happened there that I have carried with me ever since. It is still as clear in my mind as if it happened yesterday.

At the end of the service in a retirement home, while everybody was enjoying a cup of coffee and socializing, an elderly gentleman in his 80s came up to talk to me. He had a broad smile on his face, which indicated to me that he was a very happy individual. He asked me whether I would like to know what his daily morning prayer was.

“Sure!” I responded. “You have such a bright smile on your face that I would very much like to know what you pray every morning.” Then he told me the prayer that he prayed every morning as he was lying on his face in front of his bed.

“Lord, please don’t pass by an old man like me today, but give me a job, however small it might be, to do for You today.” When I praised him for such a fantastic beginning for every day, he smiled even broader and asked if I would like to know what his prayer in the evening was.

“I can’t wait,” I said. “I would love to know what makes you so radiantly happy.” With joy he shared with me this jewel of a prayer he prays every night that makes him even happier than his morning prayer does.

“Lord, thank you very much that You have not forgotten an old man like me. Again you have given me a teeny-weeny job which I could do for You!”

We should not ask what the Lord can do for us. We should rather ask what we can do for Him!

Every day the Lord hands out chores for those with willing hearts, no matter how incompetent they may feel. There is no such thing as “retiring” in the Kingdom of God. He never says to anybody, “You are too old!” or “You are too ill!” The Lord never regards anyone as superfluous! He gives work to everyone who is willing!

Old age is not the end for any of us, though people who found great satisfaction in their jobs may often feel this way. The time we once devoted to work can now be devoted to serving God and others.

So, let's make ourselves available and be alert to our Master's commands. ***Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God*** (Psalm 123:2).

## Rescued from Trash Heaps

For more than 30 years of his life, Mr. Yamaiwa picked up discarded nails. He did not care if they were crooked, rusted, broken, short or long, made of iron or steel – he did not pass one abandoned nail by! What is more, he was always on the lookout for ways in which he could use those nails.

“If thrown away nails are lying around on the road, people can step on them and get hurt, or cars can run over them and get flat tires,” said Mr. Yamaiwa. “Nails should never just lie around; every nail should be used for the purpose it was made for.”

“That shutter in front of your window is swinging in the wind,” he said to a neighbor. “Can I fix it for you?” Out of his pocket he would take a few nails, produce a hammer and very quickly, the shutter was fixed.

Many of the nails could not be used in any way, so he sold them to a foundry to be remolded. He believed that every nail should serve a useful purpose, and if they were not used, they could cause harm.

I am also a die-hard when it comes to picking up things. From the trash heaps of Japan, from time to time, I have picked up stereo equipment, furniture, about 50 refrigerators, bicycles, and many other items, and put them back into circulation among needy missionaries.

Is that not what God is doing with us? God picks up human beings out of the mire of sin, rescues the helpless who have been thrown out with the trash, makes them useful, and seats them among honored guests.

In a certain way every human being is like Mr. Yamaiwa’s nails: rusted, malformed and ready to afflict harm and definitely of no worth whatsoever – until Christ picks us up, transforms us and gives us a new purpose in life.

Psalm 113:7-8 describes God’s recovering power. ***He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash***

***heap, that He may seat him with princes — with the princes of His people.***

While jogging (which I did to maintain optimum health to do God's work to the best of my ability), I often bent down to pick up a coin. It became one of my hobbies. I learned how to adjust my jogging direction in such a way that the angle of the rays of the early morning sun shone on the coins, revealing them to me.

One morning, I picked up six coins. I was so proud of my discovery that I went home, polished them, took a picture, and then put them back into circulation to fulfill the purpose for which they were minted. Coins lying in the mud do not serve any useful purpose.

Lost human beings are just like coins that God picks up for His wealth and service.

It is easy to figure out why coins are useful and of value, but there are other things that at first glance do not seem to have any conspicuous value at all. A good second look is necessary before one can notice their worth.

One day, I visited one of the rarest gardens in Japan. I was surprised and rather disappointed that I could not see even one of Japan's vast variety of beautiful flowers in this famous garden. Instead, on the rocks, trees and ground (and even under water), innumerable moss plants grew. They were flowerless, without any seeds or roots, and I wondered if there could be any purpose for their existence! After coming home, still pondering the necessity for moss, I looked in an encyclopedia for an answer. I discovered that these unattractive green-brown plants provide homes for insects, hasten the breaking down of hard rock into soft ground so that other plants can grow there, and, best of all, also provide oxygen to the atmosphere.

Even as lowly moss is useful, so can we be as human beings. We may think that we are too lowly or of no importance to be useful. This is not true, but first we may have some important choices to make before we can truly become useful.

In the days before self-operating elevators, there was a woman who was an elevator operator in a large university in Japan. She could think of no more monotonous work than going up and down all day long. She was miserable and grumbled every time someone spoke to her.

One day, it occurred to her that she was encountering hundreds of students every day, who were burdened with a heavy load of academic responsibilities and sometimes had domestic problems that were just too great for their young minds to handle. She could influence them and help them have a brighter view of life, but to do so, she would first have to change herself! The next day, she started her process of renewal with a feeble smile. It was extremely difficult for her, but by sheer will power, day by day, she was determined to cheer up whoever rode in her elevator, and they smiled back at her. Some entered her elevator with a frown and left with a smile.

As the years went by, the lowly elevator operator became a confidante to many! Young people called her “The Solver of Problems!”

When she finally died, a few thousand people attended her funeral. She gained fame because she changed her attitude and desired the bright side to life for her and for those who crossed her path. What a pity she did not know Christ, for she could have been an excellent ambassador for Him. Her smile was very cheerful, to be sure, but it was not based upon, or the result of, her having eternal values.

As believers, we can learn a lot from this woman. Many people cross our path every day, and sometimes most unexpectedly! Let us influence their thinking about life. A kind word or deed from us could change their lives forever.

I am surprised to see how often God even uses umbrellas to give us an opening into the minds and hearts of the Japanese people.

In a country like Japan, where it rains a lot, everybody uses an umbrella. They are dirt-cheap and meet different needs. There are fold-up umbrellas for carrying in handbags, clear plastic umbrellas that are useful when riding a bicycle in the rain, strong umbrellas for when it is rainy and windy, classy umbrellas for when you are dressed up, and disposable umbrellas you can buy for next to nothing. You can also often pick up discarded umbrellas.

When it rains and you are exiting a bus, proper umbrella etiquette requires you to open your umbrella and hold it over the head of the person exiting behind you until he pops open his umbrella. It takes a little agility, but you soon get used to it.

Often when you pass a house in the rain without an umbrella, someone might well chase after you and hand you an umbrella, saying that they do not expect you to return it. Or, a car might suddenly pull up next to you, and the driver will hand you an umbrella and speed away without your even finding out who your benefactor was!

We, as God's witnesses, must also have our eyes peeled to see how we can use our umbrellas to bless people's hearts. Sometimes, standing in a long line of people waiting for a bus or taxi, we could share an umbrella and the Gospel.

"If only I had one of the waxed paper umbrellas that Grandpa makes to protect me from the rain, I would not feel so ashamed," murmured Masaki one day as he was trying to dodge the pelting rain from building to building on his way to school. God interrupted one of our worker's schedules to help him. He used his umbrella to cover Masaki from the rain, told him of the protection and shielding of God, and invited him to church. Eventually, Masaki found God, and now he loves to point out that it all started under an umbrella.

God can use an umbrella extended over the head of a captive audience, and even a little string in a handbag.

One Sunday evening, a man was walking home from the public bath. On his way, the thong of one of his geta (wooden sandals) broke. He had never walked barefoot before, and stepping on little pebbles was excruciating. He heard people singing in one of the nearby houses and made his way there. Someone enthusiastically invited him to join the group in the house-church. According to Japanese custom, he left his geta just inside the door and sat with his legs folded underneath him along with everybody else on the soft tatami (rice straw floor matting), listening to the minister deliver a sermon.

One of the believers at the door noticed his predicament. While the man was listening to the sermon, she looked in her handbag, found a short piece of string, and tied the thong back in place.

That night, the man could not sleep as he thought over the seemingly small happenings of the evening. He was deeply impressed — not with the sermon, but with the friendliness of

the person who had touched his filthy geta in order to fix the broken thong. In this hygiene-conscious country, shoes are regarded as so dirty that if you touch them, you must wash your hands. They especially loathe touching other people's shoes. Someone, probably in their Sunday best, mended this man's geta, which was more than he could fathom!

The next day, he visited the house again. He met the minister, who read to him about Jesus washing the dirty feet of His disciples and told him what Jesus said to Peter. ***If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me*** (John 13:8). This man started to attend church, and as time went by, trusted in Jesus to wash away the stains of sin from his heart. Later on, he became a minister of the Gospel!

God, who uses the broken thong of a geta, can also use the laces of a western shoe to fulfill his purposes.

Sam was working in a factory in Australia outside town. A friend offered him and others a lift into town, but Sam missed his ride because he was bending over to tie his shoelaces. As a result, he had to walk for miles in the hot sun. He was disgusted, but later on, when he heard that his friends had a tragic accident, he knew that God had His hand on his life. He dedicated his life afresh to God and came out to Japan Mission to help us in our missionary effort. Today, he is a devoted minister of the Gospel, and he often thinks of how God used his shoelaces to steer him in the direction he should go.

All of us might be able to look back on incidents that God used to steer us in the right direction.

As I mentioned previously, I used to look for coins as I jogged, but I do not do that anymore. Instead of keeping my eyes on the ground and the mud in front of my feet, I look up to the greater wealth of the heavens and marvel at God's creation. God keeps the sun, the moon and the stars in their orbit. No star can shoot out of its orbit, no sparrow can fall to the ground, and no hair can fall from my head without God's knowledge, and He is also in charge of my jogging schedule.

One day, my jogging path in a little country town in the USA took me into a bushy area and to a crossroad on a narrow footpath. Another jogger came from the side path and we almost collided! After hastily greeting each other, we decided to run

together. I discovered that this man was 82 years old and still jogging! When I asked about his church connection, he told me that he was Presbyterian. While we were panting for breath, I asked him if he was a hundred percent sure that God had forgiven all the sins he committed in his long life. He said he did not think anyone could have that kind of assurance while still on Earth.

Running at a steady, gentle pace, I continued chatting with him about his faith, and I discovered that he was confusing faith with feelings — an age-old human tendency and probably one of Satan’s best methods to sow doubt in the human heart. He did not “feel saved.” The elderly runner told me that one day he would feel his sins were forgiven, but the next day he would feel completely alienated from God.

I explained to him that his feelings might change like the weather, according to the food he eats or circumstances, and that he could never depend on anything as fickle as feelings. It was such a joy to assure him that when Jesus looks into our hearts, He is not looking at the condition of our feelings. He looks to see if we have faith in His finished work on the cross. My new friend was not only physically fit, but sharp enough to grasp how disastrous it was to rely on his feelings in regard to his salvation.

What a joy it was to hear him pray, “Lord, You have died for my sins on Calvary and in faith I believe now that you have forgiven all my wrongdoing of the past,” before we parted!

Once, on another jogging path in a country town, this time in South Africa, I came across a young man who had just finished high school. Briskly jogging together, I discovered that he was on his way to join the army and was very concerned about his future. As I wiped the sweat from my brow (I had to go at a fast pace to keep up with him!), I encouraged him to make sure that Jesus would be going with him in the new direction his life was taking him.

“I would like to have someone like Jesus to rely on,” he said. Gasping for breath, but determined to keep up with him, I shared with him about Jesus having said, ***Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*** (Revelation 3:20).

Still running, he prayed and invited Jesus into his heart and life. Before we parted, we were able to walk together to cool down. I suggested that he pray again and this time thank Jesus for coming into his heart and into his future.

I am glad to report that this was not just a spur-of-the-moment decision. For a number of years he wrote me and once he let me know that he was living by the truth of the words in Hebrews 12:1-2. ***Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.***

It is heart-warming to come across young people who want Jesus in their lives and in their future, but it is still more gratifying to come across retirees who trust God for every step they take, especially when the knees get shaky and they are afraid of height (Ecclesiastes 12:5). Rev. Kume is just one such person in this great throng of people.

“The responsibilities of the church are becoming too cumbersome for me, yet I do not want to retire,” Rev. Kume told his wife one day, when he reached the age of 70. For many years, he had been the minister of one of the largest Christian congregations in the city of Osaka. Mrs. Kume suggested that he should apply to Japan Mission for a position, and after much prayer, he applied for a post as a hospital evangelist.



Rev. Kume

“That won’t work out,” was my first reaction on receiving his application. “It will only cause trouble.” It was not only his age that put me off, but on top of that, he was a man so highly honoured in Japanese circles that hierarchal pressures would no doubt require me to immediately appoint him as leader of the Mission. In a country like Japan, his age would enable him to demand implicit obedience from everyone in the Japan Mission.

For such reasons, years before, I had agreed with our senior evangelist, Mr. Sato, that we would never have any worker older than ourselves in the Mission. Anyone who understands Japanese tradition will grasp our motivation for such a decision. Such a person could automatically expect to take the lead, and

if his methods turned out to be directly opposed to ours, chaos would result. At this point in time, Mr. Sato and I were both younger than 70. It was unthinkable that we would bring in a newcomer who would rob our senior evangelist of his authority. So, even though we had not even interviewed Rev. Kume, we were convinced, as a matter of principle, that he would be very unsuitable. I asked Mr. Sato to visit Rev. Kume and tactfully inform him that there was no place for him in the Japan Mission. A few days later, I asked Mr. Sato if he had done so.

"I visited him," Mr. Sato said, "but I'm leaving it up to you to tell him that we have no post available. I've made an appointment for you to do so. Rev. Kume will be at your office at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday next week." I could see that he was uncertain about our decision regarding Rev. Kume, and I tried to talk some sense into him.

"Did we not agree years ago that we would appoint no worker in our Mission who is senior to us?"

"Yes," he meekly agreed. "That is why I have arranged for you to tell him so."

The renowned Rev. Kume promptly took the wind out of my sails during the very first few minutes of our encounter. He took on a servant's position as he knelt in front of me in order to be lower than I was. Can you imagine, this prominent minister of the city of Osaka, a city of several million people, kneeling at the feet of an insignificant little man from the Kalahari Desert!

"I wish to join your Mission and be your servant," he humbly stated. "I seek no high position. I simply wish to dedicate the rest of my life to the winning of souls for Jesus Christ. I firmly believe that you can make this possible for me and that you can teach me the most effective way of leading tuberculosis patients to know Christ." His humble attitude brought tears to my eyes, and I understood then, why Mr. Sato could not refuse him. I never dreamt that so distinguished a person could have such a servant's heart.

"Do not treat me in any special way, and do not allot any authority to me. If you allow me to occupy the humblest post in the Japan Mission, I shall be very happy," he said, concluding his appeal to me. He then stated one of his most practical concerns if he were to work with the Japan Mission.

“There is only one thing about the rules of the Japan Mission that worries me,” Rev. Kume said. “I studied your policies and noticed a stipulation that every worker must take two weeks leave annually. In all my life, I have never taken a vacation and I wouldn’t know how to obey this rule and what to do with myself for two whole weeks.”

For him we had to change that very strict rule, but we never regretted taking him into the Japan Mission. For twelve years, Rev. Kume toiled side by side with our hospital evangelists for the souls of men and women in the hospitals of Japan, and so often, he was an inspiration to us all.

At the age of 82, his legs began to give out. Every day, he had to walk a great distance to reach the hospitals and there he had to walk down long corridors to the various wards to reach the patients. His legs simply refused to carry him any longer. Did he now think of retiring? No! Rather, he began praying that God would give him work to do which was less physically demanding.

In answer to his prayers, one of the neighbouring congregations asked him to become their minister. They arranged for a young minister to be responsible for tasks that involved physical exertion, and asked Rev. Kume only to preach and counsel needy members. He really did not slow down until the age of 89, and even after that, together with the minister he trained, he continued to handle the preaching schedule of the church.

At the age of 97, Rev. Kume – still preaching – caught a cold and his daughter noticed that he was not very firm on his feet. She insisted on taking him to see his Christian doctor friend, who suggested hospitalization, a thorough examination, and rest.

Peggy and I went to visit him, determined to be a blessing to this veteran, but when we came out of the hospital, Peggy said to me, “He was a blessing to us!” I could only look at her and say, “I fully agree!”

While in that hospital, he peacefully fell asleep, only to wake up in heaven. I spoke to the doctor afterwards to find out what the cause of his death was.

“I could find nothing physically wrong with him,” the doctor replied. “All I can say is that he died of old age!”

What a memorable funeral it was! Mrs. Kume, who many expected to be a “weeping widow,” took part in the funeral eulogy and we were amazed when she asked the vast number of people in the congregation, not to shed tears but rather to make it a time of celebration!

Mrs. Kume carried on the legacy of her husband by witnessing for the Lord on every possible occasion. In 2002, when she was 103 years old, her daughter Kyoko, who was about 70 years old, felt she could not properly look after her mother any longer and arranged for her to enter a senior citizens home. There Mrs. Kume promptly started to witness for God!

At age 106, she was not very active any longer, but the church people, who regularly visited her, told us that she was still a bright witness in the place where God had put her. Mrs. Kume went on to serve the Lord in a remarkable way until she died on July 4, 2007 at the age of 108!

I also salute Mrs. Shibazaki, who has already passed her centennial but is still as keen as ever for the Lord. As in the case of Rev. and Mrs. Kume, God also saved her and used her mightily as a testimony of His marvelous grace.

She was born in 1905, and at the age of 80, she still filled an important role in our film department. In order to get to work, she had to travel ninety minutes daily in several overcrowded trains where there was scarcely any standing space, not to mention a seat. She travelled to work during the rush hour, when “back-pushers” were on duty. These strong, athletic men wear snow-white gloves and their job is to pack the trains as full as possible by forcefully pushing people in!

At her age, her eyesight, hearing and health seemed to be as good as that of our younger workers and she had a wonderful memory. When we sought information on past events, she would be the one who could recall the facts.



*Mrs Shibazaki*

We suggested a number of times that she consider retiring and live a more relaxing life.

“Please do not discourage me while I am still in good health,” she would answer. “I should like to depart straight from this film department to heaven and retire there for ever.” She did not want to step down from work, but rather step up to heaven.

While she worked with us, she attended three services every Sunday. On Wednesday nights, she was a regular prayer meeting member, and on Saturday nights, she was at the weekly women’s gathering. Often she did not get home before 11:00 p.m.

She lived in a small, two-bedroom house that her husband had left for her. She took pity on her nephew and his family of five who had nowhere to go and invited them to live in one of her rooms for a while. Slowly, but surely, they took over her whole house. They maneuvered her out of her bedroom, and she ended up sleeping in the small porch area, meant for storing shoes and hanging overcoats. We were angry when we heard this and wanted to put a stop to it.

“Don’t do it,” she pled with us. “During my lifetime I want to win this family for Christ, no matter what the cost may be.” We could do nothing about the situation and went home, humbled by her sense of eternal values.

After a number of years, another place to live opened up for Mrs. Shibazaki, and she just gave her house and the contents to her astonished nephew. He knew he certainly did not deserve it, and he could not forget her selfless, godly life. Secretly, he started to attend church, wanting to find out what made Mrs. Shibazaki tick. It led him to become a devoted Christian, and later he was chosen as an elder in his church! Every time he visited Mrs. Shibazaki, he bowed in deep respect and apologized for treating her so badly, but she was overjoyed because he had found the Lord, and even the rest of his family looked at her in a different light.

To her nephew and his family, she was a real saint and nothing was too good for her. With tenderness, they helped her to move into a comfortable senior citizens’ facility, where she had her own room. There was even a church next door.

At the age of 102 (in 2007), she could look back over a rich and full life. She had found Christ as her own personal redeemer 87 years before, when she was still a teenager, and walked with God all those years. Now, more than anything else, she is looking forward to the matchless company of Jesus when she arrives at her celestial home.

***Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing*** (Psalm 92:13-14).

Grandma Morita also knew how to bear fruit to God's glory in her old age. She was illiterate, and became a Christian later in life, but she always had a Bible handy to open when witnessing for her God.

You might wonder how an illiterate person could witness for the Lord, but throughout this old woman's Bible, there were colored pencil markings. Her son, who was a minister, worked through her Bible, underlining verses speaking about sin with a black pencil, indicated verses on salvation in red, and verses teaching the love of God in green. Summing up the needs of people, she was then able to use the right texts for them.

"I am sorry, but I can't read," she would say to someone traveling with her on the train. "Could you kindly read this portion marked in red?" Having heard the verse from her traveling companion, it gave her an opportunity to tell them of the salvation that God had planned for human beings.

She went for daily walks in the park and always carried her Bible with her. On a bench, she might see someone who looked as if he or she needed to hear about the love of God. She would sit next to the person and open her Bible.

"I am sorry, but I can't read. Could you kindly read to me the verse marked in green?" she would politely request, and that opened the way for her to tell the person about the love of God.

We might think we are useless and handicapped, but I think it is a question of availability more than a question of ability.



*Mr & Mrs Mitsuhashi*

This was certainly true of Mr. Kazutoshi Mitsuhashi, who always had to be carried on his wife's back when he went out to minister.

Kazutoshi, who was born a helpless cripple, had just the use of his left hand to drag himself along on the ground. Looking at the boys happily playing in the streets, he cursed the harsh fate that had left him this way.

Every year, his mother had carried him to the Jumping Festival held in their town. There she had begged the spirits of the departed heroes of the brave to heal her son, so that he too could jump and dance to honor them, but every year she went away disappointed. "For what reason was I brought into this world?" Kazutoshi would often wonder bitterly.

One day, a friend, who had a cart on wheels that he pulled behind his bicycle, lifted him into this cart and towed him behind his bicycle to church. On that day, God transformed his life. He realized that the sermon was meant for him. His deformity was not due to his sins, nor those of his parents, but that God might be glorified. Jesus answered, ***"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."*** (John 9:3)

When it dawned on Kazutoshi that the living God was now dwelling in his useless body, he was determined to share His message of hope with as many people as possible. All he needed was someone to carry him around from place to place to do so.

One of the members of the church Kazutoshi attended was a student nurse, Yukiko. She often watched him drag his poor useless body into the church.

"Lord, give him a good wife whose legs can walk for him, and whose hands can minister to his needs," she silently prayed. As she prayed, deep down in her heart she heard a still small voice saying, "What about you?"

In spite of strong opposition, and no support from her family, on April 16, 1955, at the age of nineteen, Yukiko became Mrs. Mitsuhashi. On their honeymoon, they could only afford one slice of bread each for breakfast, a bowl of noodles for lunch and some rice gruel for supper, but they were as happy as could be!

God led them to prepare for the future by enabling them to go to a Bible College. While studying there, they lived in an unused garage. It was bitterly cold, but the joy of the Lord was their strength, as every day Yukiko carried Kazutoshi on her back to places where he could minister. The ring of reality in his testimony made him a special blessing to others. He could speak from vital experience to the needs of people.

“What does it matter if you have a weak body? What does it matter if you are poor?” Kazutoshi told all those who would listen. “These things are mere trifles in the light of the wonderful love of God. Don’t let your circumstances get you down. Lift up your heart to Him; He will meet your every need.” To Kazutoshi, God had revealed love in every circumstance he had ever encountered, and he had such strong faith that Yukiko said of him, “It is as if Kazutoshi has always been carrying me on his back.”

“No children could be born out of such a marriage,” people said, but God answered their prayers and gave them two wonderful sons, who are now both serving God as ministers of the Gospel!

In May 2004, Rev. Mitsuhashi went to be with the Lord, but his testimony for God continues in many ways and in many countries. Thirty years ago, the Japan Mission made a film called “A Race in the Snow” about the Mitsuhashi family. Some 20 films, 500 videos, and many DVDs continue to tell their story vividly to those who are seeking Christ.

The following year would have been the Mitsuhashi’s golden wedding anniversary, “but Kazutoshi will spend that with Jesus, which is far better,” said Yukiko during his funeral. She believed that, although Kazutoshi was gone, their hope glows in a heavenly light so bright that every shadow is dispersed. ***And your life would be brighter than noontday. Though you were dark, you would be like the morning. And you would be secure, because there is hope*** (Job 11:17).



Peggy Verwey

There are still so many dwelling in darkness, cast-offs that God wants to pick up and use for His glory.

Just before Peggy and I had to leave for an overseas tour, we got a telephone call. It came on the only day we had to get everything in order for our journey, so we were determined not to see anyone or make any appointments for that day.

As Peggy walked into our office to pick up the phone, I strongly reminded her that we could see no one that day! She came back into the sitting room where I was packing and strapping our luggage, and told me she just could not see how we could refuse the man who phoned.

“Mr. Yokokura and his wife are on their way to come and see us, and I told them that when they arrive at Ikoma station, you will go and fetch them by car.” To say the least, I was disgruntled and told her so. We were on our own, as none of the office staff were available that day, so we would have to deal with this couple ourselves. Humanly speaking, it was a very inconvenient visit. It was only after the Yokokuras had arrived that I saw God’s planning in it all and was glad that Peggy had invited them over.

Very early that cold January morning, while they were still lying in bed to keep warm, Mrs. Yokokura had said to her husband that she had thought of the best way to get out of the mess they were in.

“We can bring our problems to an honorable end by committing suicide together,” she declared. Mr. Yokokura half-heartedly agreed that it was probably the only way out for them. He had hit rock bottom. As a gangster, he had been involved in many shady deals, but at the age of 65, he just felt that he could not cope with that kind of life any more. When he had tried to get out of the gangster life, his former friends could not understand it, and he feared for his life.

Lying in bed next to his wife, Mr. Yokokura thought back over the course of his life and reflected on the fact that the happiest times he had experienced were when he had attended Sunday school as a child.

“I think that there might be another solution. It’s a long shot, but let’s try that first,” Mr. Yokokura remarked. He told his wife

how much he had enjoyed his Sunday school years. Then he crawled out of bed, looked through a telephone book for the name “Mission,” and came across “Japan Mission.” When he phoned, Peggy answered his call.

They told us later, on arriving in Ikoma, that they were besieged with doubts and walked back and forth, wondering what to do. “What kind of people are these missionaries?” they wondered. “If we tell them all about ourselves, will they not treat us with contempt? Will they really be able to help us?” After some thought and discussion, they decided to try us out.

After many bows and cups of green tea, they eventually felt at ease and slowly, but surely, began to tell us their story. How we rejoiced that morning, when both of them prayed and confessed their sins to God and promised that they would start their lives afresh by His grace. Fearing for their lives, they did not even return to their apartment, but set out for a faraway town to make a new start; this time not in their own strength, but in Christ’s. This “inconvenient visit” started the process of rescuing another couple from the trash heaps of Japan.

If we are not available to God, no matter what other kind of ability we may have, it will be of little use. Ability without availability is a liability, someone so well said!

Availability means to place ourselves totally, absolutely, completely at God’s disposal for Him to do anything and everything He wants to do in us, through us, with us, and for us whenever He chooses. We must always be willing to have God’s interruptions, intrusions, changes, adjustments and alterations in our plans.

But the Lord said to me: ***“Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,” says the Lord*** (Jeremiah 1:7,8).

Jeremiah thought he was too young! May the Lord help us not to make excuses by saying, “I am too old!” Do not fear! We serve a God that can renew our strength so that we can fly with eagle’s wings (Psalm 103:5).

May we have the strength to stick to God’s work over the long haul, making Him proud of us and the work we do for Him in His harvest fields.

***And the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are*** (1 Corinthians 1:28).

God can use even a discarded nail, a piece of string, or an old umbrella — or me in His service. Praise God, the great Recoverer!

## Focusing on One Thing

There is an expression used in the Bible numerous times that refers to something very important in the Christian life. That expression is “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 have desired of the Lord, that will I seek***, was the yearning desire of David, as he devotedly sought the presence of God (Psalm 27:4). ***One thing I know***, exclaimed the man who had received his sight by the power of Christ (John 9:25). ***One thing I do***, Paul wrote as he explained his philosophy of life (Philippians 3:13).

A vast number of Christians bob up and down in a sea of activity without realizing that the secret of progress is to concentrate on one thing. People do not succeed by doing everything. At best, they might be called “resourceful,” but to attain greatness it is necessary to specialize in one thing.

Runners are devoted entirely to their calling to do one thing and to succeed in it. They concentrate on the narrow course, and keep their eyes on the goal before them, letting nothing distract them. If they look back, they might lose several seconds.

Even dogs can be trained to do one thing in their existence and to do it well. Once I came across a dog at the train station leading a blind person. It had a big red notice strapped to its back – “I am on duty.” – and nothing could distract it. Other dogs are trained to specialize in other tasks, like Ted.

“Ted, open the door!” his handicapped owner will say. In response, Ted, a 1-year-old golden retriever, opens the door by pulling down with his teeth on a cloth hanging from the door handle.

Such support dogs help the physically handicapped in a variety of ways, such as helping their owners change clothes,

opening doors or refrigerators, switching lights on and off, and picking up things their owners have dropped.

The training of support dogs can be more difficult than teaching guide dogs for the blind or hearing dogs for the deaf, as considerations must be made for the fact that the owner's disabilities may worsen with time.

Most guide and support dogs are drawn from certain breeds, especially retrievers, but many hearing dogs are chosen from the ranks of strays. Hearing dogs are trained to distinguish certain types of sounds — both useful and dangerous. They are useful to their owners, not only in homes, but also in public places.

Mrs. Suzuki lost her hearing at the age of two due to inflammation of the middle ear. A mother of two sons, her life changed for the best when Nana, a hearing dog, came to live with them. Nana wakes her up when the alarm clock rings in the morning, tells her when the doorbell rings, and goes and fetches her when the washing machine stops. Nana serves her with tail-wagging gladness. Surely, we should serve our Master with more enthusiasm than Nana.

At a very large airport in the USA, I noticed a dog in action doing its thing with admirable devotion and abundance of joy.

"Look at that clever collie looking for drugs!" I said to my wife, Peggy, as we waited for our luggage to appear on the conveyer belt. This dog was wagging its tail and having a great time jumping from one piece of luggage to another.

"The noses of dogs are three hundred times more sensitive than those of human beings," I explained in a know-it-all fashion to Peggy. We could not take our eyes off this happy dog on customs duty.

When my luggage finally came out on the conveyor, to my utter amazement the collie went straight for one of my suitcases, singling it out from hundreds of others, and buried its nose in it. I dragged the piece of luggage off the moving belt, and as I wheeled it away, the collie tenaciously followed my bag

"Away with you," I shouted at the dog, but he followed my bag and gently placed his paw on it. By now, the custom's officials were fully alerted and one of them politely asked me to open my case. I had heard terrible stories of drugs being hidden in the

luggage of unsuspecting passengers, but I was sure that no dog would find contraband in my luggage.

Cocksure of myself, I opened my suitcase, but I had completely forgotten the two oranges thrown in with my clothes. When going through the agriculture barrier, I had signed a statement swearing that I was not carrying any fruit, but the “orange searching dog” found me out! I was very embarrassed, but fortunately, they did not penalize me. Strangely enough, in the midst of that predicament, I recalled with a touch of humor ***be sure your sin will find you out*** (Numbers 32:23).

On our return journey to Japan from the USA, at the same airport, while sitting in the waiting room with hundreds of other passengers waiting to board their planes, a friendly stranger approached us with a strange request.

“Could you kindly keep this black bag in your luggage?” he requested. Thinking of the many horror stories of drug smuggling, and my recent disgrace with the oranges in my bags, at first I was very hesitant.

“Cindy and her dog trainer are making their rounds this morning searching for drugs, and we want to make sure that she will find the bag of drugs we planted with you. Cindy is very disappointed if she cannot find drugs in someone’s luggage!” When the man thoroughly proved to us that he was a customs official, we co-operated, and tucked the black bag away under Peggy’s carry-on luggage.

Very soon Cindy, a beautiful golden retriever, came bouncing in on a leash with her trainer. She was very friendly, but hardly had time to greet the passengers as her trainer guided her from one piece of luggage to another. I knew that dogs possess excellent detection capabilities and are ideal for finding dope hidden in luggage, but it only took Cindy a fraction of a second to pass each piece of luggage. I wondered if she would ever be able to find any contraband at that speed. Besides, she seemed to be more interested in greeting the passengers. With growing excitement we watched her antics.

When she reached Peggy’s luggage, she suddenly stopped, singled out the planted bag in Peggy’s carry-on bag, sat down and rested her nose on the bag. Her trainer patted her and said. “Good girl! Good girl!” The other passengers first of all eyed us

with suspicion, but when they realized what had happened, they applauded Peggy and Cindy.

One of the highest paid men in Japan, although not in the same league as Cindy, earns his money, because his sense of smell is the one of the best among humans.

Mr. Nakamura is an olfactory professional in Japan who can distinguish some 3,000 different scents. He was the first person in the world to pinpoint the real source of body odor.

He had been noticing a distinctive odor coming from elderly people. He said that the smell that closely approximates this odor is that of old books. He traced the phenomenon to palmitoleic acid. The volume of palmitoleic acid released by the human body is ten times greater among people in their 70s than those in their 40s.

As soon as newspapers and other media announced Mr. Nakamura's theories and the new anti-odor products that he had produced, elderly people flooded the company with inquiries.

This research made me think twice, seeing that I myself am 81 years old and I meet hundreds of people in my meetings, seminars and other appointments and do not want to smell like old books! So can you guess what I do? I do not go for professional help, but when I have to mix with people, I borrow a bit of Peggy's fragrant scent!

Actually, in Japan, very few men and women wear any kind of deodorants. The reason why the Japanese fragrance market is relatively small is due to the racial characteristic of Japanese people. Most Japanese people hardly have any body odor. Therefore, most Japanese reckon they do not need deodorant. Perfume sales in Japan are extremely low, but Mr. Kato, a Japanese perfume marketer at Bluebell Japan Ltd., wants to change all that. He helps his customers, who range from teenagers to people in their 70s, to select three perfumes — one for wearing during the day, one for the evening, and also a night fragrance.

"It is my job to select a scent that matches the customer," says Mr. Kato, "It is also my duty to teach customers how to wear and preserve perfume and how to observe proper manners when wearing it."

All these smell-related stories inevitably make the believer think of 2 Corinthians 2:14-15. **Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ.** It is our duty every day, as followers of Christ, to dispense His fragrance. If people work in a rose garden or a perfume factory, they cannot help but diffuse the fragrance of roses or perfume. So it is with the Christian who is saturated with Christ.

A post office worker reached retirement age and was clearing out her desk to leave for good, when the postmaster came in to question her.

“Before you go, I would like to know why you bowed your head each morning before you started working, each evening before you went home, and each time before you ate your lunch?”

“I belong to Christ, who is God,” she said. “Each morning before I start working, I pray that God will help me to do my work the best I can. Before I eat, I thank the Lord for the food He gave me. In the evening, I close my eyes and ask God to take me home safely and accompany me through the night.” This humble worker did not know that for years the postmaster had been watching her.

“I want to know more about this Christ,” the postmaster said. She arranged for him to attend a home meeting, and he became a seeker after eternal truth. The employee at the post office spread the exquisite aroma of Christ at her place of work.

Everyone of us influences people one way or another. Researchers say that the most introverted individual will influence ten thousand people during his or her lifetime. All people are both influencing and being influenced by others. **As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another** (Proverbs 27:17 [NIV]). The issue, therefore, is not whether or not we influence someone, but what kind of influencers we are. What do others see as the driving force in us? What is the one thing that we pursue with all our might?

If it is just our own personal good looks and well-being while living on earth that is important to us, we are most pitiful.

Dr. Takasu not performs cosmetic surgery, but also gets it done on himself. He regards his body as a vehicle in which to

carry his mind around. Therefore, what he has had done to his face a few years ago was, as he puts it, was “just like fixing an old jalopy.” He gave instructions from the operating table while a senior colleague performed face, forehead, eyelid and hair transplant surgery on him at his Nagoya clinic — one of nine such clinics that he operates throughout Japan.

Later that year, he had cheek fat removed by a French doctor and an “aggressive” chemical peel of facial skin done by an Israeli surgeon. To top it all off, he had a cutting-edge jowl-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, Dr. Takasu’s complexion is as smooth as the proverbial baby’s bottom, with no trace of drooping or sagging visible.



Not that he has stopped there. Dr. Takasu regularly has fearsome-sounding chemicals, such as botulinum toxin (Botox) and hyaluronic acid injected into his face to remove wrinkles. He also has the latest laser-resurfacing techniques for maintaining skin condition tested out on himself, before his staff use them on patients.

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

I can only say to Dr. Takasu, ***Do not let your adornment be merely outward ... rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God*** (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Dr. Takasu is unwittingly a symbol of people who just plan as far as the grave and do not care or want to think about anything that happens afterwards. Ironically, he is only concerned about the “vehicle” and not the precious cargo – his soul – that it is carrying.

“Let’s think clearly about old age and work on a three-fold plan,” Mr. Wada writes in a popular magazine for the elderly

in Japan. “In the first place, you need a livelihood plan to take care of your daily needs until the end. Second, you need to be socially flexible to live in harmony with people, and, third, you need to prepare for your own burial so that you do not burden your loved ones with high funeral costs.” Mr. Wada does not mention one thing about preparing for life after death.

In general, the Japanese reckon that nature shows us how to live, and the cherry blossom is one of our best teachers. Different than in other parts of the world, cherry trees are selected, not to bear fruit, but to enchant people with the abundance of their blossoms. Their single mission in life is to be beautiful. They transform the land into a fairyland of loveliness. The flowers bloom almost all at once, and the petals drop to the ground at the height of their beauty. They are glorified like no other flower in the world and have inspired thousands of poems. A famous proverb states, “Life is as short as the three-day viewing span of the cherry blossoms.”

Sophisticated Japanese do not like to think about what happens after death, but in the household of God, it is so beautiful to watch how Christians live and triumph over death. Mr. and Mrs. Karasawa, our fellow workers for many years, departed for heaven before us, and they taught us a lot about how to live and how to die.

“Gomen kudasai,” (“I’m an honorable nuisance.”) Mr. Karasawa called out inside the front door of my house many years ago when I met him for the first time. I was astonished to find a fairly young man standing there with all his luggage at his feet.

“I’ve come,” he announced.

“Come for what?” I asked somewhat puzzled.

“I’ve come to work with you as a hospital evangelist!”

“But I can’t just take you on like that!” I exclaimed. “I don’t know you.”

“I’ll wait until you know me,” he said, and proceeded to wait right there on the doorstep. I could see that he did not intend to give up that easily!



*Mr Karasawa*

“I’ll arrange for you to stay at the Mission and I’ll give you my answer in three days,” I promised. At least that would give Peggy and me time to pray about the matter.

Although I had never heard of Mr. Karasawa until he appeared at our front door, he seemed to know quite a bit about me. I was determined to find out about him. It emerged that he had become a Christian in 1948 and had graduated from a Bible College in the city of Kobe. In 1953, he had contracted tuberculosis and had an extensive operation. He was so ill that blood transfusions were required from fifteen people, including the surgeon and the nurses, to keep him alive.

“Lord,” I cried, “Could this man be an answer to our prayers? Did You really send him to us? If he is truly sent by You, please open up another hospital for us to work in within three days. If You do this, I’ll take it as a sign that You have sent him.”

Before the three days were up, a request came from Toneyama Hospital, which had over a thousand tuberculosis patients, for us to send them an evangelist. Mr. Karasawa was obviously God’s provision ahead of time to meet this need!

God used him mightily in the wide-ranging ministries of the Japan Mission and many found Jesus Christ as their Savior through him. Mr. Shozo Yamamoto was one of them.

Out of utter boredom, Shozo, who had lost his job, listened to the radio regularly. One day, the “Voice of Joy” broadcast made him sit up and listen intently. The preacher was Mr. Karasawa! Shozo was a subscriber to the monthly pamphlet, Fountain of Joy, of which Mr. Karasawa was a contributor. One day, he went to a special Christian service, and to his amazement, he recognized the voice of the preacher as being the same one he had been listening to on the radio! Mr. Karasawa helped him to become a Christian. He went to Bible College and is now an overseas missionary working among the Japanese who emigrated to the United States.

Mr. Takahashi had been an earnest, practicing Buddhist for twenty-three years. Mr. Karasawa gave him a Bible, which he read through in a few weeks time, but somehow he did not like its message.

“As a Buddhist, I cannot accept the idea of Christ shedding His blood for human beings,” he informed Mr. Karasawa.

***“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day,”*** Mr. Karasawa replied, quoting to him the words of Jesus from John, chapter 6. Mr. Takahashi rudely interrupted him, saying he wanted to hear no more. Only when he became gravely ill and had a blood transfusion did the message of the shed Blood of Christ become real to him.

The Lord not only used Mr. Karasawa but also his mother and his wife. As a young girl, Tatsuko met Mr. Karasawa’s mother. During the Second World War, Mrs. Karasawa was in prison for her faith because she did not want to worship the Emperor of Japan. She was on parole from prison when Tatsuko first came into contact with her and found the Lord through her witness. Mrs. Karasawa encouraged Tatsuko to read the Scriptures and to go to church. There she met Yutaka, Mrs. Karasawa’s son. A friendship developed between them and they got married.

Through her husband’s persistent “sit down strike” at the entrance of my home, Tatsuko and her husband joined the Japan Mission. For more than forty years, Yutaka and Tatsuko have been members of the Japan Mission and the Lord has greatly blessed their united ministry.

Tatsuko knew that God always had His hand on her. One very cold evening, in the midst of winter, a phone call from Miss Yoshida, one of our office workers, had awakened Mrs. Karasawa. That phone call probably saved her life and that of her children. They had fallen into a deep sleep due to the fumes omitted from their unventilated charcoal heater. At first, it sounded to Mrs. Karasawa like the phone was ringing in the house next door, but as it kept on ringing it stirred her out of a deep sleep and she sprang into action. Without even answering the phone, she opened all the windows so that cold fresh air could flow into the house, woke up the children and rushed them to the hospital. If not for that persistent phone call from Miss Yoshida, they might have died that night of carbon monoxide poisoning!

Years later, at one of our prayer meetings, Mr. Karasawa, whose wife had been in poor health for some time, announced to us that her sickness was terminal.

“There is a time to trust God for healing, but there is also a time to know that God is not going to heal,” Mr. Karasawa said. “We are looking forward to the one thing that is better than healing.”

When we tried to console him, he consoled us by reading, ***For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands*** (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).

Both of them had real peace about the plan of God for their lives. They did not wish to burden their son, Minoru, a lecturer at a university in Kobe, nor their daughter, Sachie, who was a professor at a university in the USA. Mr. Karasawa chose to take care of his wife all by himself. He asked their friends to pray for them, but not to visit them. Their time together was running out and every moment was precious.

God walked with them every step of the way, and I believe that God sometimes had to pick them up and carry them. Two weeks before Tatsuko went Home, she told Yutaka that her time to go was at hand. In the privacy of their own home, with no one to disturb them, they said their final good-byes to each other. Then, Mr. Karasawa left to arrange for her to go into a hospice. He went with her and spent many hours sitting at her bedside.

Together with her husband, Peggy and I went to the hospice to visit her and to pray our final prayers together. On October 11, 1998, she quietly went to be with the Lord.



*Mr Mimura with Neil Verwey*

Mr. Karasawa was weak and sad, but continued to work for God. A few years later, one of his last messages at the Japan Mission workers' meeting was, ***the night is coming, when no one can work*** (John 9:4). Not very long after he gave that message to us, on December 28, 2003, our beloved fellow worker, Yutaka Karasawa, fell asleep and woke up in the presence of God. How true it is that there is little time before the night falls and we can work no more. Like Mr. Karasawa, let us each redeem the time.

If we have put our life in order, there is no reason to fear death. We also saw this in the life and death of Mr. Mimura.

It was on a sunny morning in 1958 when I heard the jingling of the small bell that I attached to the top of our sliding front door. At that time in Japan, any one could enter one's home at any time after first sliding open the door, stepping inside and saying, "I am an honorable nuisance!" To give us a few seconds warning of unexpected guests entering our home, we always listened for the tinkling of our warning doorbell. On that occasion, rushing to the entrance, I found a rather unkempt complete stranger standing in our entranceway, and even before introducing himself properly, he asked whether he could borrow my bicycle for a few hours.

"Certainly! You may use my bicycle," I responded. I thought that by allowing him to do so, God might bring home a message to him that I could not convey by words, but I did not in the least surmise how dramatically God would do this.

Mr. Mimura did not know that I had the worst two wheels in a frame you could imagine! My policy was that I should not have a new bicycle while the other evangelists went around on old ones. During the first sixteen years of our ministry in Japan, we could not afford any cars, and getting around on bicycles was essential to our ministry.

When I showed him my rusty bike, he looked disappointed as he studied the bent pedals and the weather-beaten saddle, but he wheeled it away, mumbling his thanks. He did not come back to see me for twenty years!

During the next few weeks, I had to use somebody else's bicycle. On the street one day, I came across Mr. Mimura and I was not very friendly with him.

"Where is my bicycle?" I demanded.

"I am sorry," he apologized. "I needed money, so I sold it to a pawnbroker." I was upset and gave him a piece of my mind, but when his head hung in shame, I felt guilty before God because of my attitude.

"Lord, what do you wish to achieve in the life of this young man?" I prayed silently in my heart.

"Give him the money you have on you," the indwelling Lord seemed to say to me. I dug my wallet out of my back pocket, and gave him all I had, which was not very much!

A few days later Mr. Sato, my fellow worker told me that Mr. Mimura had been on his way that day to commit suicide because he had no money to buy food for his family. I shuddered to think what would have happened if I had not been sensitive to God's dealings with me!

After that, I lost contact with Mr. Mimura. In a very strange way, twenty years later our paths crossed again. One of the Japan Mission's hospital evangelists told me that one of the patients in a tuberculosis hospital was enquiring about me.

"This man said he once robbed you, and he cannot find peace until he had made restitution," the evangelist informed me. I could not figure out whom he was talking about. As far as I knew, no one had ever stolen anything from me in Japan, with its honest people, but if this man wanted to get his life right with God, I was eager to meet him.

When the evangelist brought him along to see me, I did not recognize Mr. Mimura, but he did not waste any time. He immediately fell on his knees before me, bent as low as he could and begged me to forgive the great sin he had committed against me.

"The Lord has forgiven me, and now I ask your forgiveness too," he begged.

"My dear fellow, you have done me no wrong. There is nothing for me to forgive." For the life of me, I still could not figure out who he was.

"Mr. Verwey, have you forgotten the bicycle I stole from you?" he reminded me. Only when he related how he had made a fool of me by pretending to borrow my bicycle did the truth dawn upon me.

Mr. Mimura not only begged forgiveness, but according to Japanese custom, he also brought me an expensive gift to convey his sincerity, which I received not wanting to offend him. After that, he became a close friend, and repaid a thousand-fold for the rusty bicycle and a few cents I had given him years ago.

I believe friendships in Japan are less superficial and more genuine than in Western countries. It is a relationship that usually lasts for a lifetime and is not influenced by circumstances.

Although Mr. Mimura was not very strong physically, I could rely on him night and day. Should I suddenly want something done

in a hurry, I could call on Mr. Mimura. He would drop everything he was doing in order to help me. He would never mention other plans he might have had for that day, speak of business duties calling him, or even refer to physical weakness. He attended to my slightest wish without considering his own interests. Because of the depth of friendships in Japan, I had to be very careful not to express unnecessary needs.

When Mr. Mimura moved away to a faraway place, I did not feel free to call on him anymore for emergencies and my next contact with him, except by mail was some sixteen years later at the beginning of 1996. He was dying of cancer, and I arranged for him to go into a nearby Christian hospice. It was most gratifying to be able to visit him there and to sense his victory in the face of death.

“My wife and I have Psalm 23 to carry us through this ordeal,” he declared with the glow of heaven on his face. He quoted verse 4 to me. ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*** I sensed that his wife, although sharing in his joy, was very broken inside.

“How can I weep when my husband is so victorious?” she courageously voiced. “I am not even going to weep at his funeral.”

“Do not hold back the tears if you want to weep,” I encouraged her. “It is part of God’s healing process. There are also tears of victory!”

On September 22, 1996, Mr. Mimura – once a bicycle grabber, now a mercy grabber – calmly slipped out of this world and into eternity.

The one thing the Karasawas and the Mimuras displayed in their lives was practical love. ***Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*** (1 John 3:18).

Love through sincere deeds can change people, as in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Tsukamoto.

“Dear God, please help me to show more love toward my husband,” Mrs. Tsukamoto prayed one day, walking back from the Wednesday night prayer meeting. When she arrived home, her husband had already gone to bed and was drowsily scratching his feet. He was afflicted for many years with athlete’s foot.

“You are not hygienic enough,” she sometimes scolded him. “You need to wash and dry properly between your toes!” Mrs. Tsukamoto had always detested her husband’s condition, but that night she was suddenly overwhelmed by a deep compassion for him. She gently laid both her hands on his feet and prayed silently for their healing.

The following morning, Mr. Tsukamoto noticed that his feet were not itching and were completely clear of fungus! To him, the greater miracle, though, was not that his toes felt comfortable for the first time in a very long time, but that his wife had laid her hands upon his feet!

On returning home from work that night, he asked her to go with him to see the pastor of her church. He was so anxious to go and speak to the minister that he would not even eat the meal she prepared, which overjoyed his wife. For quite a number of years, she had prayed for him to come to know God.

The pastor sensed the workings of God in this man’s heart and took time to explain to him the ways of God in the hearts of men. From that day on, Mr. Tsukamoto became a genuine seeker after truth and lover of God, and he attended all the meetings at church with his wife.

It is astounding what one small act of love can accomplish – even touching the feet of those afflicted with athlete’s foot!

Some 60 years ago, when I was still in South Africa and a young Christian, I saw love in action in the life of Mr. H. T. de Villiers, a former school principal. Someone who knew him very well, told me about an incident in H.T.’s life that made such a deep impression on me, and I have carried it with me all my life. I hope that I can still accurately relate the facts.

Many years ago, Mr. de Villiers was one of the elders of a church in a very small town in the Western Cape. One day, at a church council meeting, one of his fellow elders falsely accused him of something he had not done. He kept quiet, not defending himself, realizing that if he had proved himself right, it would put the other elder in a bad light.

When he returned home that night, his wife was sleeping, but he woke her up. He told her about the elder who attacked him at the meeting, and asked her to pray with him.

“I am going to resign as an elder because I cannot expect that the Church Council can trust me anymore after this incident, but in spite of my feelings, let’s pray that God will give us an opportunity to show kindness and love to my accuser,” he asked. They prayed that prayer for many days.

One day, the elder in question suddenly lost his job, and in those days, there was no such thing as social security. Mr. de Villiers, knowing what hardship could come to this man and his family, went to the local grocer with a plan to help them.

“I have a delivery that I want you to make every Saturday, but the bill must be sent to me. The only condition is that I do not want anyone to know who the donor is.” The grocer agreed, and knowing what the elder’s family usually ordered from him, every week he sent a box of groceries with an itemized bill. On the bill, he wrote, “Donated by an anonymous donor.”

Without this weekly aid, the family would have been in a crisis, not having any money to buy food for themselves and for their growing children. Nevertheless, as if nothing worse could happen, the daughter of this elder fell sick. Mr. de Villiers, being the principal of the school she was attending, knew all about it. The doctor recommended that their child have a complete break from the stressful situation at home to restore her to health. Mr. de Villiers asked his wife to step in and speak to the girl’s mother.

“In a few days, we are leaving for our summer vacation to our cottage at the sea-side. Why not let your daughter come with our children? It will do her a world of good.” The child’s mother thought it was a good idea and mentioned it to her husband. He did not want to accept any kindness from the de Villiers family, however. All day long, though, he pondered the need for his little girl to get away for a while, and his lack of funds to take her and his family away somewhere caused him to reluctantly accept the de Villiers’ offer.

While the de Villiers were away enjoying the beach with their children and the elder’s daughter, it happened that the elder somehow found out who had been generously donating the groceries all the months he had been without work!

When they arrived back from the seaside resort, Mr. de Villiers was asked to appear at the council meeting of the church. In front of all the council members, that elder, who had previously

accused Mr. de Villiers so callously, confessed how cruel he had been to judge a man like Mr. de Villiers by hearsay, without first making sure of the facts. He asked for forgiveness and was quite willing to resign as an elder and have a more worthy person, such as Mr. de Villiers take his place.

If we love each other as if our lives depend on it, love will change people around us. ***Have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins”*** (1 Peter 4:8).

Did you know that there are people that only you, and no one else, can reach for the Lord? Dr. J.D. Bachelor, a missionary in Japan, tells us of a very frail pupil who attended his services regularly and requested to be baptized. After attending some preparatory classes for baptism, she was baptized. She then asked Dr. Bachelor to do one more thing for her. She wanted him to visit her home because her grandmother also wanted to be baptized! Dr. Bachelor had never met her grandmother and said he needed to make sure that she knew what it meant to become a Christian and be baptized.

“Yes, she knows what it means,” the girl answered him. “Every Sunday after I heard your instructions, I went home and told Grandma!” Arriving at her home, the renowned theologian found that he could not communicate with the old woman, as she was stone deaf. Her granddaughter was the only one that could speak in such a way that her grandmother could understand her, and she purposed in her heart to win her for Christ.

This frail girl – like the Mimuras, the Karasawas, Tsukamotos, de Villiers, Paul of the Bible, and so many other believers before and after him – focused on one important thing — to make Philippians 3:14 a reality in her life. ***I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

Did our Redeemer not set an example for us to follow? He knew that He would pay with His life in Jerusalem, but He did not hide out with friends or loved ones. ***As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, He resolutely set out for Jerusalem*** (Luke 9:51 [NIV]).

In the upper room in Jerusalem, when He ate the last supper with His disciples in the face of death, He testified boldly to His Father, ***I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work [the one thing] which You have given Me to do*** (John 17:4).

To Pilate, He said the next day, after unnamable suffering for one thing, as it is written in John 18:37, ***For this cause [for this one thing] I was born, and for this cause [for this one thing] I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.***

On the cross, He said, ***It [the “one thing”] is finished!*** (John 19:37)

Let us trust Christ to help us to do the one thing that the risen Savior expects from us: ***Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations*** (Matthew 28:19). With this commandment, Christ also promised to equip us for the task ahead of us. Lo, ***I am with you always, even to the end of the age*** (Matthew 28:20).

## Better than Mud Balls!

Some people will not quit until they have realized their dreams. From an outsider's point of view, their endeavors might not appear to be worthwhile, but we cannot but admire them for their determination and perseverance.

Professor Fumio Kayo teaches psychology at the Kyoto University of Education, and he spends much of his time making balls out of dirt and water. These he forms into perfectly round mud balls. As can be expected, some people think he is crazy!

It all began when he encountered a 5-year-old boy crying because the mud ball he was making was falling apart. Professor Kayo immediately made him a new one.

Since then, he has devoted himself to perfecting techniques to make and polish mud balls. He discovered he could polish them to a shine by repeatedly rubbing of his thumb over the surface.

On Sundays, about fifty children and their parents spend time with professor Kayo, learning his techniques of making little balls from dirt and water. Strangely enough, some parents, particularly fathers, seem to have even more fun than their children do in playing with the clay.

Professor Kayo is a committed mud ball 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," he said. Even after that, he had to make as many as 200 such balls before he could determine that his method could not be improved on.

This distinguished professor is a leading authority on good mud balls, but Mr. Nobuo Murakami had a lifelong calling to make good rice balls.

As a young man, he had found work in a restaurant. His first job had been to clean the pots, so they called him “Mr. Potman.” He very much wanted to be a good cook and always looked forward for a chance to taste the sauce remaining in the pot so that he could steal the cooking techniques from his senior chefs! They did not take kindly to that and began adding soapy water to the pots to protect their recipes!

The 18-year-old Mr. Potman’s shoulders drooped in despair. He felt lonely and useless! He could not even make a proper omelet. Whenever he tried, he failed miserably.

“How can we serve stuff like this to a customer!” his senior cooks belittled him. “You are a growing menace to the reputation of our restaurant!” They ordered him to eat his worthless flops himself. One day, he had to gulp down 20 omelets in front of his sneering senior cooks!

Mr. Murakami was determined never to give up, and success eventually smiled on him. At one stage, he was even the head chef at the Imperial Hotel, which is one of the most prestigious hotels in Tokyo. He was also the head chef at the Olympic Village during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and prepared extravagant feasts for thousands of people.

After a long career as one of Japan’s top chefs, Mr. Murakami, retired and died in August 2005. In his sunset years, he reportedly took pleasure in cooking sumptuous meals for his pet dog “Koro.” Even until his last days, cooking was his passion.

In many an occupation, there are those who are passionately doing what they regard as their lifework, as long as they live. In this regard, I read the story of Mr. Yatani, a Japanese-style painter in the Daily Yomiuri of April 12, 2006.

Soon after World War II, at the age of 30, he was exhibiting his paintings, and at 50, his pieces became highly sought-after by art dealers. To them, he became an example of someone who quietly and unhurriedly trained himself to be a painter.

Once, one of his friends related, he put several persimmons harvested in November on the table to paint. He continued to paint them until March, yet none of the persimmons went rotten, as if they knew how serious he was about his work!

Yet, he did not attract much public attention until he was 80 years old. His first book of paintings was published when he was 84.

Now, at the age of 90, he walks with great difficulty after suffering a stroke three years ago, but he still paints every day. He has put a positive spin on his ailment, and his enthusiasm for painting remains undiminished. He is highly regarded as a role model for new graduates who have just started working, as well as middle-aged and older people.

The story of Nobu Shirase is completely different. During his childhood, under duress, he took five oaths that he was determined to keep until his dying day.

When he was only eleven years old, he had heard tales of polar explorations from his teacher. The young boy was deeply impressed and dreamed of being an explorer in the future. Repeatedly, he asked his teacher, "How can I become an explorer?" His relentless questioning drove his teacher to distraction. One day, he impatiently ordered the boy to stand to attention and to repeat five oaths that he had to solemnly swear to keep the rest of his life.

***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 by a fire.***

With these senseless oaths, the teacher had apparently no other purpose than to get the child off of his back. For the child, however, it was a very serious matter, and indirectly led to some remarkable achievements in the future. Forty years later, in 1912, an expedition headed by Mr. Shirase hoisted the flag of Japan for the first time on the Antarctic continent!

At a lecture in his native town commemorating the 25th anniversary of that expedition, 1st Lieutenant Shirase stated, "The five oaths were easy to say, but keeping those oaths has been the most difficult achievement of my life. I am now 76 years old, I still do not drink rice wine, tea or hot water, and I have never smoked. I also never use any heaters to warm myself, even in the depths of winter."

Mr. Shirase certainly has done for his country what he thought was good during his lifetime.

When this septuagenarian visits schools to give motivational talks, the children think he is a very funny old man, but nevertheless listen spellbound to his exploits.

Even so, Mrs. Kurokawa, a nanogenarian, has more listeners than Mr. Shirase does. As a 91-year-old granny, she is a star on the Internet television station Amakusa TV. The TV station claims to have the world's oldest TV reporters.

Her success as a reporter is due to her friendliness and the rich experience and knowledge she has of the topics about which she speaks. She made her debut in July 2004, with a program about starfish cuisine. She has also covered the subject of how to make octopus jerky.

Her programs have become unexpectedly popular with viewers living in other cities who enjoy her entertaining way of talking. She has even received countless e-mails from young people who say that her programs are funny and stimulating.

"I'm lucky to have such a golden opportunity," Mrs. Kurokawa said. "I try my best and wish everyone else the best, too."

Old age should be no excuse for the lack of usefulness! There is more danger of rusting out than wearing out.

Dr. Hishikawa (M.D., D.D.), a personal friend of mine, was determined not to rust out in his old age. He faced the deepest trials of his life in his evening years, but he still experienced the most wonderful joy in God's service.



*Dr Hishikawa*

On a beautiful spring morning, when Dr. Hishikawa was 72 and still involved in his medical practice, a breeze carried the scent of blossoms through his window. It woke him up, but to his dismay, he found that he could not see anything at all! He stumbled towards the window. He could hear the birds singing, but all around him it was pitch black.

He then realized that he might be blind forever. He already had nine operations on his eyes, but evidently, glaucoma had taken its deadly course, completely robbing him of his eyesight.

He had no other choice but to immediately retire as a doctor and as the pastor of a flourishing church.

He could easily have chosen to live a life of ease. He and his wife lived in a nice house in an ideal neighbourhood. They had six loving children, two of them physicians. He knew they would gladly take care of him, but rather than rust away in an armchair, Dr. Hishikawa chose to wear himself out in the service of the Lord.

He became an honorary member of the Japan Mission, and for sixteen years his messages on our “Voice of Joy” radio broadcasts touched the hearts of Japanese men and women all over the country. Totally blind, he relied on his remarkable memory to recall events from the past to illustrate his radio messages. His wife read the Bible portions that he needed for his talks.

While he was with us, he gave 2,250 radio messages, and during that time, 41,041 people wrote in, asking for spiritual help in some way or another. With the help of his capable wife, Dr. Hishikawa also wrote a book and sent 13,000 copies out to those seeking the truth.

The secret of his successful accomplishments right to the end of his life was his active prayer life. After breakfast, he felt his way out of the front door to a small lawn outside his house. There he combined exercise with prayer. He walked back and forth and communicated with the Lord. In good weather, he would also prepare his radio messages while walking up and down outside the house.

When he went to his heavenly home at the age of 90, I spoke at his funeral on the text **“He being dead still speaks”** (Hebrews 11:4). Dr. Hishikawa, even though he died some time ago, still speaks to us by the example of his life of faith. Especially in his later years, he saw in his disability an opportunity to accomplish great things for God.

Modern society very easily makes the elderly feel useless, but in the life of Joshua, we have a remarkable example of how God wants to use us into a ripe old age. **Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: “You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed”** (Joshua 13:1).

There are many in Japan, like Mr. Jiro Nakamura, who prefer to spend their remaining strength for the extension of God's Kingdom, rather than to rest on their laurels.

Jiro had evaded death many times as a soldier in the Japanese Imperial Army. A bullet once could well have gone through his heart, but it lodged in Jiro's cigarette case in his shirt pocket. He kept the damaged bullet as a memento, thinking how lucky he was to be alive. One of his friends told him that it was not luck, but that there was a God somewhere out there who was looking after him, and that he would never die in battle. From then on, every time when he escaped certain death, he felt sure that there was a God taking care of him.

It was not until after the war, when Jiro was back in Japan in a tuberculosis hospital, where the Japan Mission had a ministry, that he realized what his friend had said was true. At a worship meeting for patients, he heard the Bible read for the first time in his life. It struck him, like a bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky, that this God was indeed the God who had been with him all his life! Within two hours of first hearing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit completely transformed Jiro. He progressed spiritually with giant strides and became the leader of the Christian group in that hospital, praying with patients, comforting them and pointing them to Jesus.



*Jiro Nakamura*

Alas, when Jiro left the hospital and was back in business with his three unsaved brothers, his interest in the things of God waned. He seldom read his Bible, attendance at church became something of the past, and he drifted into drinking and its related evils.

God noticed Jiro's waywardness and shook him up in a very dramatic manner. On September 1, 1967, while he was fishing, a freak wave swept him off the rocks into the sea! He thought his end had come as he found himself sinking in the rough waves, and in desperation he called out to God.

“Lord, save me once more out of the jaws of death and I promise to serve you for the rest of my life!” Men passing by in a boat saw him and threw out a lifeline, but were afraid to draw it in for fear of smashing him against the side of their boat. Waves were sweeping high above the boat, and Jiro was in agony! He thought his back was broken, and in dire distress, he made some more panic-stricken vows to God. In His mercy, God stretched out His arm to save Jiro. A 60-second lull occurred in the waves, and the men were able to haul him to safety!

After treatment in the hospital for his injured back, he turned up at the doorstep of the Japan Mission headquarters seeking advice.

“I now fully realize that my life does not belong to me any more. It belongs to God! Please teach me how I can best serve Him in the days remaining to me here on earth! I am ready to start studying to become a minister.” Those were sweet words to my ears, but I had some concerns.

“Is your wife in agreement with your plans to become a minister?” I asked him.

“No, she is against my going to seminary, but I have made up my mind to go!” he replied. I explained to him that it was vital for him and his wife to agree on the matter, before he could launch out into full-time Christian work.

He was 45 years old when he first sought her agreement for his intended ministry. Every year after that, he brought the subject up again, and every time she voiced some excuse as to why he should not go to seminary yet!

Mr. Nakamura had become an elder in his local church, but he was not satisfied with that alone. On the day he turned 60, he again broached the matter of going to seminary with his wife. Once more, she was against it! Not long after that, she fell gravely ill, and on her deathbed told Jiro, with tears in her eyes, how sorry she was that she had held him back so long from becoming a minister.

When he was 62-years-old, he entered seminary, and for the next four years he struggled through some very difficult courses, including Hebrew and Greek. He graduated in October 1970, when he was 66-years-old. After two years as an interim pastor, he became the lone church-planting minister in Gojoh,

an area so difficult that up until then it had disheartened the best of ministers.

Reverend Nakamura acquired a house there that could also serve as a church. One day, he started at one end of the town, went from house to house, and distributed Gospel tracts. Exhausted, he returned late that evening to his church-home and rested. He soon dropped off to sleep, but was awakened when someone opened the door and hurled a packet into his house. Investigating, he had the shock of his life! A zealous Buddhist believer had collected all the tracts he had distributed and returned them to him, marked in big red letters, "We do not need you or your rubbish in our village!"

For a moment, he was taken aback and did not know what his next step should be. But, he continued courageously with his ministry, and in the next few years, he had the privilege of baptizing fifteen people who became members of his church!

After serving for fourteen years as a minister, at the age of 82, he resigned because of weakness in his knees and retired to live near his children. Even now, at the age of 88, God is giving him marvelous opportunities to preach and to witness for Him.



*Ferris Liske*

How true it is that many retirees refuse to keep quiet when there is an opportunity to witness for Christ.

For the last nineteen years, Rev. Ferris Liske, a retired clergyman from the USA, has been coming to Japan every year as a volunteer to help the Japan Mission for a few months.

Ferris especially likes to witness to Buddhist priests. On Ikoma mountain, where we live, the priests of one of the local temples claim that every one of the 345 Buddha statues in their temple grounds has god-spirits in them. They also believe the theory of evolution — that the universe and humans are the results of millions of years of evolutionary development and men's ancestors were apes and other animals. When Ferris talks to the priests, he always tells them what the Bible teaches.

“I noticed at the big Buddhist temple near the Japan Mission headquarters that this year there are more incense sticks burning and more flames inside the temple than usual. There is more rice wine being offered on the temple altars and there is more religiosity than I’ve seen before,” Ferris said to us on one of his visits from the USA. “I shared with many worshipping and working people at the temple that no smoke, incense, holy fires or religion can truly change one from the inside out — only Jesus can do that.”

He wrote to his friends at home:

*It is fun to work in Japan Mission and sometimes to play golf. Is there any friendlier place to approach those who need Jesus?*

*“Why don’t you visit some of the special golf driving ranges nearby, while you are in Japan?” David Verwey asked me one day. I consulted with his father, Neil Verwey, about this, but he thought it was a crazy idea!*

*Then, the next day, I took a load of junk to the dump for the Japan Mission and there on the scrapheap, to my amazement, I found a golf bag full of golf clubs. To me, that was guidance straight from God, and even Neil had to agree. So then, when I could fit it in between jobs, I went to driving ranges. I bought 50 balls at a time, and asked the Lord to help me, along with the balls, to also drive home the Gospel message.*

*A few days later, I noticed a man standing next to my pad, picking up a golf ball neatly between his right foot and the golf club and placing it very skillfully on the tee before hitting it. With a powerful stroke, he sent the ball some 200 meters far into the high net at the end of the driving range. I made friends with him by congratulating him on those long shots. Every time he hit the ball, he was getting better. I knew we were friends when he told me in perfect English that he was a doctor of urology and asked me how my urology was doing!*

*I told him that I was a minister and asked him what he was doing to get ready for heaven. Instead of answering my question, he said that he was a Buddhist, and I asked him what Buddha had done for him lately. He seemed to be a very intelligent man, but I could see that he had a hard time coming up with an answer to that question. When his cell phone rang, it saved him*

*out of his predicament, and he had to rush off to the hospital to help keep people alive.*

*I am sure that it is not the end of that urologist's story and not the beginning either. God may very well have been working in his heart for years, and will no doubt continue to grant him opportunities to learn more about Himself. When God is using me as a tiny little link in the chain to present Jesus to a man like that, I am thrilled beyond words. To tell people about Jesus every day has been my greatest joy since I retired as a minister some 15 years ago.*

Ferris inspires us to work for God everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances. As Isaiah of old said, we can also say, ***The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary*** (Isaiah 50:4).

There are many senior citizens worldwide who do everything they can in the little corner where the Lord has placed them.

When Peggy and I went on our first furlough in 1956 to South Africa, we decided to visit one of the biggest financial supporters of the Japan Mission. When we entered the little town where the donor lived, I told Peggy that the person that we are seeking must live in one of the larger houses, seeing as she gives such large gifts to the Japan Mission.

When we entered the town, we noticed that the poor people lived on the one side of the railway track and the rich on the other side. We stopped at the biggest house in the town and asked if they knew where our friend lived. At first, they did not recognize the name when we asked them, but then it finally dawned on them who we were speaking of. They directed us to go over the railway to the houses where we thought the poor people must surely live.

When we arrived at the house in question, we noticed that the little gate at the entrance to her garden was sitting at a strange angle and looked as though it needed repairs. I walked through the ill-kept garden to the front door. It was ajar and I looked in and saw a sparsely furnished room with a wooden floor. When I knocked, a very elderly woman welcomed Peggy and me most warmly.

During the few days we stayed there, the only food she could give us was milk and bread. We discovered later on, that her son brought her this food from the farm every time he came into town. When we later spoke with her son, he told us that his mother had been a missionary in Africa and she could not forget what it is to be a missionary. He said when she receives new furniture or other items from someone, she immediately sold them and sent the money to countries like Japan. Therefore, they just give her the bare necessities.

When we left the house, after staying a few days, she walked us down the garden path and apologized that she did not have meat or cake in her house with which to feed us properly and tearfully she handed us an envelope.

“I have never seen a Japanese person,” she said, “but I have such a burden for them and pray for them day and night.”

Later on, when we opened the envelope, it was our turn to have tears in our eyes when we saw how much she had given so that those in a faraway land could hear about Jesus!

On a different continent, in Peggy’s home country, England, we also visited another retiree. Since then she has died, but we remember her foot care ministry very well.

While Miss Eve Hemsley was still alive, Peggy and I considered it a great privilege to call on her. The moment missionaries entered Eve’s home, she would take off their shoes and, while gleaning as much information as possible about the work they were doing, polish their shoes to a gleaming finish.

“Ever since my retirement from office work, I can no longer work actively for the Lord, but I can care for the feet of God’s messengers,” Miss Hemsley explained. Her service to missionaries spread like wild fire and many would travel long distances to see her.

In reality, she did much more than shine shoes. Every missionary who crossed her doorstep got a permanent place on her prayer list, and wherever they went, they knew that she was praying for them. It is impossible to guess how far-reaching her prayers were. ***How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things*** (Romans 10:15).

I know of a moving case of someone who not only takes care of the feet, but also the hands, of a messenger of God who announces the Good News to people in his neighborhood. A traveling evangelist told me about it.

He was conducting special services in a small country town in Japan. The local minister requested him to join him in visiting the homes of his members.

“Allow me to introduce you to the leader of our visitation program,” the minister said. The evangelist was surprised when the minister introduced him to a woman who was more than 80 years old. Although she was hunchbacked, because of osteoporosis, she still carried the briefcase for the minister when they walked from house to house. At every home, she also opened the Bible for him exactly at the place where he wanted it and jotted down notes while the minister was talking.

Why? The minister’s right hand was lame.

The Lord has a task for every Christian, and He has chosen you to do something special for Him too. I believe the Lord is saying of you what He said of Saul just after he was saved: ***This man is my chosen instrument*** (Acts 9:15, [NIV]).

We can serve God by just opening a Bible for one of His followers, but we can also serve Him with a tray, as I discovered one night at one of my out-of-the-way meeting places. After I delivered my sermon, I was in a hurry to depart for home, as the road back by car was long and mountainous.

“No! You cannot leave so hastily,” somebody cautioned me. “In the congregation is a woman who has made it her calling to tend to the missionaries who pass through here.” I sat down at the only table in the dilapidated, little meeting room. Soon, a woman with silver-colored hair entered, carrying a tray. Without saying much, from a flask, she poured me a cup of hot tea and offered me some tasty sandwiches from under a snow-white napkin. After I had eaten, I thanked her sincerely for the refreshments she had set before me with such loving kindness and went on my way.

After that, I visited that little hall once every five years, and every time the bent-over granny appeared carrying her tray to tend to me with her shaking hands.

Twenty years after my first visit, I went there to preach one night. After the service, I was looking forward to the snacks, but nobody came to offer me anything. On enquiring after the little old grandmother, they told me that she had quietly gone to heaven. She had fulfilled the calling God had given her here on earth with her tray of refreshments!

What is your calling, especially if you may not be so young any longer? How do you use your time, now that you are free from responsibilities? To each Christian, God allots a calling, and through His mercy He empowers us to fulfill that calling. No matter what our circumstances might be, He can use us — even if we are old or in prison.

Take heed to what Paul says. ***I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. ... But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift*** (Ephesians 4:1,7).

I cannot help but admire Professor Kayo's earthly persistence in making good mud balls! Are we just as determined in heavenly things when it comes to the calling God has given us? May the Lord help us to serve Him with perseverance, while we still have breath left in us!

It will be such a joy one day, when we arrive in heaven, to hear Jesus Christ say to us, ***Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord*** (Matthew 25:23).

## In the Highest Orbit

During February 2002, I took my missionary son, David, to South Africa to initiate him into deputation meetings in the country where I was born. We visited many places, and every day experienced something amazing. What could be more adventurous than belonging to God and seeing Him unfold the happenings of every day according to His own plan? It was so much more sublime than our puny efforts in mapping out our own route!



David Verwey

“It was not just ordinary meetings we had with our warmhearted friends,” I said to David in reflection. “They were precious experiences that we will relive when we get back to Japan.”

After some incredibly blessed meetings in the Cape Town area, we moved on to De Doorns. We arrived there to find the community preparing for two very influential businesspeople from Belgium. David and I thought, therefore, that we would spend the day writing letters and catching up on office work, but God had other plans for us.

Unexpectedly, these eminent Belgians phoned and apologized that they could not make it. The community was understandably very disappointed.

“We have two men from Japan that could take their place,” someone suggested. And so, instead of those high-ranking men, two very insignificant people from Japan were invited to take their place at the banquet table; and what a spread it was! They treated us like royalty, and afterwards we had a superb opportunity to mingle with the people and witness for the Lord.

So often, God has special surprises for us around the corner, if we just walk with Him. ***A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps*** (Proverbs 16:9). It is good for us

as His children to make our plans, because He has granted to us enough freedom and independence to do so, as long as we remember that “man proposes, but God disposes.”

At our next meeting place, one elderly couple thanked me for having brought a missionary message some thirty years ago to the children in their town. Their daughter, then only 6 years old, was there at the meeting with them and that day God called her to be a missionary. Today, she is laboring for the Lord in India. We also ran into a similar case in another town.

“I was 4 years old when I attended one of your meetings,” a missionary lady told us. “That night, God started to talk to me about being a missionary. I did not know the Lord very well at the time; all I knew for sure was that He had called me to serve Him.” As a child, she had kept in contact with me, and she showed me a letter I had written to her from Japan over fifty years ago! It was yellow with age, but it was still very precious to her.

I e-mailed Peggy. “It was well worthwhile sowing the good seed in the hearts of children in some of those early meetings when we sometimes could not get grown-ups to show an interest.”

On our way to another vital meeting in a distant town, we stopped at a service station. David noticed that the pressure of one of the tires was way down. When the attendant who filled our car up with fuel wiped over the surface of the tire with a wet rag, she immediately discovered the leak.

We talked to the manager at his desk in the office, but he could not find his helper who usually fixed the punctures. He was visibly upset that he had to fix the flat tire himself! We soon realized that God had a special purpose in mind with this complication.

While the manager was fixing the puncture, I discovered that he was a motor mechanic, as I had been in my youth. It opened up a marvelous opportunity for me to bring to him the wonderful news of how God had saved me on the November 11, 1946 at nine o'clock at night. He was full of questions, and we left some literature for him to read before we continued on our journey.

How wonderful it is to serve a God who even plans punctures for us in order to reach the people of His choice! **O Lord, I**

***know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*** (Jeremiah 10:23). We are mere mortals who do not know how to run our daily activities, but how marvelous to know that the Lord maps out our course spiritually. He even maps it out on terra firma when we make mistakes reading our printed road maps.

David was driving one day, and I was the navigator, at which I was not very good! We ended up missing a turn, only discovering it many miles down the road. Turning off the road to consider what route would now be the best to take, we saw a truck parked in front of us. While David looked at his laptop computer to figure out a new route, I talked to the truck driver about the things of God. When I returned to our car, he followed me, and we talked some more. God overrules even our wrong turns and leads us on new routes for His glory.



*Neil Verwey*

We still arrived in time for an evening meal together with our hosts. As we were about to set out for the meeting that night, we were dismayed to find that one of the back wheels suddenly locked and we could not get the car to move. Our host took us in his car to the meeting, and while driving there, on his cell phone David contacted the manager of the local garage. In a somewhat callous way, he said that they had more work than they could do and could not possibly help us during the next few days. We had to leave the next day for a heavy schedule of meetings that weekend and were at a loss to know what to do. But God, who was mapping our course in every detail, had already planned the next step.

A businessman, who had come all the way from Canada to take a vacation in South Africa, heard of our problem at church that night. After the meeting, he turned up at the house where we were staying and skillfully “unlocked” the back wheels, advising us to get the rusty parking brake cable replaced as soon as possible. Without an obstinate parking brake, how would we have been able to make contact with that wonderful man? He turned out to be very interested in the Japan Mission and its activities!

That was not the end of the faulty parking brake story either. Later in the week, in another town, we took the car in to get the brake cable replaced. While waiting, we gave one of our books to the owner of the garage there. He did not seem to be very interested, but one of his associates walked in, saw the book and started to read it.

"I'm now on page fourteen, and I can't stop reading it," she told us before we left. We got her e-mail address in order to keep in contact with her.

"How wonderful it is to know that God is in charge of our most insignificant steps," I reflected to David as we drove away from there. "He maneuvers our circumstances so that we can come in contact with the very people of His choice." The Bible is so clear on this! ***A man's steps are of the Lord; how then can a man understand his own way?*** (Proverbs 20:24)

David and I covered a series of appointments at places on the same route and thought we had our schedule worked out to the last detail, but we soon discovered that God had other places in mind that He wanted to add to our program. He wanted us to go to a certain senior citizens home, but we did not know it at first! They urgently phoned us and requested a visit. There we met the bright-eyed Miss Elsa. She was then 95 years old, and every moment in her presence was a tonic. We were quite amazed when we heard from her of God's daily workings in her life.

Some elderly people complain about everything. The food does not taste good! The weather is wrong! They have a pain here and an irritation there! They try their best to kill time — their greatest enemy. It is depressing to be with such people.

Not so with Miss Elsa. She was a different kettle of fish altogether! It was so refreshing to be with her. When we admired the many Valentine's wishes decorating the desk in her neat little apartment, she told us interesting stories of her well-wishers. When we admired her talent for music, she entertained us with a song she had recently sung at a wedding.

Before we knew it, it was time for the meeting, where twenty-eight residents turned up. We sensed that Miss Elsa was very popular among her friends. No wonder! She could not keep quiet about the blessings that God was pouring out on her every day, and her eyes danced with joy when she spoke.

“When I am 95, I want to be like Miss Elsa,” David said when we drove away from her place. “I also want to be bright, cheerful and inspiring to a very ripe old age!” To me there is nothing more beautiful than seeing cheerfulness in a wrinkled face. There is a proverb that says, “The older the fiddle the sweeter the tune.” How true it can be!

When we moved to the Johannesburg area for more meetings, we stayed in one of the suburbs with a very devoted couple. At the breakfast table, I told them that David and I had made an appointment to meet with someone in Hillbrow. They were shocked when we told them where we were going and strongly advised against it, warning us that we were planning to enter one of the most crime-ridden areas of South Africa. When I left South Africa in 1951 for Japan, Hillbrow was quite a popular place to visit. We listened intently to their advice, and I must admit that fear began to creep into my heart. After some prayer together with David, we still felt that we should go.

When we arrived there, I could not believe my eyes when I saw the junk in old oil drums over-flowing into the streets. I also noticed a burnt-out car blocking the way and I could not spot one friendly face.

It was hard to find a place to park outside the dilapidated building where we needed to be, so I asked David if he could circle around while I made a quick visit to this lady. I rushed up the dirty cement stairs to her apartment, where she had locked herself in behind two heavy metal doors. It took forever for her, with jingling keys, to open the doors and let me in. She was quite elderly, and I noticed that she was blind. Without hesitating, I informed her that I was pressed for time, but she insisted on making tea for me. All the time, I had my eye on her antique wall clock, which was ticking away the seconds far too slowly to my liking. All the time I was thinking of David circling the streets in a very dangerous area. It seemed to me, as if the water was never going to boil.

When she finally finished making the tea, she wanted to know if I took it with milk or not. Usually, I don't, but wanting to gulp it down as quickly as possible, I asked her to put plenty of milk in it! She offered me some cake, which I refused. She had not even

started to drink her own cup of tea, when I suggested reading a Scripture verse. I did so at full speed, and prayed probably one of the shortest prayers I had ever prayed for a supporter of the Japan Mission. As I jumped up to go, she asked me to wait.

“This might be the last donation I can make to the Japan Mission,” she said. I sat down again as she fumbled around to find the money. How on earth she could have gotten so much money together in her home in such a dangerous place was beyond me. She wanted to give me most of it, but I hesitated. I was afraid she might be short herself. That argument took up more precious time, but when I finally hastened to the door, I noticed David standing there and watching us through the steel bars.

“May I come in please? I would also like some tea,” he said quite unfazed. To my horror, he sat down, watching the blind widow going through the same ritual of making a cup of tea for him. I was so anxious to get out of that area that I did not even want to sit down again! David seemed to be in no rush at all and ate several pieces of cake. I whispered to him that I had already read a verse to her and prayed, and that we needed to be getting out of that place at full speed, but he took his time chatting to this dear widow. She told him that she had family members living in the country and they wanted her to go and live there, but she said that she had always lived in Hillbrow and would like to stay there until she died. Then she testified how God had always protected her through all her years in her home and even in the streets.

We hugged her, thinking it might well be last time that we saw her, and then I started to dash down the stairs — anything to get out of that place fast! I could think of nothing else but those dangerous streets. I asked David where he had parked the car, and he told me it was in front of the police station — as if no one had ever stolen a car from outside a police station, I thought.

David wanted to know why I was in such an unusual hurry. “If God can protect this lady all her life in Hillbrow, is He not almighty enough to protect us for an hour?” he said casually. I hung my head in shame. Since I was getting on in years, I had taken David on this tour of meetings through South Africa with the aim of trying to teach him lessons of faith, but it was he who was teaching me.

It was often a learning experience for both of us when we met some of those who donated to the Japan Mission and to learn about the things God was doing in their lives.

“The ground on my farm is so full of stones that I just didn’t know what to do with it,” one of our longtime donors said of the poor piece of ground he had inherited from his father.

His mother, a very godly woman, had more than once told him to plant peach trees there. She had originally come from an area where there was an abundance of fruit trees. After marrying, she had moved with her husband to that barren area and had very much missed the bounty of fruit she had enjoyed when she was young. Every time his mother brought up the matter up of planting peach trees, however, he respectfully replied that it would be of no avail on ground that was more stone than dirt. That just inspired her to pray harder that he would know what God wanted him to do on his seemingly unproductive farm.

Finally, his mother was able to convince him to try growing peaches. More to please her than anything else, he reluctantly planted a few rows of peach trees on the rocky soil of his farm.

He was surprised to see how well the trees grew, and even more surprised than ever when he noticed that his peaches were ready to harvest two weeks ahead of his competitors. Not only were peaches that struggle to survive sweeter, but the very stones on his farm made it possible for his peaches to ripen faster! During the hot days, the stones absorbed the heat of the sun, and at night released the warmth into the surrounding air and soil around his peach trees, helping them to ripen faster.

So successful were his peach trees – helped by the stones to thrive in the cold – that he began to plant different varieties on his land, all with the same results. This led to him making a very good bit of money, which enabled him to contribute generously to God’s work.

The stony ground, which at first seemed to be such a hindrance, actually became a stepping-stone to success! This farmer, who is still carrying on at an age when most people are comfortably retired, loves Philippians 1:12, ***I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.***

After visiting seventy places in about thirty days, and sometimes having up to three or four meetings a day, David and I were ready to go back home to Japan. Despite some minor delays, everything went very well on our tour, and we were in time for every appointment and for every meeting.

Then the unthinkable happened! As we were hurrying to the airport to catch our flight home, we realized that we had misread the time of our departure, and we ended up missing our plane by ten minutes! Those ten minutes resulted in a delay of two days.

When we finally obtained seats on a very full plane, I sat in an aisle seat and David had the window seat with one seat open between us. Anyone who has had to travel 12 hours with such limited space and had to share a similar row of seats with a stranger will understand why we prayed that God would place the right person between us. Needless to say, God had already decided on that person a long time ago! For Him, it is no problem to sling our puny little plans and desires into His higher orbit.

A moment later, we were speechless when we spotted the person who was to share our company. He was about the size of the sumo wrestlers in Japan, and had lots of packets under his arms and in his hands. God must have a real sense of humor, having arranged for someone of that size to squeeze in between the two of us. The big man liked the middle seat because he could adequately fill it and let the rest of his big frame overflow into our seats at either side of him. Mr. Santos was a diplomat from Mozambique on his way to China. David did most of the talking, urging him tactfully to become a diplomat for God.

God alone knows if the seed sown on that journey back to Japan will germinate, but we know beyond a shadow of doubt that God had us fly on the right plane, even if, humanly speaking, it seemed to be the wrong plane. He turns the most insignificant happenings into vehicles for His glory!

For those who believe in a God who reigns sovereign in the highest, there is not even such a thing as a wrong phone number! Often, I get phone calls from people who did not mean to call my number at all.

“Sorry, I must have dialed the wrong phone number,” the person usually apologizes.

“No, you did not dial the wrong number, I was waiting for your call,” I respond. Then as clearly as possible, until the person hangs up, I tell them about Christ, who came into the world to die for their sins, and about His desire to save them.

A short while ago, someone phoned me, and after I had talked for almost a minute about the love of Jesus, without saying a word, he hung up. A few minutes later, the phone rang again, and it was the same person! I assured him that it was not by chance that he had called my number twice. It afforded me a second opportunity to point him further in the direction of the Savior. Although the person did not say anything, he listened for almost another minute to my story of salvation before I heard the click of his phone cutting me off.

I have even had people who phoned the “wrong” number carefully listen to what I had to say, and then start to ask me all kinds of questions!

Nevertheless, God goes even further by utilizing our wrong moves. Even if we have landed in the wrong place by our waywardness, God can overrule it and use it to put us into an orbit with Him at the center. I have repeatedly seen it in my prison ministry in Japan.

On May 18, 2006, I visited the four South Africans imprisoned in our region of Japan. Two of them found Christ as Savior some time ago, and they are bright and cheerful in spite of trying circumstances.

How shocked I was one day when one of them reminded me that Peggy’s birthday was the next day and asked me to convey his best wishes to her and tell her that he prays for God’s best blessings on her! How on earth he obtained the information of Peggy’s birthday with his limited access to the world, I do not know!

His testimony of how God changed him was also an encouragement to me. He said that before he became a Christian, anger and hatred had ruled his actions toward God and men. Now every morning, he makes sure that his attitude is right before he leaves his cell. To him it is nothing short of a miracle to see the difference that Christ made to his daily life.

The other prisoner, arrested at the Kansai International Airport for smuggling narcotics four years ago, is now 27 years old.

Four years in prison must seem like an eternity to a young man like him. Among the four, he is the only one to have progressed to wearing a yellow badge for good behavior, and he hopes to be released sooner than his original sentencing called for.

“Last night I had a headache, and I pressed the button to ask for some aspirin,” he said one day, adding jokingly, “but the room service is on the slow side in this hotel, and I was almost asleep before they turned up with a pill.” He has been very cheerful since he found the Lord, and he jokes even about the most unpleasant things that happen to him.

“Just about everyone in South Africa knows about God, but in Japan people do not know that He exists,” he expressed his disappointment. To my amazement, he confronted the stenographer who was taking down everything we said and asked her if she knew God. When she admitted that she had no clue who the real God could be, he forgot that I came to visit him and started to explain to her about God. After that, he tackled the guard who brought him in to see me. It became a four-way conversation. What on earth she wrote in her report, I do not know, but she and the guard need our prayers! How, otherwise, will they come to know God?

The Lord has a perfect plan for every life, including yours! This plan is not something vague and far away in the future. It involves every minute of every day of our lives! As we walk with Him, the plan for our lives unfolds step by step before us.

“I am so glad that you and I met at the ticket gate by chance,” a fellow train passenger said to me one day after I had told her how much God loved her.

“Let me correct you!” I responded. “It was not chance, but destiny, that brought us together. The Creator of the universe engineered circumstances for you and I to meet each other in this way. I traveled for several hours on a bus and several trains to get to this station, and you came from an entirely different direction for your shopping. God meticulously planned it so that we could talk together for ten minutes, don’t you think?”

I quoted James 4:13-14 to her. ***Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit,” whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For***

***what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away,*** and later that night, there were tears in her eyes as she listened to the Word of God at the meeting to which I invited her.

It gave new meaning to my life as a Christian when I finally realized that every step I take is taken along with the omnipotent God.

“Every step I take is to God’s glory,” a common soldier in the Japan Self Defense Force told me one day. His group usually marched at a pace of over a hundred steps a minute.

“When we pick up speed, we might do a 180 paces per minute,” he reckoned. “I don’t mind when the officers spur us on to walk faster because, then, I can say, “Praise the Lord!” many more times!

As God guides us step by step, it sometimes leads us suddenly into highways and byways that we did not expect and which might be completely unknown territory for us.

Not so long ago, I was far away from home speaking at some special meetings. It was Sunday morning, and I was walking through one of the most beautiful parks in Japan. I greeted a woman in English and she answered me back in perfect English. We were walking in the same direction, so we talked for a while. When I introduced myself, she told me her name was Junko. She was not aware that I knew Japanese, so I continued to speak in English.

“It is now three minutes to seven, and my wife is going to call me at precisely seven o’clock, so I’m afraid we will soon have to end our conversation,” I told her. “I want to spend my last three minutes with you in a way that will be the most profitable; I want to pray with you.” I then took my mobile phone out of my pocket to get ready for Peggy’s phone call.

“What do you want to play?” She had misunderstood me because the Japanese ear cannot easily distinguish between the “r” and “l” sounds in English. “No, not play,” I said. “Pray!” She looked very surprised. “We are wasting time! Let’s step out of the way so that people can pass by!”

All our conversation had been in English, but when I prayed, I did so in Japanese! She was likely amazed to hear a prayer for her in her own language from the lips of a foreigner. I was still

praying when my phone rang. I briefly finished my prayer and started to talk to Peggy. At the same time, I gave the lady some literature, and waved to her as I walked back to my hotel.

I have lost touch with her, but I believe that God skillfully planned for me to meet Junko and pray that she will never forget her encounter with the Word of God that morning in that beautiful park.

In 2006, Peggy and I went for a vacation to Oahu, Hawaii and at the same time arranged to hold some meetings. At our first meeting, the congregation welcomed each of us with a garland of flowers, which they gently placed around our necks. When they decorated us with those beautiful flowers, they did not know how God was going to use those very flowers for the benefit of his Kingdom.



Peggy Verwey

With these fragrant flowers still around our necks, we entered the Star Market, a well-known supermarket, to buy some groceries to prepare our meals in the rooms so kindly allotted to us by a local church. At the entrance of the supermarket, we noticed a couple selling their goods. They greeted us in a very friendly way, and when we came out, they wanted to know on what occasion we had received the very colorful leis adorning us. When they heard of the wonderful meeting we had had that morning in a nearby church, I noticed tears in the eyes of the wife. She was saddened because she once had known the Lord, but had turned away from Him. I asked Peggy to take her aside and to point her back to Jesus.

In the meantime, I asked her husband if he would like to put his life right with God. He said he thought it was about time to do just that! He packed up his merchandise, and we found a quiet spot where I could open my Bible and explain to him how he could begin a relationship with God. He struggled to pray, but he managed to ask God to have mercy on his soul and to forgive him for his evil ways.

Driving away from the shop where we met this seeking couple, a verse came to mind: ***As for me, being on the way the Lord led me*** (Genesis 24:27). We are now in e-mail contact with this couple and are trying to help them as a family.

Once, on what I thought would be a very ordinary day, God reminded me in a most dramatic way that He is in control of

all my goings and all my stops. I believe that on that day, God saved me from a serious accident by causing me to stop long enough to give a coin to a hungry young lad!

When I pulled up at a red light, a youngster approached my car, begging. Feeling sorry for him, I searched my pocket for some change, risking the ire of the motorists behind me, and gave him a coin.

“The money is not to buy cigarettes or drink. It’s for food,” I urged him, as I looked him in the eye and slowly pulled away. By then, the traffic light had already changed to green, and two impatient drivers behind me drove around me.

I eventually drove through the green light, but as I approached the next traffic light, I was appalled as I came upon the most terrible traffic accident I have ever seen.

In no time, the police, paramedics, several ambulances, and a fire truck arrived on the scene to lend assistance. In one of the wrecked cars, a woman was trapped and clearly very seriously injured. Three paramedics were leaning over the crumpled hood of her car, trying to keep her alive with oxygen and first-aid equipment through the opening where the windshield had been a few minutes ago. Some firemen were using the “Jaws of Life” to remove the roof of the vehicle, while others used steel cutters to remove two doors, so that they could gently lift the injured woman out of the car.

I realized with a numb feeling that it could have been me trapped in that car if I had not taken the time to give that coin to the boy. As I prayed for the injured, I was so thankful that God had ordered His angels to protect me from harm. ***He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*** (Psalm 91:11).

I knew that God must still have some work planned out for me! From before the beginning of time, God has prepared some work that He wants you and me to do for Him. ***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*** (Ephesians 2:10). Only after we have accomplished these good works will it be time for us to go home to be with the Lord.

Sitting in my car at that street corner, in the midst of a gathering crowd, I dedicated my life afresh to God, and I asked Him to help me live every moment of every day in such a way that my life orbited around Him and His perfect will for my life.

## Living with one Foot in Heaven

Deeply ingrained in every man and woman is the desire to pray to a god of their conception when they are in trouble. Events and circumstances awaken their need for religion, as though there were no need to pray except in a time of distress or sorrow. Necessities and accidents often form the main subjects for the desire to pray. As soon as affairs take a turn for the better and the danger is past, their devotion vanishes.

Such people reserve zeal in prayer for special occasions, as is very apparent when schools, colleges and universities have their entrance examinations in Korea. On those days, the whole nation of Korea chips in to help the students and pray to all the gods they know. Many parents present their children with two-foot-long axes and forks made of chocolate to help them to “spear” the right answers.

High school bands and cheering throngs meet the test-takers at the school gates on the morning of the examinations in order to encourage them to do their best.

Workers report to their jobs an hour later than usual to reduce rush hour traffic. The students can then get to the exams more comfortably and on time.

Kimpo International Airport officials ban landings and take-offs of planes at Seoul for 15-minute periods in the morning and evening, so as not to distract students during the listening comprehension portions of their examinations.

Even the U.S. military in South Korea halts its activities at 90 bases for nine hours, in respectful observance of the Korean students’ national day of testing.

No one does more for the students than the fervent South Korean mothers and grandmothers. In 2005, about 300 of them packed an open-air Buddhist temple to pray all night for their children’s or grandchildren’s success in the national college entrance examinations the next day.

Mrs. Namoon had shown up for her bowing rites a full seven hours earlier. The mothers had worked harder than they might have in marathon aerobics classes: Stand up! Clasp hands in prayer! Bow! Down on knees! Head to floor! Back on haunches! Up on feet! All over again!

“If I try my best, it’ll help my daughter!” Mrs. Namoon said. By midnight, she had already done the comprehensive bowing process 2,000 times, aching, but determined to persevere.

“Does it really help?” she asked one of her friends, knowing that she had done similar vigils for all her four daughters.

“They all went to college, but I don’t really know whether my zeal helped them or not,” she replied. It is amazing to what extremes the heathen will go in an effort to get their gods to answer prayer!

One woman could not afford to pose for a photo because it would rob her of a few minutes of her prayer time to Buddha.

“Every morning when I open up the temple, she is waiting at the gate,” the priest told my tourist friends.

“She stays at the temple all day chanting her prayers and sutras!” They were so impressed with her religious fervor that they asked the priest to request her to pose with them for a photo, but she shook her head in refusal.

“That would take five minutes away from her prayer time,” the priest interpreted. “She was not willing to interrupt her prayers.” That is how eager she was for the continuity of her prayers, so as not to lose merit.

During 1966, I was doing the rounds at the hospitals where our hospital evangelists minister. At one hospital I met a woman of 73 who probably worshipped more gods than any other person I have met. She went from temple to temple and from idol to idol praying to as many gods as possible, in order to make sure not to miss worshipping the true God at least once in her lifetime. In a tuberculosis hospital, she heard for the first time of the Creator God and decided to add Him also to the number of gods she already had on file. Very soon, however, she discovered that He was the only true God, and she needed no other. Indeed, she was in a hurry to leave the hospital to make the rounds, this time to her family, to enlighten them about the God of the universe.

In a country teeming with idolatry and ancestor worship, the ignorance about God is overwhelming! I have even had people desperate enough to try to worship me! Like Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14), I objected and grasped the opportunity to tell them about Jesus!

One incident took place in a senior citizens home far from the Mission, where I went to tell the residents about a religion they had never heard of before. They had already heard from the religious leaders of other ideologies, and they thought it might be good to hear from someone about the “American god.”

When I entered the hall, I could tell by the vast number of shoes lined up at the entrance that the place was crammed with curious people. Just like everybody else, I took off my shoes, and as I made my way to the lectern, took care not to step on some of the people sitting tightly against one another on their legs on the floor.

I thought that I might never again get such a golden opportunity to speak to that crowd of retirees, and was determined to explain to them the way to the living God, as simply and as clearly as the Lord would enable me.

Briefly, I told them about the first happy sinless pair, Adam and Eve, and how sin had entered our world. I shared how God had prepared a way of escape through Jesus Christ, who came into the world to become a sacrifice of atonement for our sins, in order to set us free from eternal damnation.

In closing, I urged them, as they sat in front of me, to pray to the living God and ask Him to have mercy on their souls.

As I made my way back to the entrance of the hall, many said “Arigato gozaimasu” (“Thank you very much”)! Several trembling hands touched me and even weakly tried to hold on to my hand, as if to say we need to hear more, but I was already far over my allotted time and knew that it was time to leave. At the entrance, as I was putting on my shoes, two ladies fell down on their faces before me and started to worship me in typical idol worship style.

“You must not do that,” I urged them. “I have just finished explaining to you that you must only worship the God of the universe who sent Jesus into the world to die for your sins.”

“Sensei (teacher), we are very old and our minds do not function properly anymore. You brought us a wonderful message, but it is too much for us to comprehend. We reckon the best we can do is to worship you, and trust you will then be able to take it to God on our behalf so that He will have mercy on our souls.”

Touched by their plight, I slipped off my shoes again, knelt down with them, and explained the way of salvation a little better. The crowd around me grew, as I led them in the sinner’s prayer.

Ordinary people in Japan do not understand the idea of a Mediator because they believe in gaining absolution by merit; therefore, they invent many ways in which they try and do it by themselves, such as through folding paper cranes.

They regard the crane as the noblest of all birds. It is also sacred and a symbol of a long physical life and fidelity. Some give presents in the form of folded paper cranes as talismans to lovers, sick relatives, baseball teams or politicians, as a prayer for them to prosper. Folding paper cranes, according to their age-old superstition, is the cheapest and easiest way for a wish to come true or a prayer to be answered. The more you can fold, the better the results. According to traditional Japanese belief, folding one thousand paper cranes pleases the gods so much that the folder’s wish is supposedly granted.

Sadako lived in Hiroshima, Japan. She was only two years old when the atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. At the moment of the explosion, she was at her home about 1 mile from ground zero. As she grew up, Sadako was a strong, courageous and athletic girl. In 1954, at age eleven, while practicing for a big race, she became dizzy and fell to the ground. Sadako was diagnosed with leukemia, the “atom bomb disease.”

Sadako’s best friend told her of an old Japanese legend that said that anyone who folds 1,000 paper cranes would be granted a wish. Sadako hoped that the gods would grant her wish to get well so that she could run again. She spent fourteen months in the hospital, and she folded over 1,300 paper cranes before dying at the age of twelve. She folded the cranes out of her medicine bottle wrappers and any other paper she could find in hopes of getting better. (A popular version of the story,

given in *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, is that she fell short of her goal of folding 1,000 cranes, having folded only 644 before her death, and that her friends completed the 1,000 and cremated them with her.)

How much more bearable it would have been for that poor child if she could have stopped the energy-sapping work of folding cranes and found rest in the arms of Jesus!

Her story, as presented in several children's books, has encouraged schoolchildren in Japan to fold cranes as prayers to have their wishes granted.

Her perseverance also inspired children to offer yearly prayers at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. On August 5, 2005, local schoolchildren placed more than 20,000 paper cranes as prayers at the monument for peace.

Especially during examination times in Japan, students bedeck the trees on temple grounds with countless prayer requests, neatly written on strips of prayer papers. The shrines are very crowded around exam time. If children are too busy to go and tie slips of paper, which have their requests written on them, on prayer trees, their parents or grandparents will go in their stead.

Anxious students snap up a host of good-luck items at jam-packed stationery shops, like specially prepared pencils, erasers, fluorescent pens and notebooks, which allegedly "protect" their owners from tumbling into the abyss of test failure.

Another item that became a symbol of tenacity is the Akita apple. In September 1991, a devastating typhoon wreaked havoc on the crops of Japan, but the apple orchards in the Komagata area managed to survive with only minor losses. Farmers commemorate the "apples that refused to fall" with an annual event that includes presenting apples inscribed with the words "For successful exams!" to test takers. Students or their family members will often travel far to purchase such an apple.

How tragic are these desperate attempts to attain the goals of life. The desperate wailing of the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel still echoes here in Japan! There was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention (1 Kings 18:29).

How much more desirable it is to trust in the Creator of the universe. ***For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and***

***His ears are open to their prayers*** (1 Peter 3:12). God listens with interest to our slightest whisper!

Customers using the restroom at a karaoke singing bar in Tokyo told bar employees that they had heard a cat's meowing. Not knowing what to do, they called the Tokyo Fire Department.

Eleven fire fighters rushed to the scene. They were highly trained for such operations, and with an endoscope, they determined the whereabouts of the cat and started digging into the tiled wall. After three hours, the firefighters succeeded in rescuing a several-weeks-old black kitten that was stuck for two days in the ventilation duct in the wall. Customers and personnel at the karaoke parlor burst into applause.

"Our rescue training worked," one fire fighter proudly said. The manager of the karaoke parlor did not seem upset about the damage to the restroom, caused by the rescue operation, and said that he would gladly pay for the repairs.

A black adult cat roamed around throughout the operation. She was watching and so delighted to be united with her kitten, which she licked until it was just about wet all over.

We humans are even more powerless to save ourselves than that poor kitten was, but God listens to our faintest cry to help us!

In 1952 – which seems like a lifetime ago now – I was a student in a Japanese language school, and I learned from older missionaries in the same class how God truly does hear the cries of His servants and helps them in their predicaments.

One of my classmates, Miss Erickson, was a charming, fair-headed young Swedish girl. The other was a dignified, gray-haired lady, a missionary from Norway who had suffered much under Communist rule in China and been deported to Japan. She struggled to get a grasp of Japanese, but I believe God sent her to Japan to teach me about trusting Him!

It was the beginning of July, and very hot and muggy. The young Swede had never experienced such heat in her country, but what troubled her most were the fleas in her apartment. She was wearing short sleeves, and we noticed the red bite marks all over her arms.

“I just can’t get rid of the fleas in my room,” she whined. “The stifling smell of flea powder is overwhelming! I’ve tried every possible remedy.”

“You haven’t tried Jesus yet,” remarked the otherwise quiet Norwegian woman.

“Yes, I pray to Him every day and ask Him to help me,” Miss Erickson said. “But I must confess my faith is not strong enough to take away the fleas.”

The gray-haired saint from Communist China assured her junior that the God who controls the universe also has power over the fleas of Japan and the bedbugs of China.

She said that once she had moved into a house in China where no one would live, because bedbugs infested the place. The first night, after lying awake for hours and scratched her skin until it bled, she had knelt by her bed to pray about the matter. In faith, she had commanded the bugs to leave the house. She even went to open the door for them to depart and saw them march out of the room, never to return!

“My dear, a few little bedbugs and fleas pose no problem for our God,” she concluded. “Come, let’s ask God to drive the fleas from your room before you get home this afternoon.” We all closed our eyes in prayer, but she was the only one who had enough faith to pray that prayer. I prayed, too, but I had no doubt that I lacked that kind of bold faith!

The next day, the Swedish girl’s eyes were sparkling, and she was bubbling over with thanksgiving because the Lord had driven the fleas from her room. To my knowledge, she had no more trouble with fleas during the rest of her stay in the city of Kobe.

When the Chinese Communists drove the missionaries out of China, there was an influx of missionaries of this calibre to Japan, and they were a great help to the inexperienced missionaries, such as myself, in Japan.

Mr. Linden was another one of them. He was near retirement age, but he taught me precious lessons of faith. He said that one morning while he was shaving, one of the Chinese converts talked to him through the window.

“Yesterday, you explained to us that whatever we asked in the name of Jesus, believing, He would grant us,” she said.

“There was nothing I wanted to ask Him for yesterday, but does that promise hold good for today, too?”

“Yes! Our God is not fickle like the gods you serve here in China,” Mr. Linden answered. “What do you want to trust the Lord for today?”

“Will you come and pray for my sick pig?” His Bible College training had not prepared him for such a situation. Afterwards, during his seventeen years in China, Mr. Linden had to pray for many pigs, but that first experience was the most embarrassing! He had wondered if it was Biblical to pray for the healing of a pig. He was sure that God had not called him to China to intercede for pigs, but the woman kept bothering him.

Driven into a corner, he wanted to pray for the sick pig then and there, but she was not satisfied with that. She begged him to come with her and offer a prayer personally at the pigsty. Rather hesitantly, he agreed, knowing how important it was to her.

“She is all I have. If she dies, I shall lose her and all her unborn piglets, and I shall be without food,” the little Chinese woman informed him as they walked to her home. Upon reaching the house, he was surprised to find about fifty people gathered at the sty.

“I have called these people to come and witness the Lord healing my pig,” she said. Mr. Linden felt very uneasy. Swine fever was prevalent, and many pigs had already died. No one would believe that there was a cure for a pig as sick as her pig was, and Mr. Linden was inclined to agree! After all, sickness and disease among animals is all part of the reality of our fallen world. He thought he would pray a few words and disappear.

“Our Heavenly Father,” he began to pray.

“No! No! Not here,” she interrupted him. “I’ll open the door of the pigsty for you to go in and kneel beside the animal.” For a moment, he almost prayed another prayer, and that was that he could have angel’s wings to fly back to Norway. Disgustedly, he half squatted, half knelt in his black suit and shiny shoes in the middle of the filthy pigsty.

“You must lay your hands on my pig,” she insisted. Obediently, he stretched out his hand and laid it on the warm head of the sick animal. It was an awkward prayer, and as he had expected,

the pig lay in the mud without moving. He then tried to beat a hasty retreat.

“Wait a minute,” she said, her voice trembling with excitement. “If a pig is healthy, it eats.” She ran to the barn for some food. It seemed to take ages before she came back, and Mr. Linden wished he could just disappear into the mud.

“Piggy! Piggy!” she called upon her return. She pushed a few turnip-tops in front of its pink snout. On smelling its favourite delicacy, the animal jumped up, oinked, and started gobbling it all up!

The onlookers gasped and began enquiring about the God that can heal such a feared disease among pigs. That day, several people were added to the Christian fellowship, all because of the little Chinese woman’s faith in God.

The God who uses the healing of a pig for the extension of His Kingdom, in spite of the missionary’s feeble prayer, can even use unwanted crows.

Crows are very unpopular in Japan. With their incredibly thick and powerful beaks, Japanese crows can tear trash bags to pieces in seconds to get at some morsel of food that might be at the bottom.

Crows are early risers and always beat the city garbage collectors to the goodies. Soon after first light, these opportunistic scavengers can mess up an entire neighborhood with garbage, tossing it here and there. Some residents, troubled by the clean-up work, have contracted private-sector garbage collectors, at their own expense, to make the rounds during the dead of night when the crows are still sleeping.

Crows build their untidy nests, often with clothes hangers, high up on utility poles and billboard frames. They have discovered that wire hangers make strong and durable nesting material. More than one homemaker has gone outside to find her laundry on the ground and her clothes hangers stolen.

Throughout the nesting period, the parent birds are extremely aggressive and will caw fearlessly as they dive-bomb cats, dogs and even people that get too close!

A 50-year-old prisoner in Japan from South Africa, incarcerated for drug smuggling, is thankful for the cawing of crows early in the morning. He is a young Christian who wants

to have an undisturbed time of prayer every morning before the wake-up bell sounds and the jail routine makes it impossible. He doesn't have an alarm clock, but every morning, God sends crows to wake him up, and then his cell becomes a sanctuary as he has fellowship with the King of Kings. Like David of old, who wanted to wake up at dawn with his lute and harp to honor God (Psalm 57:8), this inspired new believer also longs for a daybreak encounter with his Creator.

"I am the only Christian in the factory where I work," he said. "Everyone there is opposed to Christ, and I feel as if I am forced into Buddhist rules! If I start the day right with God early in the morning when the crows awaken me, it is easier for me not to be discouraged when they persecute me."

Nowadays, I also use the same "alarm clocks" that my friend in prison uses because the crows start to carry out their raucous raids in our neighborhood in the summer any time after 4:00 a.m.

Like myself, my friend in jail told me that he, too, is sometimes very tempted when it is still dark to linger in bed just a little longer after the first crow squawks. I told him about the story of the Japan Railway Company air cushion that did not inflate properly and inconvenienced thousands of people.

They had to cancel the departure of an early morning train because it could not leave at precisely 6:04 a.m. This is disastrous in a country like Japan where trains need to run accurately to the second in order not to affect other trains or cause passengers to miss their connecting rides. The 34-year-old conductor overslept for only two minutes, and could not be on duty on time!

The unnamed conductor had finished his duties the previous day around midnight and went to bed in a facility near the station. He told officials that he woke up once when the air cushion, designed as a wake-up timer, was inflating, but then dozed again, as he thought only for a few seconds.

The cancellation of that first train inconvenienced about 3,500 passengers on connecting trains, and the conductor, severely reprimanded for his lack of consideration, was deeply shocked.

The conductor's error was very human, but spiritually speaking, we also should always stay alert because, before

we know it, we might be ensnared and affect the lives of many around us.

***Watch therefore, and pray always*** (Luke 21:36). Part of the Christian's spiritual watchfulness is surely to specifically pray for other people. I try to surround myself with little reminders to pray for people. My office is full of them. Around my computer are prayer notes, cards, clippings, an entire wall full of pictures, even a warthog tooth and a green tea candy – not to eat, but to help me to remember to pray for the giver of the candy, whom I met when jogging on a hiking trail near my home on Mt. Ikoma.

I had come across this elderly man sauntering down the winding path. I stopped to tell him about the glorious Creator who made the trees around us, and the birds that sing so beautifully to us, as we enjoyed the twisting little footpath.

I was rather out of breath as I witnessed, but he listened carefully and looked at me as I was wiping the sweat from my brow. Without much comment, he fumbled around in his pockets until he found a green tea candy. The Japanese suck green tea sweets for energy. He gave me this paper wrapped candy, probably thinking that I needed reviving before I could go a step further. So now, that candy decorates my office as a reminder to pray for this old man.

Just as my reminder to pray for that elderly man is a green tea candy wrapped in rice paper, so were two 30-year-old postcards a reminder for a teacher to pray for one of his promising students with whom he had completely lost contact.

The first contact the student, who is now a preacher friend of mine, had made with the Christian faith was through his high school teacher. He felt his teacher not only practiced his faith, but also had compassion on his students. At that stage of his life, my friend did not want to follow through on the advice of his teacher to become a Christian, but he never lost sight of Christianity and the way it changed the lives of people.

Years later, somewhere in Asia during World War II, filled with deep nostalgia and a longing for a better life, he wrote two postcards to his teacher.

Thirty years after the war, he searched for that schoolteacher, who had been his role model from childhood. For some inexplicable reason, during all those years, he always had this

man and his lifestyle in his mind. One day, he visited him to thank him for influencing his life so profoundly.

After greetings and many formal bows, they talked together while sipping cups of green tea. After a while, his old teacher stood up and left the sitting room. He came back with the two old, yellowed postcards that my friend had sent to him so many years before.

“It became part of my life to look at them every day and pray for you, my former pupil,” said his teacher. He handed my friend one of the postcards, as a reminder to my friend that he had prayed for him over 10,000 times!

“The other one I am going to keep,” he said. “I will look at it every day and continue to pray for you.” That day was a turning point in the life of my friend. He earnestly sought the Lord, found Him and, although well on in age, became a minister of the Gospel.

Be encouraged that our God answers persistent prayer! Be assured that your prayers do not vanish into thin air. In the vision the apostle John had on the island of Patmos, God showed him what was happening to the prayers of the saints: ***And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand*** (Revelation 8:4).

Jesus also assures us that God answers persistent prayer. ***Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?*** (Luke 18:7)

Sometimes I am very surprised by the unselfish attitude toward prayer that some converts take when they find God.

“Mr. Verwey, please don’t waste your precious time coming here to pray for an old woman like me!” requested Mrs. Uemoto, a dying tuberculosis patient in her 60s. “I already have one foot in heaven, and it is well with my soul! Rather, take the message of this wonderful heavenly destination to other dying people around me, who know nothing about it yet! I will pray for good results.”

I was speechless! If I were in her shoes – dying – I would probably say, “Please visit me as many times as possible and pray for me as never before!” When I looked into her radiant face and her shining, dark eyes, I knew that she was the one

who was carrying me in prayer! I then remembered her telling me on a previous visit about the secret of her victorious living.

“I start each day anew with God and I do not allow Satan to get a foothold in my life,” she had said. “I rest assured that He is in charge of every detail of the day ahead of me.”

One of the most precious privileges Christians enjoy is that every morning marks a new beginning. We can start each day anew with a fresh touch of God’s forgiveness and strength and with a fresh yearning after Him.

***As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God*** (Psalm 42:1-2). Every day, no matter what happens, can be a day of celebration. There are many senior citizens in difficult situations who know the secret of having intimate fellowship with God daily, just as Enoch did. I have come across some residents in senior citizens homes who were outstanding intercessors because God was just a conversation away.

“Mr. Verwey, I get up every morning when you start your day and I travel with you from place to place,” a silver-haired, 92-year-old grandmother told me, as she was holding up a printed copy of my itinerary of meetings in her hand. “I am with you wherever you have your meetings. At night when you go to bed, I am also tired and have to rest because the next day I also have to rise early to accompany you in prayer on the road to the next stopover.” It suddenly dawned on me why I sometimes experienced the presence of God so vividly when I had meetings. She was, to me, a pillar of support, just as Aaron and Hur were for Moses.

Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses so Israel could be victorious. ***And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun*** (Exodus 17:12).

It was not easy for Moses to assure victory by raising his hands to the sky all day long, and it is not easy for us to continuously carry people in our hearts and prayers. Still, some elderly citizens have learned the art of interceding effectively, and they are doing a lot more for the Kingdom of God than we could ever imagine!

Sometimes the prayer life of some elderly people is so secret and so effective that those moving around about them do not even know about it.

“It is impossible to communicate with her. She’s too far gone,” the nurse told me, when I asked to visit an elderly woman in a nursing home. “She is completely blind and deaf. She also has constant pain, due to her broken leg, so we keep her sedated.” In spite of all she said, I insisted that I needed to see her.

When I arrived at her bedside, she was sound asleep. I did not know how to gently wake up a person who was deaf, but I wanted her to know that someone cared enough for her to visit her and pray for her. Fortunately, she was alone in her room, so when I prayed, I shouted my prayer into her ear. Suddenly realizing who I was, she reach up with both of her hands and gripped my hand, which I had placed on her head when praying. She then said something that I will never forget as long as I live.

“Mr. Verwey, I have made this bed a bed of prayer! Every moment that I am awake and conscious, I pray for my children and for the work of the Lord worldwide.” With a shining face, she told me about the many things and places for which she had been interceding, and I suddenly realized what the Bible means when it says ***pray without ceasing*** (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

As I was walking down the long corridor of the nursing home toward the exit, I had tears in my eyes as I thought about this woman who was probably doing the greatest work of her life, and not even the nurses in that place knew anything about it.

To pray without ceasing means to be in an attitude of prayer wherever we are and whatever we are doing. Whether we work, play or relax, suffer or are jubilant, the Lord expects us to pray without ceasing. The desire to pray is the result of God’s greater desire to talk with us. This woman, under the most trying circumstances you can imagine, was helping to extend the Kingdom of God, and I am sure she also had sweet fellowship with the Initiator of prayer.

Even when we have one foot in the grave, or more correctly in heaven, may our greatest desire be to pray for God’s work and workers and to praise God for His infinite goodness.

## Robots as Family Members

In Chinese folklore, there was an aged grandfather who could no longer work and who ate more than his fair share of the family's food. His son decided it was time to get rid of him, so he loaded his father into a wheelbarrow and pushed him up the mountainside. His eight-year-old son ran after him and plied his father with questions as to the need for this strange journey.

"Grandpa is too weak to work and is eating the rice that the rest of us need," his father explained. "For the sake of the rest of the family, I now have to take him up to the top of the mountain and leave him there to die."

"Oh, I see," the little boy exclaimed excitedly. "It is a good thing that I came along, so I will know just where to take you when you grow as old as grandfather!"

In Japan, there is a train station – Obasute Station – whose name means "abandon Grandma" because it is near the place where grandmothers who reached the age of 60 were pushed over a precipice. I wonder how many old people had their lives ended there when Japan was still barbaric and the elderly were just regarded as another mouth to feed.

Having said that, it is very gratifying to notice that nowadays in Japan, so many are rallying to make life easier for the elderly. To cater for them, Japanese companies are writing new chapters in universal design.

In May 2003, Toyota Motor Corporation unveiled a passenger van with seats that swivel sideways and hand controls for the accelerator and brake. In the first month, Toyota sold 11,000 of them, nearly three times what it had predicted. Not only physically challenged people, but many senior citizens purchased these modified vans.

The president of Tripod Design Co., Ltd. noticed that many women folded a handkerchief or towel to cushion their hands when they picked up heavy shopping bags. He invented a

colorful, plastic, curved worm-shaped handle that hooks on to a bag and distributes the weight more evenly. They have sold over 600,000 Handy Wormys, and are now selling other products, like an easy-to-grip pen called the Handy Birdy, easy slip-on walking shoes, and a line of lightweight luggage. Retirees have bought many of these items.

A stationery firm has a line of 400 products designed for the elderly and disabled, including staplers and scissors with lightweight handles for people whose grip is not as strong anymore.

The DoCoMo phone company has developed a loyal following among senior citizens with a mobile phone that features an easy-to-read design with few buttons.

Panasonic built a high-tech nursing home just outside the city of Osaka, which is just like a beautiful hotel. Along one side of the lobby is a waterfall that creates “negative ion” energy, which is believed to improve people’s health. The community areas open on to landscaped Japanese gardens. The beds are equipped with sensors that automatically lock the doors and send a message to staffers if a person leaves their bed during the night. The toilet covers lift up automatically when someone enters the bathroom, and in the bathing room, residents can sit on specially designed seats while showering.

Mrs. Okumura, who moved into this home, said the nursing home’s high-tech offerings gave her a sense of independence and security. “After entering this place, I could forget about my weak left arm. I feel I am surrounded by safety,” she said.

Some local governments in Japan have started a simple system to confirm the well-being and safety of elderly people in their area. Local government welfare officials send messages to the receivers every morning that appear in big letters on a screen in the homes of the elderly. If their eyesight is a problem, they can listen to an audible message. The person can reply by pressing one of three buttons, indicating “well,” “not well,” or “call me.”

“We want our senior citizens to know that we care about them,” said one of the officials expressing his concern for elderly people.

I must admit that some of the gadgets for the elderly are quite useful. The Secom home security company runs a 24-hour-a-day, 365-days-a-year service that provides GPS information on elderly people using GPS satellites.

Their families are able to ascertain their position online via a mobile phone or personal computer Internet connection. In addition, when requested by the family, Secom's emergency personnel can hurry to the exact place where a person, who may be senile, is lost and help them out.

Furthermore, a growing number of services are available to help worried children check on their elderly parents living alone in the countryside.

In the year 2001, a leading maker of thermos flasks, introduced Internet-friendly hot water pots. A wireless transmitter attached to the bottom of the pot, sends e-mails to up to three people to let them know if the user is drinking tea at regular times. As long as the children receive these e-mails, they are confident that their parents are using their electric hot water pot and are not in trouble. The company developed the system after cases of elderly people dying alone began increasing.

"When I called my mother because she hadn't used the pot, I found out that she was in bed with a cold," one user reported. "As a result, I went to her place and took care of her."

These services are especially popular because the elderly certainly do not like cameras monitoring them. They also provide peace of mind to their families without them being called constantly by their family members, who are checking up on them.

Some ten years ago, a few companies introduced videophone systems for senior citizens. With great fanfare, they advertised the products, thinking that the elderly would enjoy face-to-face phone conversations from the comfort of their own living rooms. They felt that it would ease the loneliness of many elderly people, who have little opportunity to go out. The companies were very disappointed that it did not really take off as expected, though some people liked it. The convenience of sending and viewing video of products in stores through the videophone screens was one of the program's selling points.

Nowadays, there are sensors everywhere, and even the elderly profit from them. ArtData Corporation developed a system that provides subscribers with round-the-clock updates on their elderly parents by attaching sensors to frequently-used household items — everything from the door of a refrigerator to a bathroom floor mat.

The company attaches the sensors to the telephone line in an elderly person's home. If he or she does not use the refrigerator for a designated amount of time, a computer monitoring the data informs the designated recipient by e-mail or other means. The computer also records how often each item is used. Based on the average frequency an item is used, the computer can calculate the possibility of an unusual situation having occurred and contact the subscriber.

"These systems can let our customers know about emergencies as soon as possible, based on the format set up for each person," said Mr. Kobayashi, president of ArtData Corporation. The firm has also developed biosensors that inform people when their elderly parents or relatives have an abnormal heart rate or have difficulty breathing.

Some care agencies go still further in monitoring the elderly. They use "pets" – stuffed toy animals with built-in computers – to monitor the health of elderly people living alone. This is helpful, due to the shortage of domestic helpers. The pets are capable of uttering simple sentences such as "Good morning!" and "It's fine weather today." The pet also relays conversations it has with its owner to health officials, who use the information to assess the owner's physical condition. The pet has a device that can notify health authorities in case of emergency. Officials are also able to speak directly with people via a miniature speaker installed in the pet. If they receive no response, they immediately send an ambulance to check on the elderly person.

Panasonic has developed a toddler-size robot that can operate the TV, send and receive e-mails, and do a funny little dance, and robot pets that sit in the laps of senior citizens and give them weather reports, remind them to take their medicine, and link them to hospitals and community canthers through the Internet. Tmsuk Co., Ltd. has built a "maid" that serves drinks.

Many think that as Japan's elderly population continues to grow, there will be a greater demand for robots to look after senior citizens and bedridden patients. To meet the needs of a graying society, researchers are developing completely computerized room robots equipped with cameras and sensors. Designed for people who can't walk around, the robot will fetch what the patient needs with its robotic arm when the patient simply points at it.

Other robots are touted for use in therapy sessions. In one hospital, elderly patients suffer from severe dementia, but their faces light up when they see the dog-shaped robot, swaddled in soft clothing, waddle around the hospital floor. Some clap and others break into feeble smiles. Urged on by nurses, a few cautiously reach out and touch it.

"It's cute," one female patient cries out. This "cute" dog is but one of a budding series of robot-therapy sessions at Japanese hospitals and senior citizens homes.

Dr. Toshio Tamura, a professor at the National Institute for Longevity Sciences, recently published a research paper that says that some patients' activities, such as talking, watching and touching, increased with the introduction of the robot in therapy sessions.

"Playing with the robots reduces behavior problems, and they gain a certain peace of mind," doctor Tamura said in a recent interview at his laboratory. He feels that robot therapy makes more sense than the use of animals because they are more sanitary, they do not bite or cause allergies, and there is no need to feed them anything other than electricity.

Advocates see robots serving not just as helpers – carrying out simple chores and reminding patients to take their medication – but also as companions, even if the machines can carry on only a semblance of a real dialogue.

Scientists are now working on robots with faces that can express emotions and with the ability to understand a human partner. Such robots will be able to react as a person would, not just with words, but with voice inflection and facial expressions. The robots will be able to wink, smile, frown and even look horrified.

If these robots prove to be successful, they could help achieve huge savings in medical costs, reduce the burden on family members and caretakers, and keep the elderly in better health.

I admire the respect that the Japanese people have for the elderly, and the way in which they research how to better take care of them. I pray that we as missionaries may be just as keen to look after them spiritually. We need to help the elderly to realize that God can take care of them in ways that no human being, system, or robot ever could.

It is not only scientists, though, who are looking after the needs of the elderly. Even children are doing their share in assisting them.

The 4th-grade children at an elementary school in Oda City have been very busy. The children, who are more computer-literate than many adults, teach an introductory personal computer course for older local residents. The grown-up students claim that they feel more relaxed with the young teachers than they do with adult instructors. They receive one-on-one tutoring from the children.

In a computer room at the primary school, the 4th-graders pair up with adult students from the neighborhood, who are in their 40s to 70s, and each pair works together in front of their own computer.

“Press here when you want to print out your document,” says one of the child-teachers, and the adult student manages to click the mouse at the right place. The children set the pace for their students, some of whom need more time than others to get used to the electronic gadgetry. They also teach their adult charges how to surf the Internet.

“I couldn’t do anything on the computer by myself,” admitted Mr. Takeshita, who is the oldest student at 77. “I am so grateful for my child-teacher. He is kind and interesting when he teaches me what to do. I like learning how to use a computer a lot!” Mr. Takeshita is even thinking about buying his own computer.

“I usually don’t prepare much for school,” said Saya Gobara, a 9-year-old child-teacher. “But I do prepare in order to teach the computer session,” she added, “because I like computers.” Children are often much more caring than we give them credit for!

**Jesus said, Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven** (Matthew 18:3 [NIV]). May we learn from children to become unsophisticated like them, in order to get into the Kingdom of God.

There is still more good news when it comes to considering the elderly.

Even the mail carriers of the post offices are paying closer attention to elderly residents who are living 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 about such elderly residents to the post office for the mail carriers to follow up on.

There are not enough welfare commissioners to confirm the well-being of each single elderly resident every day, so the mail carriers check whether single elderly people have any problems. They also help take care of elderly residents suffering from senile dementia who tend to wander away from their homes. When the mail carriers notice anything unusual at the homes of elderly residents, they inform the appropriate authorities.

The older I get, the more I am conscious of the fact that a vast number of people care for me in the country where I am living. I board an overcrowded train and a young person suddenly jumps up to let me have his or her seat. The local government issues me free tickets to use on trains, buses and taxis. Someone at the public bath unexpectedly washes my back. Sometimes younger couples treat Peggy and me at posh restaurants. Often I discover surprise presents at my door. Delicacies are often delivered to our house without Peggy and I being able to find out where they came from.

People respect me because I am elderly, and I am often ushered to the place of honor in their houses. Many of these people do not know the Lord, but they certainly are instinctively very Christian-like in their actions. **You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord** (Leviticus 19:32).

Not so long ago, I was walking in one of the most magnificently landscaped gardens in the world. Beautiful trees, flowers, paths and streams were everywhere. The idea of such a garden is not to conquer nature but rather to be in harmony with it.

A withered tree brought me to a standstill. The condition of the tree did not amaze me. I grew up in the Kalahari Desert and I have seen many withered trees. What made this tree unusual was the fact that it was leaning over at an angle of 45 degrees.

It must have been several hundred years old. It started to lean over further and further, refusing to fall to the ground, so the city fathers decided to assist it in its plight. They consulted with the best horticulturists and came up with a plan.

They wrapped something around the trunk that would not hurt the wood. Then they painstakingly built a frame of steel rods that followed the contours of the slanting trunk, and supported the bottom part of the trunk by encasing it in cement. They also supported the leaning top of the tree with a piece of wood cut from the trunk of a young fir tree, neatly tying it together at the top with rice-straw rope.

This old rotten tree obviously appreciated the attention and support so much that at its gnarled top, young tender leaves started to sprout!

God used this tree to speak to me most powerfully regarding how well He will look after me in the declining years of my life. He will take care of me much better than those city leaders could ever care for their beloved tree.

***And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither*** (Psalm 1:3). Even if we are fading away, gnarled with age, our God is still caring for us!

Without God in their lives, people are ruthless and uncaring. ***The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel*** (Proverbs 12:10), but, God be praised, as elderly people we can continue to live in comfort as modern science comes to our aid.

Scientists and ordinary people, often without knowing it, carry out God's instructions to the elderly. ***We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good*** (Romans 15:1-2 [NIV]).

The Asahi Newspaper wrote about an elderly woman who was a very heavy smoker. She has three children and they love her very much. Her children did not like her smoking habit, but for a birthday present, of all things, they gave her two hundred cigarettes — the type she liked best.

She was very surprised, seeing that her children have so often urged her to get help and quit the smoking habit. She thanked them for being so considerate and looked forward to going through those cigarettes very fast. She could hardly wait for them to leave.

When she was about to light up the first one, she noticed some very fine writing on the side of the cigarettes. Her eyesight was no longer very good, so she put on her glasses to read the fine writing on it. "Every cigarette you smoke shortens your life by 2 minutes and 30 seconds!"

In disgust, she put that cigarette down and took up the next one. To her horror, the same lettering was on that one. And on the next one ... and on the next! She inspected all the cigarettes and found the same thing written on every one!

She suddenly realized, in spite of their strange method of showing it, that her children loved her. It must have taken them hours of hard work to write those words on every one of the two hundred cigarettes they gave her.

Her children wanted her to make sure that she would be around for a long time. That day she renounced smoking and has never again touched another cigarette! Even non-Christians can teach us that practical love transforms people.

I pray that, as a missionary, I will be able to cater to the elderly, not only for their temporal, but also for their spiritual needs. It is the task of every missionary and all fellow believers to remind the elderly that the Creator God can take care of them better than any scientific system can.

What a blessing it is to know that when it comes to God, we need not depend on pressing three buttons in order to get help! ***Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me*** (Psalm 50:15). If we call on Him, He will rescue us, and we can praise Him forever!

Higher than any satellite, God is watching every human being. ***The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth*** (Psalm 33:13-14).

Researchers realize that people need companions and helpers, but what they often so sadly do not understand is that God is the best Helper ever. ***Behold, God is my helper; the***

***Lord is the sustainer of my soul*** (Psalm 54:4 [NASB]). We have a great helper and companion in God.

On a recent trip to that wondrously beautiful country of Canada, I was again deeply impressed to see how God is taking care of His smallest creatures.

Early one morning, as I was jogging, I stopped in my tracks in amazement as I saw overhead, a large number 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 gaggle to each other in “goose talk.”

Discussing it with my host, I discovered that Edmonton is one of their “motel stops.” At 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 in their famous V-formation. As each bird flaps his wings, it creates uplift for the bird following immediately behind it, adding greater flying range than if each bird flew alone. Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed. When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back in the formation and another goose takes his place in front. When a goose falls out of formation, he suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone, and smart geese quickly get back in formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the group. When a goose gets sick or hurt and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with him. They follow the suffering goose down to the ground to help and protect it. They stay with the fallen goose until he is able to fly or dies. Then they launch out to catch a passing formation of geese so that they can head to their mutual destination together.

Scientists have made progress in their research on the navigation systems of migrating birds, but it remains a mystery how these birds guide themselves. Good sight and hearing alone cannot explain how they travel so unerringly for thousands of miles. God has planted these abilities in them, and He looks after them as they travel. Did our Master not say that God feeds and takes care even of the most insignificant birds (Matthew 6:26)?

A few days later, quite early in the morning, while gingerly jogging along a very slippery, icy mountain road, I suddenly

came across a coyote as he foraged for food. When I spoke to him, he ran for dear life — he had never heard Japanese before!

My host, again my mentor, told me that these coyotes usually cover 15 to 20 miles a day in search of food, but what they do not realize with their animal brains is that God takes care of the balance in nature to supply food for them.

Every day God's creatures are in His care! We have no reason ever to grumble or be dissatisfied! Even if we are not conscious of it, we too are under the constant and perfect surveillance of the Creator of the universe! ***The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good*** (Proverbs 15:3).

What a comforting thought to know that God is everywhere. Wherever we are in the world, He is able to look after you and me at the same time! Therefore, we can even face old age with joy because every day is one little step closer to our eternal home!

## Ten Thousand Cheers for Jesus!

On September 9, 2004, Peggy and I were just about to go out quietly to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. On our way to the car, I happened to notice Alex, one of my grandsons, wiping the perspiration off his forehead as he was working on cleaning the muck out of an air conditioner.

“Alex, do you know what the real purpose for your life is?” I casually asked him as I walked by.

“To glorify God!” he responded with the most thought-provoking answer, and that while he was dirty with grease and mud! When I had flippantly voiced that question to Alex, I did not realize that, at his age, he would so quickly and so accurately give me the reason why he was here on earth!

As we drove away in the car, and I saw Alex in the rear mirror concentrating on his dirty job, the following verse came to mind: ***Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*** (1 Corinthians 10:31). Little did I know that God would test my innermost being before the day was out to see if I was willing to give Him glory at any cost.

Peggy and I spent a very happy day together, but that night, our son David woke us up out of a deep sleep and told us that Mr. Tom Poole, one of our workers had suddenly passed on to his reward after choking on some food.

“Lord, why did you not take me or Peggy?” I complained to the Lord. “We are expendable! We are both in our 80s! We’ve run the race and are near the finish line!”

“Why did you have to take Tom of all people?” I continued. “He has three young children and was only 58 years old! He was healthy and active, and he was a key person in our community. We need him!”

“Why?! Why?! Why?!” I said repeatedly to God, questioning Him and His wisdom. It is not necessarily wrong to question God, I think. Moses, Jeremiah and many others complained to God. But I do think it is wrong when we question Him with a rebellious heart and without an attitude of trust.

In the early morning hours, I saw things in the right perspective. God, who plans everything in detail, planned Tom's time of death before the foundation of the world to bring glory to His Name. He wanted to speak to many people, including me. It helped me to have a closer walk with God as I recalled the last conversation I had with Tom. It was not about our own interests, but about the importance of the glory of God in our lives.

Unfortunately, many of us are more interested in God serving us than us serving Him and bringing glory to His Name. Too many of us are always thinking of "me, me, me!" But, life is not all about me and what I want. It is about God's glory!

Especially when we grow older, the danger can be that we want to keep ourselves, our desires and our ambitions in the center of our lives, instead of God's glory. Too many of us are more concerned about God supplying our own needs than pursuing His glory. When we pray about our needs, we should remember to pray as Jesus taught His disciples (Matthew 6:9-10).

Our Father in heaven should be right at the start of our prayer, not first listing our own needs and problems. Your kingdom come, not "My kingdom come!" Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, not "My will be done!" Only after we pray in this manner, can we humbly ask for our daily bread.

Often, without any reference to God's glory, we pray for healing, prosperity and success for ourselves and for others! That is not how Jesus prayed! He taught us saying, ***The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified*** (John 12:23). Jesus did not complain because He was going to hang on that horrible cross! God's glory was more important to Him than anything else.

***Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name*** (John 12:27-28). When He was storm-tossed and deeply troubled by His feelings, He did not plead, "Father, get me out of this!" Rather, He wanted God to put His glory on display!

The glory of God should be the predominant motive in our life. We serve Him and not ourselves. This also has a bearing in even the most stressful circumstances.

One of the prisoners that I visited during 2005 put his life in order before God. He said to me that he realized that his habit of reading the Bible up until then had been completely wrong. He only chose to read portions that he could interpret as promises for personal gain. He was not interested in what God wanted from him. With a changed attitude, he reads the Bible in such a way that God can tell him how he can serve Him best and bring glory to His Name.

On hearing this, I was deeply impressed because I realize that many Christians in much better situations read the Bible with very selfish motives. They are just concerned about “showers of blessings” for themselves, instead of thinking what God wants from them in order to reach out to the world.

God’s glory for many of us has a very low priority in our lives. Therefore, it was inspirational for when we were visited by two tourists from South Africa in whose lives the glory of God was the overriding factor in everything.

These two delightful grannies had lost their mates and had the time and the resources to travel. Many people travel for their own enjoyment, but it was so refreshing to meet people like these two stalwarts who had a dual purpose in traveling — to be available to be used by God for His glory.

“Mr. Verwey, we have asked God to make us a blessing to at least one person in every country we visit,” they said. They were not very firm on their feet any more, and one was walking with a cane, but they were battle-ready for anything God had in mind for them. With some concern, I gave them a supply of tracts and had them stand on a corner in Osaka where people take tracts as fast as you can give them out. While unsteadily moving about in the hot summer sun to distribute the tracts, they did not know that God was about to send a man their way who was desperate.

This man heard a voice in his ear and he liked the voice because it told him jokes. Slowly but surely the voice took charge of his life and later on, he had to carry out everything the voice told him to do. One day, the voice said to him repeatedly, “Kill yourself! Kill yourself!” He did not know exactly how to take his life, but decided to gulp down a whole bottle of sleeping pills.

He did not die as he had expected, though. Someone discovered him, and, at the hospital where he was taken, the

emergency staff pumped his stomach. Damaged mentally and physically, the doctors sent him from hospital to hospital. After two years, the doctor in charge finally pronounced him well enough to be discharged. He was not bothered by that unknown voice anymore, but he did not know where to go and aimlessly wandered around the streets of Osaka.

“What is going to happen to a poor man like me,” he cried out in desperation to all the gods he knew. It was at this time that one of these gray-haired women from South Africa tottered across his path and gave him a tract to read.

After he found a place to stay, he read the tract. It moved him so deeply that he wrote us a twelve-page letter. We immediately sent one of our evangelists to explain the way of salvation to him.

“Please find that lady who placed me in contact with the Living God,” he earnestly requested. “Convey to her my deepest gratitude!”

When we are on vacation, like these two women, are we just concerned about our own pleasures, or are we available to God to use us any way He sees fit?

“Please God, if there is someone on the way I am traveling today who must hear the Gospel, please don’t pass me by, but use me,” I often pray when I travel far or near.

God is looking for people who are available, and not set on their own timetable. At a time of God’s choosing, He will bring glory to His Name.

God found a man like that in Mr. Sato, my fellow worker, who even in years of fading strength was absolutely determined to bring glory to God.

Mr. Sato, who found God as a young man, joined the Japan Mission in his later years. When he was younger, he would do eighty push-ups every morning, but when he reached the age of 82, he was down to forty! By the time he reached 89, his eyesight had also deteriorated, but he spread the aroma of Christ wherever he went.

“He brings blessing to our members every time he preaches in our church,” one of the younger ministers said to me. To assist Mr. Sato in his almost one-hour long sermons, they always had



*Minoru Sato*

a chair ready for him to sit down on if he became tired while preaching, but he always preferred to stand.

“We are sometimes afraid you might not last until the end of your message,” one of the elders once joked.

“If that happens, I want you all to shout, ‘ten thousand cheers for Jesus!’” he responded.

One very hot day, he walked down to the station to catch a train to go to one of his appointments. As he waited there, he suddenly discovered that his feet refused to move. The stationmaster happened to pass by and Mr. Sato asked him if he could rest in his air-conditioned office for a while. The stationmaster called several of his staff members to help him get there. There he exercised for some thirty minutes, until his feet would listen once more to the commands of his brain! Then he went on his planned journey to serve the Lord!

What would I have done on a seething hot day at a railway station, if I suddenly found out that my feet would not move? I likely would have urged the stationmaster to call an ambulance to take me to a hospital as soon as possible! It was not so with our Mr. Sato. God’s business and glory always came first, and then his own physical needs.

At our next Japan Mission prayer meeting, on relating his experience, Mr. Sato read to us, ***Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities ... for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong*** (2 Corinthians 12:10).

“I am happy with my limitations,” Mr. Sato told us. “I am glad just for Christ to take over, because the weaker I get, the more I have to depend on Him, and the stronger He gets in me!”

At the age of 85, I noticed that Mr. Sato was starting to have problems remembering things, and his memory lapses sometimes really let him down. He would forget his Bible in the most unlikely places. On one occasion, he walked down to the station from his house, having his Bible in his briefcase. At the station, standing and waiting for the next train, he put his briefcase down on the platform next to him, and then boarded the train, forgetting his precious Bible there on the platform!

One day, he phoned us saying, “I got off at a station to use the restroom and forgot my Bible there!”

“That’s no problem,” I assured him. “Tell me the name of the station and I will go and get your Bible.” There was a long pause

at the other end of the line, and then he admitted, "I'm afraid I've forgotten the name of the station!"

While he was still on the phone, I prayed with him, trusting that somehow or other God would continue to use that particular Bible to be a blessing to someone. He never could find that Bible again, but we trust that it is still useful in God's service somewhere. Since then, Mr. Sato prayed that God would help him not to leave his Bible behind anywhere, and God answered his prayer in a unique way.

"I never forget my Bible any more!" Mr. Sato cheerfully told us at one of our prayer meetings. "God gave me a wonderful solution!" We all anxiously waited to hear what that wonderful solution could be.

Out of his pocket, he produced a strong but fine silver chain. "The one end of this chain I attach to my wrist, and the other end I attach to my briefcase," Mr. Sato demonstrated for us, adding, "I don't forget my Bible anymore!"

We all praised the Lord with Mr. Sato that although in many ways he is absent-minded, when he preached, he could recall the truths of the Bible to such an extent that his message was always a blessing to those who heard him. His eyesight was not as good anymore, but if he could just make out the first few verses in a chapter of the Bible, he could usually recall the rest of the chapter from his memory in a remarkable way.

"I'm so glad that I memorized so much of the Bible in my younger days," he said. "In many things now my mind just goes blank, but the Bible verses I committed to memory many years ago have somehow stuck! Now, even as I am falling apart in more than one way, it is a help in my preaching!"

Apart from his many other responsibilities, until he reached the age of 90, three churches still invited him to preach for them on a regular basis. Mr. Sato never threw in the towel when his strength and abilities declined. His motto was 2 Corinthians 4:16! ***Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.***

At age 96, on December 17, 2007, Mr. Sato, my dearest fellow worker and confidant for over 50 years, silently slipped into eternity. We felt a void in the ranks of the Japan Mission upon his death. Many unsaved members of his family wept

uncontrollably because they did not realize that he had gone forever to be in the glorious presence of Jesus!

A few weeks before this, when he was hospitalized, he was at the brink of death. He said that he saw the heavens open to welcome him, but God said to him “Kaere!” (“Go back!”) He was revived to such an extent that the doctors allowed him to return home and live for another week, as his large family circle came from far and near to say their final farewells to him. God wanted him on earth one more week for the well-being of his family, and then he died peacefully.

When Mr. Sato was a young man, he had given his life to Christ when he read Revelation 3:20, where Jesus said, ***Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.***

At his funeral, with hundreds in attendance, I challenged the people and his unsaved family members to open their hearts to Jesus Christ. I asked them to repeat aloud, after me in prayer, as I led them to open the door of their lives, asking Christ to come into their hearts and to have intimate fellowship with them. How many prayed that prayer in earnest that day, I will never know; but I believe that God gave many unbelievers an opportunity to respond to Him that day. Mr. Sato was a living testimony of someone who was concerned for God’s glory.

Miss Florence Penny also strived unswervingly for God’s honor. She was born again in 1927, in the same year that I was born in Vryburg, South Africa.

Our first contact with this remarkable lady, originally from London, was in 1955 when she invited Peggy and me to hold a Christmas meeting in a large tuberculosis hospital near her home. On the way there by train, we wondered how we could possibly bring cheer and joy to such a gloomy place.

When we entered the sanatorium, we could not believe our ears! We heard beautiful organ music echoing down the corridors. Miss Penny was playing Christmas carols in the hall, which she had tastefully decorated to emphasize the joyous birth of Christ.

“Wherever did you get this organ from?” we enquired. “Someone helped me to fasten it on the back of my bicycle and

I managed to push it here,” she answered. To me she looked so frail that I wondered how she could possibly have done so!

“Some people along the way helped me not to lose my balance on the steep gravel path leading up to the hospital,” she assured me. I could see that she was determined to make that service an unforgettable experience for all the patients. **Whatever He says to you, do it** (John 2:5) had always been her life’s motto.

That encounter with Miss Penny was when she was only 47 years old. From then on Peggy and I remained her close friends. We watched her, up to the age of 95, always in high gear with all the meetings and responsibilities of the church.

When Miss Penny hit the age of 80, we had problems trying to get her to switch to a lower gear! Friday was her shopping day, and she would get off the bus, struggling uphill to her house with all her groceries for that weekend’s cooking and entertainment. We felt very sorry for her, and so much wanted to make her load lighter.



Miss Penny

“At your age, you do not need to travel in crowded buses anymore,” we told her one day. “We will give you a monthly contribution for taxi fare.” She received our gift graciously, but without us knowing it, deposited her taxi allowance in the bank. Just before Christmas that year, she gave us all that money back with interest!

“The Lord was so good to me. I did not need to use one taxi this year,” she said tactfully. This happened year after year, until we realized how futile it was to try to get her into a taxi.

“I enjoy being a senior citizen more and more every day,” Miss Penny said to a man complaining about the burden of getting old.

“Children are better off than we are,” he objected.

“I don’t agree,” Miss Penny said. “I believe that today is the most wonderful day of my life, and I believe that tomorrow will be even better!” She often hummed this song to herself.

***Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.  
Every day with Jesus, I love Him more and more.  
Jesus saves and helps me,  
and He is the one I am waiting for.***

***Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.***

She firmly believed the words of Proverbs 4:18 — ***The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.*** Right-living people walk along in the ever-brightening light of God's favor. The longer they live, the brighter they shine!

By the time Miss Penny was 90, she was far from well. She was struggling with high blood pressure and heart trouble, and to help her out at least once a month, I preached in her place at her Sunday morning worship service.

Even at her advanced age, after the service, she usually served a delicious meal to anyone who might be hanging around. While eating, I was often amazed to see how many times she had to run to the phone to assist someone who was relying on her for advice. To talk to her and to sense her joy in the Lord was no doubt a healing tonic to many.

On her 92nd birthday, we asked her when she was likely to retire from active missionary work. Well, Miss Penny could not even understand that concept! She was too deeply involved in her daily Christian activities.

She is the only missionary we know who did not take any type of vacation over a period of more than seventy years. When most missionaries in Japan spend time at some missionary resort to try to escape the summer heat of August, she started Daily Vacation Bible Classes for children. Many of those she led to the Lord as children are today getting old and are still serving Him!

When she was still young, a Christian doctor stopped by and asked her if she could start a Sunday school for the children of the hospital staff. One of his boys, Takuma Hashimoto was about five years old at that time. Later on, he became a medical doctor and professor. He was baptized in Miss Penny's church and later married Yuriko, one of Miss Penny's converts.

On July 20, 2001, Miss Penny turned 93, and what a day it was! Early that morning, she went out shopping in order to prepare a feast for her guests who would be coming from near

and far. On the bus on the way to the shops, she met a man with his family, whom she had taught when he was in kindergarten. They listened very intently as she again reminded them of what is most important in life.

Back at home, while preparing the meal, the telephone rang continuously, with her large circle of friends ringing to wish her well. Everyone who could attend the party told of the spiritual help Miss Penny had been to them.

Mrs. Okamuro related how God had helped her to find Christ out of the heresy of a fanatical Christian cult. Almost beside herself in desperation, she had wanted to speak to Miss Penny, but could not bring herself to enter the church. The inside of the church looked like a different world to her. She loitered in a vacant lot next to the church, and Miss Penny, ever alert for those needing help, noticed her and went outside to speak to her.

It did not take long for Mrs. Okamuro to become vitally interested in the teachings of Christ, but the heretical group she was involved in had programmed her mind. They told her that terrible judgment would strike her if she read any literature not published or approved by them. But God encouraged her through Psalm 118:6, which says ***The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*** From that day on, she was free and grew by leaps and bounds in Christ.

Those who could not be present at Miss Penny's birthday celebration sent her presents by special delivery. One came in a box nearly as tall as she was. Taking her time, she managed to get it into her sitting room. Upon unwrapping it, she was delighted to find a beautiful orchid, carefully wrapped in layers of plastic and tissue to protect it. It came from Mrs. Yuriko Hashimoto, the wife of the Christian doctor, who had been one of her kindergarten students.

"The orchid was not the best present I received from Yuriko," Miss Penny commented. "I received something much more precious from her." We wondered what Yuriko had given her that could be more beautiful and valuable than the gorgeous orchid gracing the corner of her sitting room. While we sipped a cup of real English tea, Miss Penny told us all about what happened just before her birthday.

Yuriko's oldest brother was dying of cancer and her husband was treating him at his private hospital. Although her brother seemed to be considering giving his life to Christ, he was very reluctant to take such a life-changing step. In the meantime, he was physically deteriorating very fast.

While in the hospital, he had lost consciousness, and for ten days, there was no response from him. On the tenth day, Dr. Hashimoto called Yuriko and told her that her brother's end was very near. Yuriko prayerfully rushed to the hospital to say good-bye to him.

"Can you hear me?" she asked as she bent over him. "If so, nod your head." He clearly nodded his head. It was the first response from him in ten days, and she was elated when she realized that she could communicate with her beloved brother.

"If you believe in Jesus, nod your head again," she urged her brother. To her amazement, not only did he nod his head, but opened his eyes widely and said very clearly, "Yes! I believe in Jesus!" Then he was gone.

"That was the best present I have received this year for my birthday," Miss Penny assured us. "There is no better present for me than to realize that the converts carry on the message of salvation to others who need it!"

Similar to Miss Penny, I also experienced a joy greater than that of leading someone to the Lord.

During August 2007, I went to the Osaka Prison and met a new arrival from South Africa, who was serving a sentence for bringing drugs into the country. When I questioned him, he told me that he had become a Christian since he landed in jail. To my utter surprise, he said that among the 3,000 prisoners there, he had been placed in the same cell as Pedro, a man I had pointed to Christ a few years before! In a very short time, being with a believer, he also became a Christian!

When I prayed with him in front of the police, tears rolled down his cheeks as he thanked God that in his life-long search for God, he had to come to a prison in Japan to find Him!

Once Pedro experienced the wonder of pointing someone to the cross of Christ, there was no stopping him! He asked God to let those who need Christ cross his path, and every day he was on the lookout for them. He converted his cell into a place where

God dwells. In one corner, he has his library of books that I took to him over a period of years and on his little desk his open Bible! He was truly expecting those seeking the Lord to come to his “office.” Discipline is so strict in the prison that inmates can’t even visit each other’s cells, so God has sent spiritually hungry people to Pedro as overnight roommates.

Being a linguist, he prayed with several people from other language groups, who passed through his cell as “guests.” They got very little sleep, as Pedro, whispering so as not to alert the guards, told one after the other about the living Christ. He led several in the sinner’s prayer, and they left his cell in the morning “completely taken over by Jesus,” as Pedro describes it.

Next, he thought of starting a prayer meeting for the converts, but there was no place where detainees could have unofficial gatherings. So, every day when they gather on open grounds for exercise, they exercise in prayer, too. They lock arms and lean toward each other in a circle as they pray aloud for themselves and for the salvation of their fellow prisoners. Some detainees thought it strange and wanted to know what it was all about. Others have asked to join the circle of prayer. The officials look on and consider it “peaceful exercise,” so the prayer meeting is still going on!

Like Miss Penny, I was simply overwhelmed with joy! Not only did God transform Pedro, but he is now leading others to the Lord.

Soon after Miss Penny’s 94th birthday, Peggy and I arrived at her church just as she was finishing her Sunday school class.

“It is difficult for me nowadays to play the organ and lead the singing for the children at the same time,” she said. We also noticed that she was getting much weaker and found it difficult to keep her balance.

“I might not be able to run around as much nowadays, but I can spend more time in prayer,” she told us. The believers rallied around her to help her as much as possible, and Mr. Sasagawa gave a wonderful word of testimony before I brought the message to the congregation that Sunday morning.

“Thirty years ago, Miss Penny found me in a tuberculosis hospital and led me to the Lord,” he said. “When my health was

restored, Miss Penny arranged a wedding for me with a nurse that she had led to the Lord some time back. For our wedding anniversary, I always buy my wife a nice bunch of flowers, and then together we always thank the Lord for Miss Penny, who led us to Him and to each other.” How wonderful it was for Miss Penny, in her old age, to have friends like the Sasagawas.

After turning 95, she was still preaching every Sunday — on the book of Revelation in the morning and on Esther in the evening. As far as I know, she was the oldest active full-time missionary in Japan.

One of her last letters to her supporters in England was written with a very steady hand and in beautiful writing, thanking them for their support and prayers. The last sentence was most moving. “It seems that the darkness deepens around me, but our GOD is faithful and true and abides forever; and we look up and rejoice in the promise of HIS coming for us.”

As Miss Penny was weakening, her four adopted children took turns taking care of her. She had adopted them, as babies, when no one wanted them and brought them up as her own. Now, already middle-aged, they have made their mark in life. For many years, they and their children were recipients of Miss Penny’s unfailing love. Now they had an opportunity to repay her by not putting her in a nursing home, where her personality would not have fit in easily, but with around-the-clock help and care in her own house. Until the end, she had been too independent to allow them to do anything more concrete for her.

She spent more time in bed and slept more, but in a way it seemed that she was always on duty, until 9:47 p.m., September 17, 2003, when she was called home at the age of 95. In their evening devotions, her son-in-law was reading Psalm 23 to her. ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.***

Suddenly, she took a deep breath, looked intently at him, and went to be with the Lord. Her son-in-law called all her children and grandchildren, and they wept together; but they did so praising God for her godly life.

For 71 years, she was an active missionary, pouring out her life for Japan. She also ran a kindergarten, sometimes single-

handedly, for some 38 years. About 1,300 children, after they had completed a year of daily studies with her, graduated from her day nursery in preparation for school and life. Today, they are in many occupations and are still looking back on that time when they learned from Miss Penny to pray to the living God and sing praises to Him!

We were surprised to find that her worn-out prayer book showed that she was praying for hundreds of people every day. "I pray for you seven times a day", she assured us when she was still alive.

How true of her life — ***She has done what she could*** (Mark 14:8)! Even her departure from life was a God-glorifying experience.

This was also true in the case of Mrs. Yoneda, one of our own nearest neighbors. The dark backroom where Mrs. Yoneda lived was about five meters away from our house, hidden behind a green hedge. We did not know it then, but she was bed-ridden. First, she had been just a "cough" in the house next door. For months, Peggy and I were only aware of this person's existence when we heard this dry, hacking cough, especially in the quiet of the night. This cough became a challenge for prayer. We were determined that each cough would be accompanied by a prayer for the salvation of that unknown person.



*Mrs Yoneda*

Finally, her daughter-in-law, who in the beginning would not even allow us to come into her house, agreed for us to visit the "cough," in a little room at the back of her wooden house. There we met Mrs. Yoneda, who had been bedridden for 60 years and was now in her 80s. She was dreadfully crippled with arthritis and suffering from asthma. She was delighted to see us, for she was very lonely. Even her daughter-in-law, living in the same house, visited her as seldom as possible, for she and her husband regarded her as a nuisance. Often she contemplated suicide, but could not devise any means to do so.

Hearing about Jesus for the first time in her life from our fellow workers and us, she soon believed in Him. Her face beamed with joy and peace. Even her unsaved son and daughter-in-law were amazed at the change in her.

One morning at 4:30 a.m., she rang the bell next to her bed. Her sleepy-looking, disgruntled daughter-in-law soon responded.

“Whatever do you want, Grandma?” she wanted to know. “Do you know what time it is?”

“I’m very sorry, my dear,” Mrs. Yoneda said. “This is the very last day I will bother you because I am going on a journey, and I want you to help me with preparations.”

“Don’t be silly!” her daughter-in-law responded. “Where can you go? You’re too weak to even get out of bed!”

Be as it may, by 6:30 that morning, Mrs. Yoneda was dressed in her very best kimono, her hair neatly combed and by the side of her pillow lay her most treasured possession, her Bible. At her request, all her family members gathered at her side.

“I am going to God’s new world,” she explained to them. “I pray earnestly that you, too, will join me there one day.” No one could believe what she was saying, but when her voice got weaker and she lay back and closed her eyes, the family summoned the doctor. By nightfall, she had peacefully gone to be with the Savior, whom she so dearly loved.

Our last days on earth can be full of God’s glory if we allow Him free rein in our lives!

I once heard a story of the already elderly Corrie Ten Boom that I will never forget. A friend noticed that she had purchased some new travel bags, and he enquired about them. She told him that an angel had appeared to her when she was 70 years old and told her that she had ten more years to live. If so, it was time to buy new traveling bags, she thought, because she had to travel all the time to get to her appointments!

Five years later, her friend visited her on what appeared to be her deathbed. She was in incredible pain and suffering greatly. Corrie then told him that the angel had visited her again.

“What did the angel say?” her friend wanted to know, so Corrie told him about her conversation with the angel.

Angel: “The sickness you are now suffering will eventually lead to your death. You will never get better, but the pain and suffering will stay with you until the end.”

Corrie: “But Angel, you told me I have five more years to live!”

Angel: “Your Father knows the suffering that you have to endure, and He has sent me to you ahead of time to say that you do not have to go through it. You can come home to heaven now. It is your choice!”

Corrie: “Which will bring my Father the greatest glory?”

Angel: “Stay and suffer for the five remaining years!”

Corrie rejoicing: “Then that is my choice! I will stay and suffer for five more years.”

As her friend wondered, so we also wonder, how she could have made such a difficult choice? She knew the truth of James 1:2, where it says, **Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials** (NASB). When trouble came her way, she considered it a gift from God and was very happy. She did not seek comfort and ease, but rather to radiate her Father’s glory.

The older I get, the more I realize the importance of God’s glory! I am determined, in my remaining days, to give God the maximum glory I am capable of every day. He must get all of the credit as the One mighty in everything. With that in mind, I want to sprint over the winner’s line!

***That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen*** (1 Peter 4:11).

## The Best Compass Ever

There is nothing sadder than to come across elderly people who have lost their spiritual perspective and sense of direction, and are pitiful examples to those they meet in everyday life.

Recently, the police arrested three members of a family in Furukawa, Japan. They had all driven cars without a driver's license for decades. It was only after the father caused an accident that the police discovered their wrongdoing.

"Yes, it is true," Mr. Sotome, 67, confessed to the police. "I have driven without a license for about 50 years." His two sons, Shinichi, 42, and Harunobu, 34, also admitted to the police that they also had done so for 20 years and 15 years, respectively!

"If father could get away with it, why not us?" they reasoned. No wonder the police promptly arrested all three of them.

As elderly people, we need to be careful because our children and others are watching us and often follow our example! Therefore, let us embrace the advice of Titus 2:7, which says, ***In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works.***

I know many with Shinto backgrounds who, in their evening years, are setting a do-good example to the best of their ability to their family, friends and neighbors.

A famous artist, well advanced in years, had undertaken a world tour. He looked up the people who had previously bought what he regarded as his inferior pictures and replaced them with high-standard paintings. In his younger days, as a struggling artist, he had painted for food and lodging, and is now ashamed of the work he had then produced.

"Those paintings are crude, sloppy and not artistic," he insisted. "They bring dishonor to the owners!" With better training and years of experience behind him, he produced his best artwork in his evening years. A high standard was more important to him than money and time. He did not care about the cost or the time involved, and was adamant to retrieve

all of those second-rate paintings and replace them with better ones.

Like this world-famous artist, others also try to put right situations that they had messed up, before it is too late. Often it happens in small towns where everybody knows about one's actions and where it is very important to protect the name and reputation of one's family.

In rural Japan, a 23-year-old man, similar to the prodigal son of the Bible parable, wanted to seek his fortune, having left his hard-working parents eking out a living on their small plot of land. Needing money fast, he entered a bar and robbed them of everything that was in the till. He had not known it would be so easy to get hold of cash! No more hard work for him he thought. For the next eighteen years, he was never short of money. The police finally caught him, and promptly put him in jail.

He was not aware of it, but in the meantime his father had died. His mother, not knowing what had happened to him, started looking for him when she was 82. She did not know if he was still alive, and approached the local police.

"My son left our home thirty years ago," she informed them. "Can you possibly trace his whereabouts?" After many inquiries, the police told her the shocking news that he was in jail.

Saddened, his elderly mother wrote him a letter, asking him to start over with a clean slate and to come live with her. On receiving the letter, he completely broke down and made a full confession to the police of the 130 places he had robbed.

"My mother still loves me!" he declared unashamedly. "I am willing to take my punishment. When I am through with my jail sentence, I want to go home where my mother is waiting for me!"

There was an elderly former military officer in a rehabilitation center who wanted to wipe his slate clean after ten years.

Officers at the Tokyo Airport Police Station were greatly surprised to receive a letter of gratitude and 5,000 yen (\$50/£25) in cash from a former Self-Defense Forces member. He confessed that he had borrowed 1,000 yen from the police box at the airport more than a decade ago because he did not have enough cash to pay the fare from the airport to return to his base.

He fully intended to pay it back, but after suffering a stroke, he was physically and mentally unable to arrange to repay his debt. Then, after many years of undergoing rehabilitation, he felt he could make a special effort to amend the past and wrote the following letter.

Because of my physical limitations, I cannot write neatly by hand. Therefore, I have borrowed a word processor to type this important letter.

Now, at last, I am able to pay the money back. Until today, I have been feeling like a criminal, but I now hereby return the money with interest. If any rules make it impossible for you, as police officers, to accept the money, please donate it to a good cause, such as to buy medicine for a sick person.

The police phoned in order to verify his identification, but learned that he lived in a welfare facility, and had lost his ability to speak. He was still suffering badly from the effects of his stroke, but the letter was very legible and touching.

The police who were stationed at the airport when the man borrowed the money had all been transferred. The current staff had no knowledge of the incident, but they decided to honor his wish. They accepted 1,000 yen for the police benevolent fund and used the remaining 4,000 yen for social welfare purposes.

"I am really glad to know that this man kept his promise," said Mr. Chichii, the deputy chief of the police station. "This is an important lesson not only for the disabled, but for all our citizens to remember."

For those who call themselves Christians, the integrity of this disabled man implies a precious lesson. He probably never read the Bible, yet he followed one of its cautions and stipulations: ***Owe no one anything except to love one another*** (Romans 13:8). May we have no debts, except the huge debt of love that we owe to one another!

These are, indeed, marvelous examples. How much more marvelous it would have been, though, if they could have attempted their reconciliation from a Christian point of view — not out of a kind of legalism in order to feel better, but rather because they are saved and forgiven and act out of pure thanksgiving.

In the history of Japan, there are many who did not just put some single act of wrongdoing right, but truly found God,

repented of wickedness and lived a godly life afterwards. Mr. Shigoto Masuzaki was such a man.

He fought in the Meiji Civil War in 1877. When the enemy slaughtered his whole regiment, and he barely escaped with his life, it stimulated him to look for a deeper meaning in Buddhism. Within a short time, he became so pious that he was nicknamed the “Praying Magistrate.”

When his son, Sotohiko was born, his father designated him to be a student priest. Mr. Masuzaki’s underlings drummed into Sotohiko a knowledge of the sutras from the time he was very small. He was ordained as a monk when he was only ten years old, and for many years he repeated, *Namu amida butsu* (“Save me, merciful Buddha!”), thousands of times every day. In vain, he sought peace for his soul in that kind of life. He tried to commit suicide six times and every time something happened that prevented him from doing so at the last moment. Again at the age of 16, on his way to commit suicide, he ran into a Salvation Army open-air meeting and found the true God.

His conversion hurt his father very deeply. To him it was terrible to think that this Jesus devil possessed his son. To win his son back, he persecuted and tortured him daily, but for Sotohiko the Bible took on a deeper meaning when he read, ***For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*** (Philippians 1:29).

One night, he slipped away from the rigorous militaristic training of his father, went to church, and requested to be baptised. It was midnight when he arrived back home and his father was still busy in his study. Sotohiko fell on his knees and confessed that he had been baptised. For a few minutes, it seemed as though his father did not grasp the true implications of the step he had taken. Then his anger burst forth in a way Sotohiko had never experienced before.

“Oh, so you dared to bring everlasting shame on my name!” he shouted as he jumped up and drew his razor-sharp sword from its sheath. In a split second, the thought flashed through Sotohiko’s mind that he was about to die at his father’s hand.

Mr. Masuzaki lifted the sword above his head with the intention of cutting his child in two. In a moment of remorse for what he was about to do, he hesitated momentarily, and Sotohiko instinctively jumped aside and fled to the kitchen.

“Sotohiko, come back here at once, without your clothes on!” his father commanded him. Instantly, he obeyed his father’s order. While still busy tearing off his clothes, Sotohiko fell down in front of his father on the balcony of the study, expecting that seconds later he would be in heaven.

His father was confounded to see his son lying in front of him in absolute obedience, whereas minutes before he had fled in fear. With the flat side of his sword, he started hitting Sotohiko’s slender shoulders until they bled.

“My son, do you really mean it?” he asked in a voice somewhat more controlled. “What is more precious to you – this Jesus-devil or your father? Tonight, you must choose! Do you really think you can withstand all I can do to you?”

“Yes, anything,” Sotohiko answered immediately. In disgust, his father grabbed his naked son and threw him outside on a frozen pond. Exposed to the icy winds, Sotohiko’s wounds ached and the snow beneath him was colored red with his blood.

By this time, his grandmother was wide-awake and found her grandson sitting in the snow, naked and covered with blood. She heard him softly singing and thought that not only was his father crazy, but Sotohiko as well!

“Sotohiko! The hand of your father will yet cause your death,” she called out, jumping out the sliding door of her room into the snow in order to get her grandson into the house. She was the only person who could stand up to Mr. Masuzaki. She bathed and bandaged Sotohiko’s wounds and helped him to dress his shivering body in warm clothes. Immediately, he returned to his father’s study.

“Forgive my momentary disobedience,” he pleaded with his face on the floor. Even then, he was sure his father would kill him, but leaning on his sword, his father was shedding unmanly tears. In his whole life, Sotohiko had never seen his father cry. But these were not tears of repentance; they were tears of impotence.

That night, God spoke clearly to Sotohiko. ***Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father’ ... (Matthew 10:34-35).*** He packed a few things in his furoshiki (hold-all wrapping cloth), and left the house.

His father was furious when he heard that Sotohiko had fled. His son's faithlessness was breaking his heart!

Years passed — years during which his father tried in vain to reach the heart of his son. Then it dawned on him that maybe he should study Sotohiko's outlandish religion, Christianity, and thoroughly expose all its miserable principles. Then his son would come back to him, he thought.

Mr. Masuzaki bought a Bible, and day and night carefully examined Biblical truths. He wanted to find some errors in them, but he got stuck in the first chapter of Matthew! He just could not make heads or tails out of it. He read and reread it, and wondered how anyone could believe such unprecedented nonsense and then pretend it was a religion. His pride hindered him from asking anyone for help, so it took him three years before he could finish the first four chapters of Matthew. He read the same chapters repeatedly and wrote down pages and pages of his own impressions about them.

As the years went by, Mr. Masuzaki did the same with the rest of the Bible. Then, he concentrated especially on the Salvation Army books because his own son was now working for them. He paid special attention to the book *The Gospel for the Man in the Street* because the writer of that book was the man who had robbed him of his son's loyalty. He read the book so many times that he eventually knew all of it by heart!

The figure of Christ was the biggest obstacle for Sotohiko's father. If only he could prove that this Christ and His teachings were false, then there would be hope for his son. At first he did not like it, but the long hours he spent studying the Bible were gradually softening his heart, and to his own astonishment, he started to pray to the God he had so much despised. .

"O Christ, if You are God indeed, show me Your presence," he prayed. It was then the middle of February. Snow covered the earth, and Mr. Masuzaki was already 65 years old. For three weeks, he fasted and stood daily under the icy Garyusan Waterfall in order to shock his senses awake, so that he might understand spiritual things.

On the twenty-first day, he was blue from the cold and shivered uncontrollably when he stumbled away from the waterfall. Exhausted, he fell on to a rock and pressed the palms

of his shaking hands together in prayer. At that moment, Christ appeared to him in a very special way and changed him instantly into a new person.

Mr. Masuzaki had no words to explain what happened to him. The only thing he knew was that his heart was new, and he had a different outlook on everything! All he could think of then was to get in touch with his son, after so many years of estrangement, to tell him the good news of his conversion.

It was the first letter Sotohiko had received from his father in twelve years. He would have recognised his father's beautiful handwriting anywhere. Just seeing his address written in the unusual style of his father filled his heart with joy. Tears coursed down his cheeks, and he hugged the letter even before he had read a single word of it. Even when he opened it, his eyes were so full of tears that he found it difficult to read.

Your old father tore up four of your Bibles and eleven times mistreated you until you fell down unconscious. Only now do I realize how wicked and cruel I was. People do not even treat their animals so cruelly.

I am filled with regret and remorse. I battered you to the brink of death. For weeks, I have wept over my wicked behavior. Can you ever forgive me?

Your old father decided to read the Bible, but it seemed to me full of riddles. It was impossible for an old man, with a mind as full of evil as mine, to understand it; but by now I have read the Bible straight through several times.

“On my birthday, I decided to go to the Garyusan Waterfall. I took an oath to remain in the snow and ice for twenty-one days to plead to God to have mercy on me in my depravity. On the last day of my oath, an angel in a white robe appeared to me. Could it have been Jesus?”

Sotohiko wept unashamedly, his heart bursting with joy. His elderly father had even invited him to return home. When Sotohiko arrived, Mr. Masuzaki welcomed his son as an important and honored guest. He took him to the guest room, and insisted that Sotohiko sit in the place of honor. Sotohiko knew that it was unheard of to do this and protested, but he could see that nothing would induce his father to sit there himself. Sotohiko sat on his folded legs in that place — a place in which he had never

sat before since it was a place meant only for his father or for honored guests.

But that was not all. His father did more unheard of things that day. He knelt at the door in the place reserved for the servants. When Mr. Masuzaki was satisfied with the new status he had attributed to himself and his son, he could no longer hold back his tears!

“My son! My son! I beg you to forgive me!” his father beseeched him, kneeling pathetically with his face between the empty shoes of the servants on the cold stone floor. “I sincerely ask you to forgive my blindness and sin in banishing you from your home and disinheriting you until now.”

Sotohiko could not believe what he was seeing and hearing! He wanted to jump up and exchange places with his father, so that he too could confess, but his father would not hear of it.

“Sotohiko, please look at the new scroll now hanging in the tokonoma alcove,” his father urged him. Turning around, Sotohiko looked at the alcove of honor, which reflected the house owner’s most important philosophy of life, and sat in stunned silence. How shocked and proud he was to see the change his father had made there.

Hanging in that place of honor was a scroll written by his father. A simple arrangement of cherry blossoms accentuated the message of the scroll. “I turned around and beheld Golgotha.”

From that time on, his father led a godly life, dedicated to serving his Lord. His spiritual compass indicated the right direction for his life until his death in his seventy-first year.

When he fell seriously ill, he wrote Sotohiko a letter. “It won’t be long before I go to heaven. Thank God, I am ready! Hallelujah! However, you must not be worried and allow yourself to shirk your duties just to come and see me.”

Shortly afterwards a telegram arrived informing Sotohiko of his father’s critical condition. He left for home immediately.

“Your son is here,” Sotohiko’s aunt, who was nursing his father, announced. His father was weak, but with a great effort, he raised himself up on his bed.

“Coward! Go back! Go back!” he scolded Sotohiko in his weak voice. “Has the struggle become too much for you? Your work for the Lord is much more important than standing around

at the bedside of an old man! Go back!” Exhausted by the effort, Mr. Masuzaki sank back on his pillow.

For two days and two nights, Sotohiko kept watch at his father’s bedside and helped his aunt to nurse him. With almost his last breath, on the evening of the second day, Mr. Masuzaki beckoned his son to come closer.

“My son! My son! You are a good man,” he said, and his voice was exceptionally clear. “You discovered something so wonderful, and you led me to a special little place in heaven. Sotohiko, thank you so much!”

After his father passed away, Sotohiko found his father’s will in a big envelope. On it he had written in his beautiful, strong handwriting, “SUMMONED TO GOD!”

The first words written in his will were, “When this envelope is opened, I will already be a citizen of heaven. Sotohiko is my greatest benefactor. He showed me the road to heaven.”

The envelope also contained Mr. Masuzaki’s “jisei.” It is customary in Japan for cultured people to express their last thoughts on earth in a poem of two lines.

His jisei read:

***Journey through the wilderness ended;  
Joy inexpressible with Father above.***

God did not only work in the lives of elderly people in Japan before I was born. He is also at work in the lives of people we are in touch with today. Johnny Walker is one of them.

He was an American prisoner of war, and the Japanese made him work in the coal mines in Sendai. He suffered much, even sometimes having to work in his bare feet in icy conditions. Many of his fellow prisoners died, and at the end of the Second World War when he was released, he said that there was one thing he was determined to do and that was “to hate the Japanese until the day I die!”

Many years later, he gave his life to God and regretted his oath to hate because, even after such a life transforming experience, he still had hatred burning in his heart toward the Japanese. God showed him clearly how terribly wrong it was, but he could not help himself. ***He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes*** (1 John 2:11).

Aware of his revulsion for the Japanese, he was stumbling blindly in the dark not knowing where he was going. He was filled with such strong animosity for almost fifty years, and no matter how he tried, he could not get rid of it.

“I want to go to Japan and find a Japanese soldier who suffered as much as I did and embrace him, and then I am sure that this hatred will disappear from my heart,” he told his wife.

“I will go with you and help you find peace because I can’t live like this any more, seeing what hatred is doing to you,” his wife replied.

Johnny and his wife came to us in Japan as volunteers and helped build the house in which we are living. When I heard of the bitterness that Johnny had carried with him all those years, I explained to him that forgiveness is not decided in the area of emotions, but needs to start with the will.

“You might never ever feel like forgiving the Japanese, but you can make a decision, in faith with your will, to forgive them.” I explained to him. “Choose to do what God commands you to do, apart from your deceptive emotions. Decide to forgive. If you do so, God will set you free!”

That day Johnny did just that. He chose to do what God expected him to do, and I am so grateful to report that, while he was with us, God in His mercy released him completely from hatred and filled his heart with a love towards his previous enemies and for the Japanese he met day to day in the work he was doing for me. So great was the transformation in his life that he came back to Japan again and again on similar volunteer missions.

War and hate can do dreadful things and throw life’s compass completely out of whack! In 1968, Kim Sin-jo was one of 31 intelligent, young soldiers who were handpicked in North Korea for the job of assassinating the South Korean president, Park Chung-Hee. Mr. Kim was in command of the commando unit.

Dressed in civilian clothes, they stealthily tried to reach the Blue House, the presidential mansion. A police officer stopped them en route and demanded identification. The police noticed irregularities and in a shooting match, killed four of the assassins. The others fled, prompting a nationwide manhunt.

Mr. Kim was the luckiest. Police caught him with a grenade in his hand. He could have pulled the pin or been shot! Moments

before, another commando had blown himself up when police cornered him. Slowly Mr. Kim simply placed the grenade on the ground and surrendered.

“I had an aching desire to live,” Mr. Kim said. In the end, Mr. Kim was the only commando to survive.

After spending about a year in custody, and repenting of his evil intentions, Mr. Kim requested to become a South Korean citizen. He adjusted very well, and to this day, his name is synonymous with army training that prepares soldiers to be ready for action in five minutes. Still, the Blue House incident haunted him for many years.

“I feel guilty to this day,” Mr. Kim said. “I led 31 people to their death.”

In 1981, he went to church for the first time to appease his religious South Korean wife. The pastor informed Mr. Kim that the dead commandos lived in his han, the Korean expression for a tragic experience that was bottled inside one’s soul. With the pastor’s help he prayed and asked God to forgive him for the sins of his past. He eventually became a pastor.

Now Rev. Kim, who is in his 70s, is one of the pastors of the Sungnak Baptist Church, a towering complex in Seoul, and other political defectors from North Korea have been attracted to the church because of Rev. Kim’s involvement. He and his wife are praying for this verse to characterize their remaining years: ***Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us*** (Psalm 90:17).

Recently, I met Ichi and Chika Setoyama, retirees in Canada, and heard their remarkable story.

Ichi lived in Japan and listened to many Christian radio broadcasts, including Japan Mission’s “Voice of Joy” broadcast. He received a New Testament from us with a letter pointing him towards God.

He found God half-heartedly and later moved to Canada, where he totally wandered away from God for 20 years. He lived in sin, but God did not abandon him.

In this state of spiritual decline and desperate loneliness, he looked on the Internet to find a wife. He came across Chika, who was living in Japan. She went to Canada to meet him, and after a romance of a few months, they were married.

Chika had never had any contact with Christianity, but had a strong desire to go to church. Ichi adamantly refused to take her. He did not want to have anything to do with God, the Bible or church. He enjoyed his life of sin. He was out at sea and had no spiritual compass to guide him.

For two weeks, she wept and pleaded with him, until in desperation he gave in. He thought he would take her just once and get it over with. That Sunday morning, the Holy Spirit, through God's Word, transformed him in the twinkling of an eye, as he broke down before God. That very morning Chika also found God. Today, although they are no longer young, they are a lovely Christian couple living for God and for His purposes!

They came to know that the mercies of our God do not run dry, and His love never ends! ***Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not*** (Lamentations 3:22). They found direction in their spiritual lives, and are determined never to get diverted from the way of God again.

I also saw the love of God at work in the life of an elder who had lost his bearings.

One Sunday morning, after preaching at the Sunday morning worship service at a church far from the Japan Mission, he came to me and asked if I could go to his home to talk. I told him I had a full schedule and would prefer to talk to him at the church the next day before going on to my next meeting. He insisted that I come to his house, and I finally set up an appointment with him for the next day.

When I arrived at his home, a charming little girl was playing on the floor of the sitting room with her toys and dolls. Disregarding the child, he told me his story.

"Two years ago, my daughter asked me to look after her little girl while she was working," he said. "That little girl was then about the same age as this one, whom my wife is taking care of. If you listen to the rest of my story, you will understand why I do not want to be directly involved in looking after this one."

Already retired, he had gladly agreed to look after the previous child of his daughter, but one morning, when his wife was at work and he was busy with some domestic chores, the little girl had slipped through the unlatched gate of their swimming pool, fallen into the pool and drowned.

No earthly emergency measures could save her, but he had fallen on his face at the side of the swimming pool, crying out to God to give life back to the little girl. How would he ever be able to look into the face of his daughter, who had so fully entrusted her girl into his care?

He refused to move from the edge of the swimming pool and lay there on his face, determined to stay there until God gave life back to the little girl. That evening, many people had tried to talk him into giving up his vigil and going inside. Eventually, two ministers had come over and convinced him that life would not return to the little girl, no matter what he did.

The shock and trauma were so overwhelming that afterwards he often contemplated suicide. His family members were so worried about him that they even hid the car keys.

His faith was utterly shattered. He had been an elder for years in his church and every day opened the Bible, read to his family, and prayed with them. Now he felt that he could do so no longer! For two years, he had been in the deepest darkness of despair.

“Mr. Verwey,” he addressed me. “Since then, I always ask any preachers who preach to our congregation to pray for me, that God will bring me out of this darkness! I cannot pray for myself anymore or allow myself to grow attached to my daughter’s other little girl! What if God is going to punish me by taking her away too?” I listened to his story and just cried in my heart to God for wisdom.

“If anyone is going to pray in this house today, it has to be you, not me,” I assured him. “Two years ago, at the side of the pool, you refused to accept what God had allowed to come into your life, and you stepped out on a path of disobedience and darkness. It is high time that you pray and ask God to forgive you for going your own way for the last two years! You need to ask Him to help you to get back into fellowship with Him. Then, you will have enough confidence in yourself and in God to look after this child.”

He refused to pray, and I refused to pray, although it was very difficult for me not to pray, because my whole being was yearning for a solution. His wife, weeping about the impasse we had reached, left the room. While sipping tea, I continued to urge him to discontinue his state of enmity with God and to get his life right before Him.

“Does it not show you that God wants to reach out to you by giving you another child to look after?” I questioned him. “Does it not speak to you about the trust of your daughter?” He remained headstrong and unyielding. After we had finished several cups of tea, I told him that I had another appointment and had to leave.

“You have to pray, my friend — even if it just means groaning to Him! God will listen to your groans and your prayers.” I was still urging him to seek God, when he fell down on his face and started to weep, crying out to God for forgiveness! It is true that there was more groaning than prayer, but his wife and I too fell down on our faces, as we joined him in weeping and prayer. The little girl stopped playing, and probably wondered if she should cry, too.

After awhile, he stopped praying and was just softly repeating, “God is merciful! God is merciful!”

“Do you now have assurance that Christ has forgiven you for spurning His love for the past two years?” I asked him.

“Yes,” he said. “A great burden has been lifted from my shoulders, and I am back into fellowship with God.” The little girl started to play again with her dolls on the floor, and her grandfather lovingly patted her on her head.

When we walked out, he picked her up, and as I went on my way, I knew that God had done some refining work in the life of this elder. ***Indeed, those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction*** (Isaiah 29:24 [NIV]).

If we get off track, God helps us to get back on track. Instead of constantly mistrusting God and grumbling at people, we should gladly obey His teaching.

Peggy and I received a very encouraging letter from our old-time missionary friend Eunice Clarke from the UK on June 22, 2006. She is in her 80s, and God has given her a new lease of life.

She wrote:

About two and a half years ago, I was very tired and in a lot of pain. One day, God gave me a very comforting thought: “You are not in a cave BUT in a tunnel!!!” Both places are dark, but different. A tunnel has an exit as well as an entrance, but a cave takes you nowhere — once you roam around its labyrinths,

there is no way of escape! There is always light at the end of a tunnel! This gave me real hope and comfort, giving me improved health and filling me with peace and faith again.

***You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*** (Ephesians 5:8). She was so enlightened and invigorated that she later visited Japan twice in her old age, and God blessed her ministry.



Eunice Clarke

I met another person who groped along through gloom and blackness, but not only for two and a half years. His wandering lasted for 100 years! When I was traveling in Australia, a friend told me of Old Sandy, a centenarian. He had spent his life pleasing himself and had no time for the things of God. He had been an alcoholic for at least 75 years. He had also ill-treated his wife, who had long since gone to be with God.

One night, he had a dream. He saw a long, winding, white road, and at the end of it, there stood the Lord Himself. That long, winding road depicted his life. The voice of God, to which he had closed his ears for a century, spoke that night and told him that he had gone his own way for too long.

At last, he realized his waywardness and turned to God. When all hope of change seemed to have faded, the old man set out on the road that leads to the cross of Calvary and to a hunger for the Word of God. Unable to read because of failing eyesight, he paid children to read the Bible to him on their way home from school.

“Read that again,” Old Sandy sometimes interrupted, and after listening to it carefully, he would exclaim, “Well, isn’t that lovely!” He was living with only one purpose in mind — to please God.

“My one big regret is the hundred years of my life that I wasted!” he sighed. ***The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble*** (Proverbs 4:19). But when Old Sandy came into the bright light of Jesus, there was no more stumbling around in the darkness. ***I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life*** (John 8:12).

Maybe, like old Sandy, you need to ask God to help you to turn again to Him. ***Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!*** (Psalm 80:3)

The prodigal son was still quite a distance away when his father saw him. The father's heart pounded as he ran to his son, embraced him with loving mercy, and tenderly kissed him. What a moving picture of God, who is waiting for those who have gone astray, to return to Him.

***Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry*** (Luke 15:22-23).

If you return to your Father, He will be very quick to dress you in the finest robe, put the family ring on your finger and prepare a celebration for you unlike anything you have ever experienced in your life!

Always remember that God's love for you is beyond human comprehension!

***Could we with ink the ocean fill  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the Ocean dry.  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole  
Though stretched from sky to sky.\****

\* The Love of God, by Frederick Lehman

## The Elderly Living it Up

Gray hair is a mark of distinction! What is more heartening than to meet older Christians who are an encouragement to those around them? Listen not to their old-age-complaints, but to the precious experiences and the wisdom that they have gained through living a godly life.

When some people listen to senior citizens, they tend to look at their watches and think of a hundred other things they would rather do. But, thank God, it is not true of everyone! Others realize that the gray hairs of the elderly, especially those who lived a life loyal to God, are a mark of distinction, and they are eager to learn from these seasoned travelers on their way to eternity. ***So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*** (Psalm 90:12).

Scores of elderly people live life to the full, and I want to encourage you with their stories some of them, even though they are not all Christians.

In 1970, the newspapers and Time Asia reported that Dr. Shigeaki Hinohara was en-route to a medical conference when terrorists hijacked the plane on which he was a passenger. For four days, he and the 130 other passengers on board lived under the threat of death as the communist-inspired hijackers stalked the aisles with explosives strapped to their bodies.

“I expected to die,” said Dr. Hinohara, who is now 96 years old. For Dr. Hinohara, who is a Christian, those four days changed everything. “My life was spared, so I knew that I must dedicate it to other people.” Since then Dr. Hinohara has devoted much of his life – 35 years and counting – to helping the elderly Japanese learn to make the most of their sunset years. He has published an advice book, *How to Live Well*. (His publishers convinced him to change the title from *How to Die Well!*) The book sold more than 1.2 million copies, solidifying Dr. Hinohara’s status as Japan’s master of healthy aging.

“If you keep working, and if you keep learning something new all the time, you’ll never get old,” is Dr. Hinohara’s seductively simple message. He has practiced what he preached. Besides his medical duties, among many other things, he has become a part-time poet, novelist and composer.

When it comes to aging well, Dr. Hinohara is less concerned with the specifics of diet and exercise than with promoting the right mental attitude. “Japanese people already know how to live a long time,” he says. “Japan has the world’s highest life expectancy — at 85 years for women and 78 for men.” He points out that the number of centenarians in Japan has been soaring yearly. What they need to learn is how to stay productive and engaged after they have moved into the third phase of life. One of the first books that Dr. Hinohara published was about life after 75. “There is no reason to deplore getting old,” he says!

His day usually begins at 7:00, with a chauffeur picking him up for meetings and lectures, and ends with him writing late into the night. Many times he does not have time for lunch.

“I often set out to do things that people say I can’t do,” he says. “I try to do them, and destroy people’s preconceived notions. It’s fun! Once you turn 75, why not show your individuality?”

Dr. Hinohara is very positive about growing old. He believes very strongly that people need to have goals and ideas if they are to stay “young” in heart and be productive. He started a movement for people 75 years or older to actively enjoy their lives and contribute to society. A year after its establishment, the group – the New Elder Citizens Group – already had 1,650 members.

“Most people have undeveloped possibilities in them. They can do much more than they think is possible,” this incredible man declares.

One of the New Elder Citizens Group members took up painting when he was 75. At an exhibition, he received an award for his work. Dr. Hinohara had told this patient not to come to his hospital so often, and suggested he do something else, such as painting. The man reckoned that art was not his cup of tea and confessed that he had not liked his art teacher when he was at school. “When he tried painting, however, he found that he could do it!” boasted Dr. Hinohara about his “disciple.”

He advised another 75-year-old man to start learning about personal computers. The man did more. He eventually wrote a book about using computers, and taught many other elderly people how to use them!

“It takes time to learn new things,” he said. “But you have plenty of time after you retire!”

Mrs. Mori, a retiree, is not afraid of using new inventions. Wondering how her 3-year-old granddaughter, Rina is doing, she starts up her personal computer and logs on to the day-care center’s Internet telecast service. She can see Rina clearly 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. Mori is surprised to see that at the day-care center, she is eating everything, talking animatedly and having fun with her friends.

“I enjoy watching my grandchild on the computer,” Mrs. Mori said. “I see facial expressions I’ve never seen before!”

Many fathers who are posted overseas 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. Even pet owners watch their pets over the Internet from anywhere in the world, and an increasing number of grandparents use the service to keep up with their grandchildren, as Mrs. Mori does.

Dr. Hinohara holds special sessions for elderly people in many cities around Japan to teach them how to get the best out of life. After all, in Japan, there were only 153 people 100 years old or older in 1963. By 2007, however, Japan had over 30,000 centenarians, and the number is increasing.

Many centenarians enjoy life after 100. Mrs. Ikeba, at 103, fusses over what to wear when she goes out and occasionally loves a good steak. Her only regret is that she had to retire from her job as a tailor four years ago! It is this type of living that is very dear to the heart of Dr. Hinohara, and it inspires him all the more to live life to the fullest.

“After 75, you still have potential,” Dr. Hinohara insists. “But, you always need to start something new, something you’ve never tried before.”

Dr. Hinohara himself is still going strong, continues to lecture on aging around the world, writes books, and handles lots of fan

mail, which he receives every day! However, he is beginning to consider making a few concessions. He sees old age as a time when it is finally possible to cultivate an individuality that often has to be sacrificed for the sake of work when younger.

“Next year, when I turn 95, I think I’ll take up golf,” he says. “Finally then I’ll have the spare time, I guess.”

Dr. Hinohara is not the only one in Japan who is enjoying life and is active at a very old age. Mr. Kozo Haraguchi, at the age of 95, ran the 100 meters and broke his own record of 21.69 seconds, a world record for his age bracket! The track was slick with rain, but Mr. Haraguchi looked sturdy and fit as he dashed across the finish line. A former craftsman of paper doors, Mr. Haraguchi didn’t take up running until the age of 65, which still left him 30 years to prepare for his record-breaking sprint. Mr. Haraguchi, who also holds the record for the 90- to 94-year-olds, says that he hopes that his running record will inspire other seniors to also unleash their energy and potential.

“There are many people who are capable of doing similar things,” he says. “It’s such a waste to have the elderly do nothing.”

Over the years, he has inspired many other elderly people to take up running. One is Mr. Maezawa, 67, who lives in Tokyo. Mr. Maezawa, who still has a spring in his step, took up long-distance running at the age of 50, and he has already completed 181 marathons all over the world.

Mr. Maezawa, a former primary school teacher, has run at least one marathon every month for the last 17 years. Including unofficial meets, he has taken part in 238 marathons.

When Mr. Maezawa’s wife died seven years ago, he jogged every other day to his wife’s grave for a year to take flowers, a round trip of 10 km. Currently, he jogs to the cemetery twice a week to put fresh flowers on her grave.

“There are people who have finished a lot more marathons than I have, but I’m probably the only one who started at 50 and is still running a marathon every month,” he said. “I would like to continue running at my own pace and maintain my strength,” he said.

A local newspaper wrote about a 60-year-old solo mountain climber, who took just 106 days to conquer 100 of the country’s highest peaks.

Mr. Toyosaka, a retired auto-parts company employee, living in a suburb of Osaka, felt the need to achieve something to overcome the emptiness he felt after retirement. Having worked at the company for 36 years, Mr. Toyosaka retired in October 1997. Spending his days just idly passing time away, he soon began to feel empty inside. Then the idea of turning himself into a “living monument” sprang to his mind.

He prepared himself for his goal by speed-walking seven or eight kilometers a day to build up his stamina. Mr. Toyosaka began his challenge in May 2005 and tackled Mt. Miyanoura, the highest mountain in Kyushu.

After conquering that peak, he drove around the Japan Alps, sleeping in a tent, sometimes ascending three mountains in a single day. By early September, Mr. Toyosaka had climbed Japan’s 100 most famous mountains, ranging in height from 1,000 meters to 3,000 meters.

His climbs were not without incident. On August 7, while on Mt. Warusawa, he slipped on a rock, fell and broke a bone in his right hand. A doctor in a little village at the foot of the mountain bandaged and attached a splint to his hand. Undaunted, he continued with his climbing.

During his adventures, his weight dropped from 72 kg (158 lbs.) to a healthy 60 kg (132 lbs.), but Mr. Toyosaka’s crowning glory came on September 9, 1998, when he reached the summit of Mt. Fuji. There, he set up a banner that read, “Proud to be 60 years old and conquering Japan’s 100 highest mountains by myself.”

Other elderly Japanese mountain climbers, like Yuichiro Miura, also fill me with admiration. He retired from climbing mountains and breaking records at age 60, deciding he was too old to haul himself up mountains anymore. Handling the downhill portion of his life proved much more difficult.

After five lazy years of eating and drinking, he said that it was not enough just to talk about your past and to have no future dreams. When he was younger and an alpine climber, he was always thinking of some new record to break.

He had become the first person ever to ski down Mt. Everest, hurtling more than a mile down the peak’s icy flank in less than two minutes, descending 440 meters in an almost airless

world, barely surviving, after stopping dangerously close to a bottomless crevasse. He has since skied down the highest peaks on all seven continents.

His drinking companions, all of them well along in age, could not understand why his voluntary retirement from mountain climbing frustrated him so much, and they thought he was crazy; but, after five years of training, he became – at the age of 70 – the oldest person ever to reach the roof of the world. He reached the 8,850-meter summit of Mt. Everest, on May 22, 2003.

Scaling Mt. Everest, the mountain of all mountains, is not child's play. Climbing higher than 8,000 meters, there is only about 30% as much oxygen as at sea level. Climbers refer to altitudes in excess of 8,000 meters as “the death zone.” The oxygen-starved brain tends to influence a person's decision-making capability, and even some experienced climbers have lost their lives because of mistakes made under these conditions. More than 1,200 climbers have attempted to reach the summit in the last 50 years and at least 175 have died trying! Even extremely fit young climbers need to stop for breath every few steps at that altitude. At the age of 70, though, Mr. Miura coped just fine.

Mr. Miura's party had made good progress, but near the top, the weather turned bad. The heavy winds and snow forced the team to postpone its assault on the summit repeatedly, and they had to spend four days in the high-altitude “death zone.” The blustery weather finally cleared, and the team set out on the final leg of the ascent. Mr. Miura, his 33-year-old son, and a 46-year-old cameraman reached the summit that day.

“I have accomplished one of my life's most earnest dreams,” Mr. Miura excitedly explained by satellite phone from the summit. “I now stand at the highest point on earth.” His courageous achievement at his age impressed many people around the world.

“No matter how old people are, they can still accomplish their dreams,” Mr. Miura said as he was making history. “You just have to continue to make an effort to turn your dreams into reality. I learned that if you keep taking one small step after another, you can even stand on top of the world!”

The remarkable septuagenarian is now planning another Everest ascent in 2008 at the age of 75. In preparation, he is walking nearly everywhere with more than 20 kg of weight strapped to his back and ankles.

“When you’re getting older, you tend to rationalize and think of all the reasons why you can’t do this or that,” he explains. “If I am going to die, I would rather do it on Mt. Everest than in a hospital!”

On May 31, 2006, the 70-year-old Takao Arayama scaled the peak of Mt. Everest, claiming to be the oldest person who ever accomplished such a feat. He is three days older than Mr. Miura.

It isn’t just men who are into mountain climbing. Ms. Tamae Watanabe also knows what it feels like to be on top of the world. After all, she has been there! In 2002, at the age of 63, Ms. Watanabe, an ordinary office worker in Japan, became the oldest woman to scale Mt. Everest.

Some elderly people in Japan want to go as high as possible, but others want to go as far as possible. In 2005, 71-year-old Minoru Saito became the oldest person to sail solo around the world without stopping!

“I thought my life after 70 was finished, but I discovered that there is more to life than just sitting around doing nothing,” says Mr. Saito, as weathered as a tugboat and as trim as a battleship. During his 244-day voyage, he scared off a pirate with a flare gun and subsisted on his rations, plus the occasional flying fish, blood-pressure tablets and rainwater.

“It was quite enjoyable and better than living in Tokyo!” he said.

Kenichi Horie, who is called “The Master of Ocean Voyages,” will agree with him. The 66-year-old sea adventurer from Ashiya, Japan, sailed into the history books on June 7, 2005, when he became only the second person ever to complete eastbound and westbound nonstop solo circumnavigations of the globe in a yacht.

During the 50,000-km voyage, which took 250 days, he had only a propane stove for very simple cooking. Pots and a kettle hung from hooks and swung like pendulums when the yacht was tossed around by the waves.

He had no generator, microwave oven, refrigerator or other modern equipment. He used a solar panel to run communication devices. His interaction with his grandchildren began three weeks after he set sail, and he also exchanged e-mail messages with 867 students from six elementary and junior high schools in Japan.

In his chilly cabin of bare aluminum, he wore many layers of clothing. When the cabin was at its coldest, he wore five layers on his body and three on his legs, and used hand warmers in his rubber boots. These hand warmers, which are very popular in Japan, contain dry chemicals that, when mixed together if the packet is twisted and jostled, become hot. At night, he kept warm with a metal hot water bottle.

While some seniors brave the sea, other retirees, like Mr. Ikeda, take to the air. He completed the first successful glider flight ever across the Japanese archipelago on April 23, 2006. It was a seven-day adventure of 2,100 km, covering the four main islands of Japan by air. He touched down in only five cities and one village during the entire time he was gliding.

“I wanted to show that retirement from a job isn’t a retirement from life,” a misty-eyed Mr. Ikeda said at the end of this exciting experience.

Tragic as it may seem, even in the prisons of Japan, the elderly are living it up.

“I’m comfortable with prison life. I have clothing, food and housing, and I’m taken care of when I get sick. Prison life 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 6:40 a.m., the wardens go to each cell and wake them up individually.

“Some have weak hearing, and others have been diagnosed with dementia. So we need to personally wake many of them up,” said Mr. Hayashi, one of the prison’s assistant directors. Roll call is always after the prisoners have made use of the toilet.

Menus take into account individual considerations and 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 in their spare time.

“The prison may, at times, resemble a nursing home,” Mr. Hayashi said, “but our job is to return them to society in good condition.”

Being a prisoner in Japan may have certain advantages, but freedom is not one of them.

The elderly in Japan are excelling on the highest mountains of the world, on the high seas and in the blue skies, but the elderly in other countries of the Far East also have a zest for life.

South Korean grandmothers “get a kick” out of martial arts! Mrs. Ji is one of a group of 23 South Korean grandmothers, all of whom are 70 or older. They are practicing the high-kicking and hard-punching martial arts at a gymnasium. For them, it is a way to keep happy and healthy. There is no granny-on-granny fighting during practices, but several of the septuagenarians said they were ready to fend off an attacker.

“I haven’t been sick once since I started coming here three years ago. I’m here because it’s fun. If it wasn’t, I wouldn’t want to do it,” says the elderly Mrs. Cho.

Mrs. Kim, who at 77 is the oldest of the group, focuses more on slower movements and milder stretches. “I couldn’t even walk up a 5-step flights of stairs before. Now, I can go up more than 60 steps with ease,” she said. “Coming here is much better than going to the hospital. Even my doctor tells me to attend the class every day.” Before she began learning the sport, she had trouble simply moving. She had been suffering from diabetes and arthritis for years.

“Feel my back. It is wet with sweat,” one grandmother proudly announced, grabbing her fellow classmate’s hand.

Then there is a 95-year-old cyclo driver, Mr. Giang, who was featured by the Associated Press because he keeps on pedaling and has no desire to stop. He pedals his 3-wheel bicycle-taxi 40 km a day in Hanoi, Vietnam, and he has not seen a doctor in 34 years — not bad for a 95-year-old man who spends most of his day maneuvering through polluted and chaotic city traffic!

He does not have to work. His twelve surviving children would be happy to support their father. However, Mr. Giang chooses to be independent, so his legs keep pumping away on his cyclo.

Family members have sold his cyclo three times since 1985. Rejecting their advice that he should take it easy, he asked them to buy it back each time.

"I don't want to rely on them. As long as I can work, I will," Mr. Giang said, a broad smile showing off all his own teeth in a face with few wrinkles. His day starts at 5:00 a.m. with exercise and meditation, followed by a shower and breakfast. He then heads to the main railway station at 8:00 a.m. to wait for passengers. He has a quick lunch at a sidewalk restaurant and returns home around 6:00 p.m. Mr. Giang has outlived four wives, and he has 101 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Asked the secrets of his longevity and good physical condition, Mr. Giang said, "Always stay happy and be optimistic. You should wipe your mind clean from all things that may bother you."

We can certainly learn a lot from this gracious old man.

Jesus also advises us not to worry. ***Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things*** (Matthew 6:34).

A carpenter in Pakistan encouraged me not to worry! Everything went wrong for him one day. Through a flat tire, he lost an hour of work! Then his electric saw quit, and when he wanted to go home, his ancient truck refused to start!

While his employer took mercy on him and drove him home, the carpenter sat in silence with a worried frown on his face. Upon arriving home, he invited his employer in to meet his family. As they walked towards the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands.

After 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, when 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 earlier.

"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 house with my wife and children. I just hang them up on the 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!"

We believers also have a tree – the Cross – where we can hang problems that may tend to overwhelm us. But, our "trouble tree" takes our worries and fears away not just once or for just one night. It takes them away forever because Christ takes our problems on Himself. Therefore, we can wholeheartedly ***be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let [our] requests be made known to God*** (Philippians 4:6).

Some of us always expect trouble to happen. Others worry about what may never happen, not knowing that worry is often more exhausting than the most demanding work.

Rather than worry, let's make time to pick daisies at the roadside. If we do so, we will see a lot of our stress disappear! That is exactly what many elderly people in Japan are doing because they have the time and the money to travel.

Some of the oldest tourists in the world visited Vietnam the first week of January 2006. Three of them were 106 years old and hailed from Okinawa, Japan, which boasts the most elderly citizens in the world. The three became friends at a club for elderly people, and decided to go together on a sightseeing tour during the New Year's season. On a 4-day bus tour, they took in the sights at the capital city of Hanoi and Ha Long Bay and found it quite enjoyable.

We might not aspire to be like some of these wiry old-timers of Japan, but while we are on earth, no matter what our age or physical ailments, we might as well enjoy every day. Many times, it is just a matter of attitude!

Some of us might not be able to run races, climb mountains, ski down high peaks, sail the wide oceans, kick high and hit hard, or take to the air, but let's celebrate today and every day, regardless of our circumstances, as a day that God has made for us to enjoy! ***This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it*** (Psalm 118:24).

What is more, as Christians we are also in a marathon! We run the most important marathon in the world. ***Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*** (Hebrews 12:1).

Paul threw his whole weight into his race of life and faith. It is no wonder that in his old age he could say, ***I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*** (2 Timothy 4:7).

As far as mountains are concerned, we might not be able to stand on Mt. Everest and wave to the world, but to stand on God's holy mountain is much better! ***Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully*** (Psalm 24:3-4).

God said, ***"He who puts his trust in Me ... shall inherit My holy mountain"*** (Isaiah 57:13). What a mind-boggling promise from God Himself to unworthy human beings like us!

Peggy and I are certainly not the same caliber of people you have read about in this chapter, but we are enjoying ourselves as we jog and cycle on modern stationary exercise machines and pump iron until our muscles ache.

"It's a lot cheaper to go to a health club than to a hospital," I often encourage Peggy. Three times a week we work out for two hours at a time to keep the temple of the Holy Spirit, our bodies, in tip-top shape.

A man in his 90s is one of the most gracious and polite people I know. Every morning, he walks forty minutes to get to the health club and he takes part in everything. In the area for cardio-vascular exercises, he moves slower than others; at the weight-lifting area, he handles the lighter weights; in the swimming pool, he is in the slow lane; and in the sauna, he does not stay too long. Still, he is enjoying everything, and he is a real inspiration to us.

For many years now, our motto has been, "Do everything possible to enjoy the best of health, in order to be the most effective in God's service." We do NOT do this for a longer life! God can take us any day that He sees fit, but until our last breath, we want to be at our best for our Lord.

Before Peggy and I drastically changed our lifestyle, we had all kinds of physical problems. We were taking medicine for years for all kinds of ailments, such as for cholesterol and high blood pressure. Since making drastic changes in our lifestyle, we no longer needed to worry about cholesterol or measuring our blood pressure, and we have given such unnecessary instruments away to others.

We are still learning more about healthy living. We read in Time magazine recently that in addition to exercising and stretching all our muscles and joints every day, a balancing work out is also necessary. If you can stand for two minutes on one leg without touching anything with your hands, you are in good shape! I was surprised to see that Peggy could hardly stand on one leg for more than 10 seconds! We are well aware that we are fast going downhill, but we are determined to make it a quality downhill experience.

We also make precious contacts for the kingdom of God in the health club. Recently Peggy brought six of her friends from there to a church meeting where I was speaking.

Peggy and I always get an annual medical check-up, and every time our doctor declares both of us well enough not to need any medicine of any sort. If you consider that our combined ages are 168 years, then you can imagine how deeply grateful we are before the Lord!

It is sad to say, but too often I observe senior citizens idly waiting by for their final day on earth. Instead, I think life should be lived to the fullest. What is most important is not the length of life, but the quality of life!

It is amazing how many old people rise before dawn. "The early riser confirms that he or she is still very much alive," the Japanese believe. Quite early, many of them are pattering around with this and that and, if they are farming families, they are out in the fields ripping up weeds or swinging a hoe as they go from row to row. They have a purpose in mind, even in old age.

At a meeting for senior citizens, a 65-year-old woman told me that every morning, while the others are still asleep, she gets up, usually at 6:00 a.m. She washes her face, combs her hair, powders her nose and gets fully dressed. She reports for duty with the following prayer: "Anything you want me to do

today, Lord, I am ready for your orders.” She does not give God instructions concerning what He should do for her that day; she simply reports for duty.

Then, if nothing comes to mind, usually the names and faces of those she needs to pray for or write letters to come to mind. She is purpose-driven, and very early every day she makes sure that she is in tune with God.

Oh, that we might report for duty every morning as this Spirit-filled lady does, so that the Lord can have His way with us the rest of that day.

Let’s not be idle! Life is too precious. ***For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself*** (Proverbs 9:11-12). If we live wisely, we will live a long profitable life. Far too many folks put the body in neutral when they reach middle age.

No matter what our disabilities are or how weak we may feel, God will never abandon us! While we are still breathing, God has in mind to make our lives wonderfully worthwhile! Let’s make every day a day of celebration!

No wonder the psalmist pleaded with God, ***Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation*** (Psalm 71:18). Let’s not sit around with folded hands — life is too valuable for that. God promises to give us strength for the task at hand!

It is fascinating to remember that Moses was 80 when God called him to his life’s work for which He had prepared him. The last stage of Moses’ life was his most productive as a believer and a leader.

Caleb was very much alive at 85 when he drove out the giants from Hebron.

Gladstone served as Prime Minister of England at the age of 83.

Konrad Adenauer was still Chancellor of West Germany when he was 90 years old.

***Bless the Lord, O my soul; ... Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s*** (Psalm 103:1,5).

God might not allow us to reach such an exceptionally old age as some of the people in this chapter, or expect us to be world-famous for our old-age accomplishments for Him.

But, every day, as we rub shoulders with people, God gives us opportunities to smile or speak a word of encouragement to them.

Like most of our fellow believers, we might not be able to speed along to sports clubs, ascend the highest mountains, traverse the deepest seas, glide in the air above us, paint enduring masterpieces, or rule nations. Nevertheless, many “golden oldies” can be an example and an inspiration in their little corner of the world where God has placed them.

Maybe God wants us to be more thoughtful; or have the grace to listen to the stories of other people’s pain and keep our lips sealed when it comes to our own pain. Maybe He wants to keep us reasonably sweet, because who wants to learn from someone who is always in a bad mood? Every day, in so many ways, God can shine His glory through us.

***The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness*** (Proverbs 16:31). May we wear this crown with dignity, thanksgiving, kindheartedness and devotion.

## Shoes for Rough Roads

They say you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, and it is actually true that the older we get, the more difficult it is for us to learn new things! For this reason, Peggy and I are intent on continually trying to learn and apply good things as we grow older. Especially in this time when we are being deluged with technological innovations, we do not see old age as a reason not to learn and use what is useful. We are now learning things in our old age that we should have learned when we were young and fair! There is no reason why we cannot send e-mails every day to our grandchildren and friends, and use a cell phone.

Having said that, one of the most important lessons we are learning is on a spiritual plane. Too late in life, through our shortsightedness, we now realize how vitally important it is to choose every morning how we are going to spend that day!

*Carpe diem* is a Latin phrase that means “seize the day.” We can choose to positively seize every day and make it a very special day! ***This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it*** (Psalm 118:24)!

“We can, by God’s grace, choose whether we are going to make it an occasion for cheerfulness and thanksgiving, or a day of gloom and grumbling,” we say aloud to each other when we get up in the morning. We are aware of the fact that our happiness and peace of mind are not dependent on the events that we might encounter on that particular day, but on our attitude towards life.

Interestingly enough, researchers have discovered that older people are happier than younger people. Maybe it is because many elderly people have learned that their state of mind is determined not by their circumstances, but by how they handle them.

One of my favorite Bible verses is: ***All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His***

**testimonies** (Psalm 25:10). Take note that the psalmist does not say, “some of the paths of the Lord,” “a few of His paths,” or “some selected paths.” No! A thousand times, no! He shouts out with joy, **“all the paths” of the Lord!** So why can we not be joyful?

At first, it was very hard for me to grasp the message of this text. It became more apparent to me about twenty years ago, when I had three automobile accidents in one day! Until then, I had driven for many years without having an accident of any kind, but then suddenly disaster struck!

The first accident occurred early in the morning when my car slid on a rain-slickened road and the left front wheel landed in a ditch at the side of the road. Several men stopped and helped me to lift the front of the car out of the ditch and ascertain if the car was still road-worthy.

Later that same day, after a hard day’s work helping a missionary repair his house, I asked one of my younger helpers to drive me to my next appointment. Tired to the bone, I laid down on the back seat to rest before having to tackle my next task. Coming down a mountain pass, the driver steered into a curve, while applying the brakes. The car spun out of control and overturned on the edge of a precipice! I woke up when my head hit the inside roof of the car. We were both very surprised that we had escaped serious injury. Several concerned drivers stopped and helped us to roll the car back on to its wheels. They also checked the oil and water, and helped us get the car running again.

When I looked at the ashen face of my shaken friend, I thought it would be better for me to take the wheel. For the next hour, I lectured him on how to drive down steep mountain paths on rainy days. To my embarrassment, near my destination, when I switched lanes to get ready to turn off the main road, the truck driver behind me did not like the way I swerved in front of him. It seemed like he decided to wipe me off the face of the earth because, as he sped past me, he struck my car with the backside of his truck, hurling my car into a muddy rice paddy! No wonder the Scriptures warn us against boasting; no doubt my overconfidence affected my concentration! Still behind the wheel, I looked at my companion and could see that his face was now as white as a sheet!

“Shall we walk the rest of the way?” he suggested with trepidation! Again, I had to get the help of other drivers who were passing by in order to get the car back on the road so that we could continue our journey.

Upon arriving home late that night, I shared with Peggy the happenings of that day, and we thanked the God of life and death that I had returned safely. It did not prevent me from having nightmares, however! During the early morning hours, I thought of the accident-free years I had driven, and God spoke peace to my heart through His Word. ***In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other*** (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

Now, before I go out on the highways and roads of Japan, Peggy always insists on holding my hand and praying for my safety. Even when I am jogging, she is concerned. Before I joined a health club, I used to jog forty minutes, three times a week, near our home on the footpaths of Mt. Ikoma. Peggy usually accompanied me part of the way, before I took off alone on the mountain trails. She was always fearful that something might happen to me, like breaking a leg or getting bitten by a poisonous snake. I told her that it was ridiculous to be worried, but if I was away just a bit too long, she would come out to look for me, and once she even sent out a search party!

I would never have thought I could hurt myself in the safety of my own kitchen, but one day, while I was trying to get some juice out of a carrot, I pushed down on the juicer with all my might. My hand slipped, and the handle of the juicer hit my rib cage. The pain made me realize that at least several of my ribs were cracked. Peggy immediately wanted to take me to the nearest doctor, but I resisted.

For ten days, just about everything I did was painful, so much so that I could hardly breath without pain. Jogging or exercising was out of the question. At night, I could only sleep on my back, and Peggy had to listen to me snoring.

God used this event to teach me humility through my pain and discomfort. It was one thing to visit a sick person, but it was quite a different matter to be helpless myself. When I was lying on my back and could look nowhere else but up, God reminded

me that I should be much more sympathetic with sick people.

My ribs eventually healed, but in 1999, God taught me precious lessons through a fourth car accident, just as He had more than 20 years before when I had the three accidents in one day.

Every five years, Peggy and I had visited the USA on a schedule of meetings that usually started in Chicago, where we have some very precious friends. They supplied us with a car for three months, and they always gave us the best they had between them. Once we were given a brand new car! As usual, I argued with them and said that we would be satisfied with an older model, but they always insisted we take the best, “because it was for Jesus!” Every time I borrowed the car from them, I prayed the prayer of faith for God’s protection on our extensive journeys.

I learned in my Christian life that when I pray, I have to pray the prayer of faith, and not just rumble off a request to God. He expects faith from me! ***Without faith it is impossible to please Him*** (Hebrews 11:6).

So, as had been our custom over the years, Peggy and I gathered with our benefactors around the kitchen table of their small apartment, and I prayed the prayer of faith, saying, “Lord, I believe You will help me to return this car to my friends without a scratch! I also pray for our fellow drivers on the road to drive with a sense of responsibility. I pray believingly in the Almighty Name of Jesus! Amen!”

For further insurance against accidents, I claimed Psalm 139:5, ***You hem me in — behind and before; You have laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain*** [NIV]. I asked myself, “How could anything go wrong with such strong faith?”

Nevertheless, to make doubly certain, every morning before we set out for that day on the fast roads of the USA, together with Peggy, I read Psalm 121, word for word, with special emphasis on verse 8. ***The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.***

Then one day, very near Atlanta, a car suddenly appeared, seemingly, from out of nowhere. It rear-ended us on the passenger side of our car. The other car’s front end was caved

in so badly that a wrecker had to tow it away. The rear fender of our car had crashed into the wheel well, and a second wrecker hauled our car to a garage for temporary repairs. Fortunately, nobody was injured!

For me, the worst time was immediately after the accident when, for five minutes, I was completely out of tune with God's will for my life! I complained bitterly to Him and questioned His wisdom in allowing this terrible thing to happen to me. I reminded Him of the prayer of faith I had prayed at the kitchen table of my friends, and of all the promises I had claimed for protection. Why did this have to happen to me? Was I not faithful in doing what God expected from me?

Then suddenly, by God's grace, I realized that the Creator could allow anything He wanted to happen to His creatures! It is not right for the one who is created to question the wisdom of the Creator! It is not for the clay to say to the Potter, "What are you doing!"

In those desperate moments after the crash and through the noise of scraping steel, God clearly and powerfully spoke to me. If the road is rough, He gives us strong shoes to wear, and when we cannot walk any further, He carries us. ***When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you*** (Isaiah 43:2)

God is almighty enough to protect us against all adversity, but He also may have a greater purpose in allowing misfortune to sometimes cross our paths. ***In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials*** (1 Peter 1:6 [NASB]). Realizing this helped me to come to my senses, and I knew that God had allowed the accident to happen with a grand purpose in mind. With God's help, I could again take advantage of a seemingly bad situation and make it an opportunity for the kingdom of God. I started to lovingly console the elderly confused driver who had run into us. I could also testify to the police, the wrecking crew and the insurers about the goodness of our almighty God. I trust that God blessed my inadequate words of testimony to them.

It took a great deal of the afternoon to repair the car so that it was again roadworthy. While the men at the workshop bent, stretched and hammered on the steel parts of the car, I had

plenty of time to think. God does not take pleasure in making life hard for His children. Nevertheless, in our broken earthly existence, He allows it, but does not relish it. **For He does not afflict willingly** (Lamentations 3:33). When His children suffer, He suffers also. God is almighty enough to save us, but He has chosen to give us a free will, and that sometimes involves risks and suffering. If any of our doings result in trials, it helps us to discern God's voice with more clarity.

We, practically in exile in this temporary world, are comforted by God's words spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, **for I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope** (Jeremiah 29:11).

That evening after my appointment in Atlanta, I repented of my sin of momentarily doubting Him for not being in full control of every happening of my life, and could again sing from the depth of my heart, "Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still."

When I noticed the black and blue marks on Peggy's body, I was most grateful that she was not seriously hurt. For three days, she was in a daze, but I did my best to encourage her with the words, **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose** (Romans 8:28).

This chapter started with lessons we sometimes regretfully learn too late in our lives, like being able to make a conscious choice whether we are going to spend our day in joy or misery. I want to mention something else that I discovered too late in life: God can accomplish marvelous things for His kingdom through my absentmindedness.

On one of my tours to South Africa, when I took my first meeting of that year, Dr. Christo Cloete and his wife Marie-Lou, longtime friends, were in attendance. They were well-known psychologists and regular contributors to the Japan Mission. I often sent letters to thank them for their generosity, but that morning after the worship service, when they came up to greet me, I did not recognize them. Embarrassed, I asked them to tell me their names. They were very understanding.

“Are you over 60?” Dr. Cloete asked.

“Sure I’m over 60!” I said.

“Then you have a license to forget,” he assured me. “If it will help you, I can write you a medical certificate, saying that you now have the right to forget,” he joked. While talking to them, I suddenly recalled an encouraging phrase from God’s Word, **therefore do not cast away your confidence** (Hebrews 10:35). I do not know how much blessing others received that Sunday morning, but I felt as though I had received a special blessing.

Peggy and I continued our tour of meetings in South Africa in high spirits, knowing that God had given us new boldness. I am now 81 years old and determined by the grace of God not to lose courage or the necessary portion of my memory.

Soon after that memorable morning service, we had another meeting in a church, in Potchefstroom. Knowing how forgetful I am, Peggy usually goes around in the churches we visited to make sure that I have not forgotten anything there. That church, however, had a high pulpit with about ten steps going up to it, so my considerate wife omitted ascending into that high citadel to check for forgotten items.

The following Monday, already many kilometers away at the next place, I realized that I had forgotten my sermon notes on the pulpit of that church. I was very distressed! At that stage of my life, I had not yet fully realized that God could perform miracles through my shortcomings.

While Peggy searched for the telephone number of someone I could phone in Potchefstroom to ask them to pick up my sermon notes and send them to me, I was reading my Bible and was comforted to notice how even the disciples could be forgetful! **The disciples had forgotten to take bread** (Mark 8:14)!

When I tried to phone the number of a friend in Potchefstroom, I made a mistake and dialed one wrong numeral. The phone rang, not in the house of the person I intended to call, but in a different area called Noordbrug, in the home of someone I had never met.

Without my knowing it, a week before, the occupants of that household had listened to a radio message I had given, and, therefore, had come to know of the Japan Mission. The man and his wife had then thought it would be a good idea to make a list of missionaries and to pray for them every morning after

breakfast. He had just retired from work and did not need to leave early in the morning anymore, so they had plenty of time to pray.

Peggy and I were both on their prayer list, without our knowing it. That morning, when I phoned, it was just after breakfast and he and his wife were praying for Japan Mission and for us! It was just at that time that their phone rang.

“Who is speaking?” he asked, after answering the phone.

“Neil Verwey from Japan Mission,” I announced. To say the least, the man couldn’t believe his ears!

“Who gave you my number?” he asked. “Did you know that ever since we heard you speak on the radio, we have been praying for you?” I sensed that God was at work, and we had a wonderful conversation. He was willing to do anything for me, and immediately agreed to retrieve my sermon notes and forward them to me by the fastest means possible.

The next morning in a faraway place, Kokanje, I was in the middle of getting ready for a meeting for senior citizens there, when someone quickly ran up the aisle and handed me my precious sermon notes. You can guess who this was!

Since then, this man and his wife have been supporters and prayer partners of the Japan Mission! It was a great blessing to see how quickly and miraculously God undertook for me even when I make mistakes! God overruled my forgetfulness to His glory!

God has been present at every happening throughout my entire life. I believe that He sees all my mistakes, weaknesses, flaws and shortcomings, intercepts them, and transforms them to work out to be an advantage for His kingdom.

Before I believed that all the ways of the Lord are good, my forgetfulness was a frustration! I once drove to a hardware store near my home to get something fixed, and after I got there, I suddenly remembered that the item I wanted to take in to get fixed was still on the kitchen table at home! I felt irritated, cross and disappointed with myself because I had to go all the way back home to get the forgotten item!

Worse still, one day, dressed neatly in my black suit to go to a special meeting, I walked down the mountain from my home to the train station, and just as I was about to get on the train, I noticed that I still had the white socks on in which I had jogged that morning! A black suit and white socks; can you imagine

what I looked like?! Knowing that I had to take my shoes off at the meeting place to which I was going, I was frustrated and disappointed in myself. I was fuming at myself all the way as I struggled back up the hill to my house to change my socks!

Since then, God in His infinite grace has taught me not be frustrated with all my absentmindedness but to see His hand in all things. Through even these things, He wants to bring glory to His name. Hallelujah!

Some time ago, at the end of an afternoon church service in Winnipeg, Canada, Peggy and I left quickly because we had to travel about 1,000 km to Thunder Bay where our next meetings were scheduled. We were hardly on our way when I asked Peggy if we still had carrots in the car. I love carrots! No matter where I am traveling in the world – by ship, plane, ferry or car – I always have a supply of carrots with me.

To digress for a moment, some time ago, while driving alone in a car from Pretoria, South Africa, to a faraway place for a meeting, I just had one carrot for lunch! That morning I had pulled it out of the garden of one of my friends, washed it and placed it on the passenger's seat before I set out on this long journey. When I realized that I was running late for my appointment, I decided to eat my lunch while driving. I pulled off the green stem of the carrot, opened the window, and hurled the carrot out on to the highway by mistake! There was no way I could safely stop on that highway to retrieve my lunch. I stared at the green leaves left in my hand and tried to eat them, but they were just too bitter! I regard that as one of the biggest losses of my life, and ever since then, I see to it that I have a good supply of carrots readily on hand. So, that day, in Canada, before setting out on our long journey, I asked Peggy if we still had some carrots in the car!

“No, you’ve eaten them all,” she replied.

“Well then, before we are on the highway, let’s find a supermarket and buy some more,” I suggested.

No sooner said than done! Only after we got back to the car with my carrots did I notice that in our rush to leave the church, I had forgotten to load our video projector, which we needed for the next meeting, into the car!

In the past, this would have thrown me in the wrong gear, and I would have felt frustrated because we had been delayed.

But not anymore! Now, I believed with all my heart that ***All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and his testimonies*** (Psalm 25:10). ALL His paths!

“By forgetting the projector at the church, the Lord intervened and changed our plans,” I said to Peggy. “On our way back to the church, we must be very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit because I am sure that God wants to do something special that we are not now aware of.”

I had hardly spoken when we got stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. The devil sought to discourage us, but we praised the Lord and trusted Him to overrule our mistake of forgetfulness and to have His way with us completely.

When we reached the church, we found the doors and windows all tightly shut. There was no one around to help us. Not knowing what to do, I knocked on the neighbor’s door.

“Sir, are you a member of this church?” I asked when a bearded elderly man opened the door.

“Certainly not!” he shouted at me as he looked at me with disgust. I was glad to escape without an altercation. In the meantime, Peggy had looked up the telephone number of the pastor and she suggested that we phone him.

I agreed, but I did not know where to make the call from. I dared not go back to that angry man’s home. I was still pondering my options, when a car pulled up and parked in front of the church. The driver was in the process of making a phone call. I waited for her to finish her call, and then walked towards her side of the car.

“Sir, am I allowed to park in front of the church?” she asked anxiously. I still had my church clothes on, and she may have thought that I was the minister.

“Yes, parking here is no problem,” I assured her. I then told her about my problem, and she was delighted to help.

“Sir, why don’t you use my cell phone,” she offered. While I phoned the pastor to come and unlock the church, Peggy talked with the young lady and discovered that she was very interested in what we generally like to share with people. After I hung up, she took the cell phone and called her boyfriend who was living in an apartment across the street.

“Come over here quickly! There are some people I would like you to meet,” she said. We then had an excellent opportunity to

witness to those two young people of the redeeming grace of God. It was as if I heard the words of Acts 16:9, ***Come over to Macedonia and help us.***

My forgetfulness delayed us for about three hours, but we praised the God who uses even our mistakes to further His kingdom.

God can transform everything, even the teeny-weeny circumstances in everyday life, into spiritual adventures. We need to pray that we might be spiritually mature enough to always understand that when the going gets tough, God is about to do something marvelous.

One day, my son, David, and I were on our way to a service. His cell phone rang, and he had to pull the car off the wet road to talk. He stopped right in front of a vegetable shop, and there was just one employee behind the counter.

“Do you know that right now my son had to stop right in front of your shop to talk on his cell phone?” I said to her. The air was filled with the aroma of fresh vegetables and fruit. I continued, “I had to come in to ask you if you know the great Agriculturist and the Creator of the universe, who also ordains our stops, so that I could come into your shop to tell you that He is personally interested in you and loves you.” After a while, when another customer walked into the shop, I thought it was time to buy some carrots because I had run out of them again!

Then we were on our way again to take a meeting in a distant place. When we arrived at the house where we were supposed to stay, through some misunderstanding, the person there did not know anything about the arrangements and would not let us into her house! We were tempted just to leave immediately for the next place, as we knew no one else in that area, but we first went to the church building where we were supposed to speak that night, thinking we might find someone who knew about our coming. We waited in the churchyard, ate the carrots I had just bought for the road, rested, and prayed for a while. Then we went to view the church cemetery. For us, it was quite unusual because there is nothing like this in Japan. As the time for the meeting to start approached and no one came, we got in the car to leave, thinking it was a lost cause. Suddenly, a bus arrived with 16 warm-hearted retirees. We then spent a very

profitable time with them, and they could not do enough for us. They even arranged for us to spend the night with some very friendly people nearby. God again took charge and transformed a completely negative situation into pure spiritual gain.

Even in the most crushing calamities, God's every road for us is fragrant with His presence! Misfortune to us is only a mysterious form of good! What seems to be a great loss is, in the end, great gain. If we walk with God, the road ahead is one on which no evil can ever happen to us – it is always overruled by good – but how hard this is for us to fathom! Sometimes, we only realize this when we reach old age!

When the prophet Isaiah tells of how the grain is pounded with heavy blows to separate the wheat from the chaff in Isaiah 28:28, he adds, ***This also comes from the Lord of hosts, Who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance*** (Isaiah 28:29). Here we can understand one of the greatest lessons God wants to teach us!

Not just accidents, but even sickness and death itself, will bring us to eternal victory and into His presence for evermore! In the immortal words of the apostle Paul, ***For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*** (Philippians 1:21).

And remember, if the road is rough, God provides us with strong shoes, and when we cannot walk any further, He carries us. ***Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you*** (Isaiah 46:4).

Hallelujah!

# LIST OF SOURCES USED

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*The Speakers Quote Book*

*Christian-Cyber-Ministries*

*The Love of God, by Frederick Lehman*

*The Verwey Family at Alex and Eri's  
Wedding on July 21, 2008*



*Back (l to r): Neil & Peggy Verwey, Eri & Alex Verwey, Sue Verwey, Bonnie Verwey  
Front (l to r): David Verwey, Jesse Verwey, Earlene McKean, Chris Verwey*

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In *Strong Shoes for Rough Roads*, you will read how God picked up human beings out of the dirt of sin; rescued the helpless who have been thrown out with the trash, and seated them among honored guests. God is working with resurrecting power in Japan!

*He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people (Psalm 113:7-8).*



Neil and Peggy Verwey

Neil and Peggy Verwey are the founders of Japan Mission, a faith work established in Japan in 1957. Together with their son, his family and many co-laborers, they continue to strive to share the Gospel with the seeking ones among the masses, by whatever means the Lord reveals.

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