

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Japan Mission does not plant churches. We use various methods to reach the lost and introduce them to local churches.

Rev. Yoshida is the minister of one such church. "As a child, my mother made me attend a church that was quite legalistic and I ended up believing that being a Christian was mostly about keeping a set of rules," Rev. Yoshida shared. "This is one reason why I have a burden to welcome families with children to our church and find ways to communicate God's love to them.



Rev. Yoshida

"Once a month, we hold a special Sunday service for the children, where the parents participate, as we do crafts, tell Bible stories, sing songs and play with the children." **Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'** (Matthew 19:14, NIV).

Japan Mission has introduced Rev. Yoshida to many who have been reached through the English Classes, Kids Club, English Camp and the CAYA Café ministry. Some families have started to attend his church and have shown real interest in Christianity. **Pray** that many would come to know the Lord through our partnership with various churches.

## MOTHER'S HOUSE OF PRAYER

Christian mothers are often overwhelmed and in need of a great deal of encouragement. Eri Verwey (Alex's wife) leads a gathering for mothers at Japan Mission, called Mama's House of Prayer (Mama HOP).

Mothers with little children, who struggle to find the time for prayer and fellowship, can come and have their children taken care of while they focus on their own walk with God. Mama HOP provides a safe space where their faith can be restored and relationships are given new life, as these mothers take their hearts to the Lord in prayer.

**Pray** with us for these Japanese mothers, who are raising up the next generation of baby Christians, and have a great influence in their homes and communities. **Pray** that they would have wisdom as they often struggle to know how to show God's love to family members, whose desire for the family is to adhere to many pagan rituals.



# JAPAN MISSION

CALLED TO SERVE

March / April 2019

## PART II – GRAFFITI ARTIST FOR JESUS

Yasutaka Yoshida was born in December 1985 and raised in Osaka. His parents were divorced, so he ended up living with his mother and three younger brothers. She was a Christian and took him to church every Sunday. Yasutaka prayed for his father to return, but God did not seem to answer his prayer, so he felt frustrated and came to doubt His existence.



Yasutaka Yoshida

"After I graduated from High School, I decided to leave home and join the Japanese Self-Defense Forces," Yasutaka shared. "I also started to listen to club, hip hop and R&B music, so the Self-Defense Forces and music became my life.

"I started to read all kinds of magazines and found pictures of parties in foreign countries. It looked like a lot of fun and there were pictures of people smoking something, but they weren't cigarettes. It was marijuana, which was presented as '*a ticket to having an awesome life!*'

"I soon started to smoke weed, was eventually arrested and fired from the Self-Defense Forces. I was released after three months and determined to clean up my life and not disappoint my devastated mother again.

"However, I soon made friends with some graffiti artists and started to smoke weed again. One time, we decided to draw on the rooftop of an apartment complex. It was a place that was visible from the platform of a train station. We jumped from one building to the other to get to the rooftop. Falling would have meant certain death, but we were all determined to draw in that highly visible place, so that didn't deter us.

### INFORMATION & INQUIRIES

[www.facebook.com/japanmission.jm/](http://www.facebook.com/japanmission.jm/)

Website: [japanmission.org](http://japanmission.org)

E-mail: [jm@japanmission.org](mailto:jm@japanmission.org)

#### JAPAN

Japan Mission  
7-40 Monzen Cho  
Ikoma Nara 630-0266  
Tel: +(81) 743-73-1754  
Fax: +(81) 743-73-1681

#### AUSTRALIA - For Donations

Make checks payable to:  
**Japan Mission**  
23 Carbine Court  
Drouin VIC 3818  
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AB T8A 6K1 Tel: 780-464-0470

"All four of us drew at the same time without a lookout and the strong smell of spray paint quickly filled the air. We suddenly heard voices from below. Some people had come out of one of the bars and were saying, 'Hey, they're drawing something! It's graffiti! Call the police!'



Yasutaka drawing graffiti

"We jumped across to the next building and ran down the emergency staircase. I hid under a car for the longest time. After the police left, I called my friends and found out that one of them had been arrested.

"A few days later, one by one, my friends were arrested. One morning, the police tore down my door. 'You're Yasutaka Yoshida aren't you? We've got a warrant for your arrest!' they said. I tried to lie my way out of the situation, but they forced me to go with them.

"My new 'home' was a small jail cell with an unenclosed toilet. My mom sent me a Bible and some clothes. 'Like I'm gonna read this,' I thought and threw the Bible across the room.

"I had no phone and I couldn't see my friends or go outside. After two months, I became so frustrated that I started to read the Bible. This was the first time I had opened the Bible by myself. The verse, ***The wages of sin is death*** (Romans 6:23) caught my eye. I realized that I would go to hell if I died.

"From that day on, I started to look for answers and God started to speak to my heart. The Lord helped me see my sin and I asked Him to forgive me for the selfish life that I had lived. A sense of peace came over me and from that night on I could sleep well. I didn't do anything to deserve it, but I knew that God had saved me!

"I soon developed a strong urge to tell others about Jesus. Just then, an old homeless man was assigned to share my cell. He was arrested, because he kept stealing food. He smelled terrible from the moment he entered the room. I had never smelled something so disgusting, but I toughed it out at first.

"After I received Jesus into my heart, I decided to be nice to everyone, but I couldn't stand the stench and soon let him know about it. I drew a line where my mat started and told him not to cross that line! The old man stared at the wall in silence.

"I figured that it was not my fault that he smelled so awful and tried to get some sleep. As I lay there thinking, I remembered the words that I had read in the Bible, ***Love one another.***

"Have I ever even loved the people that said they liked me?' I wondered. 'Wasn't I just using them for my own benefit? I always expected something in return, so that wasn't love, was it? I can't even be nice to this old man, just because he smells bad.' I realized that there was no love in me!

"As I closed my eyes, a voice gently prompted my heart. ***Why did you draw that line and put that old man on the other side? I crossed that line and I loved you.***

"Why?' It rang out in my heart. I then realized that even though Jesus Christ was God, He came and lived on this earth. He crossed that vast chasm that we had no possible way of crossing. He didn't just reach out his hand. He came to earth as a man to love us! He gave up his life and was nailed to the cross for someone with a filthy heart like me, but it didn't just end in death. He rose from the dead!

"I finally understood and thanked God for showing me that Jesus came to save someone with a filthy heart like me — filthier than the homeless old man that I shared the room with. After that, I shared my cell with drug addicts, black marketeers and a man who ran over and killed someone with a car.

"I thought that these people were really bad, but I came to realize that in God's eyes I was no different. It was a matter of the heart. I'd never killed anyone, but I had hated a lot of people.

"I remembered reciting prayers as a child. I used to think of prayer

as simply reciting some lines, but God taught me that prayer was a conversation. Tears started to flow as I came to the realization of the depth of God's love for me. I was filled with a sense of joy and became strangely content with my circumstances.

"I was released in September 2007, after serving eight months and eventually found a job at a retirement home. While caring for the elderly, I started to think, 'What is going to happen to this person when they die? Where will they go?' I realized that there would be no hope for such people if I did not become a person who could help by explaining the Gospel to them in simple terms.

"Soon after, the Lord led me to attend Bible School for three years. After graduating, the Lord opened the door for me to become the minister of a church. God also opened up some wonderful opportunities for me to use my drawing skills to reach young people for Christ. I would draw graffiti, containing Christian messages, on a giant canvas and share my testimony.

"Before I used to live life according to what I thought was good. Now I want God to use me according to his plan." ***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit — fruit that will last — and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you*** (John 15:16, NIV). □