

From the Desk of Tiffany

Good morning friends,

After an amazing, incredible mission trip, I made it back to home last night (8/8). I wish I could share my whole story to you in person, but I realized that I'll be heading back to Baylor University soon so I may not see many of you all for a while. Thus, I've decided to send you all a short, maximized story of the mission trip in JAPAN!

Prayers were heard, and I could feel every single one of them every moment. I remember so clearly on the first day as I was heading to the airport w/ feelings of anxiety, fear, and unknown for what would happen. I wasn't confident at all in my Japanese nor was I comfortable speaking to the Japanese people. Furthermore, it was my first time traveling by myself (internationally too!) and the only one w/o a relative on the mission trip.

As I was waiting at the airport, tons of Japanese teenagers were speaking in their own language and began to look at me thinking I was also Japanese. Soon enough, I was boarding onto the airplane, and I found myself sitting next to two Japanese men (who were the ones looking at me). After a couple of minutes of awkward silence and not knowing what to say, one of the guys began to initiate the conversation. He had a really sweet laugh and began to teach me some more Japanese. I couldn't believe my eyes because a friend of mine specifically prayed that God would bring a divine appointment for me on the airplane to teach me the language. Near the end of the ride, I felt God pushing me to share the gospel with him, so I did. I used the five colored book that I got from Orange Mission Trip 8 years ago. My heart was beating really fast and my words weren't coming out very smoothly, but somehow God was STILL in control. He believed he was a sinner and believed that Jesus Christ died for him! I also gave him 3 gospel tracts in Japanese and a blue cross (the same one that I gave for those who financially supported me in the letter) with Jesus loves you (in Japanese). In other words, he accepted Christ into his heart! His name is Hiroki, so if you could please keep him in your prayers that God would continue to guide him in life and for God to continue to nourish his seed to sprout and grow.

In this mission trip, I knew no one but my classmate from Baylor, so our first week was actually time for team bonding with the rest of the 9 members. We went to three cities, Tokyo, Kanazawa, and Kyoto. During these days, we visited Shinto shrines, Buddha temples, cultural sites such as soy sauce factories, and famous shopping areas to help us understand the Japanese culture more before our official mission trip camps. At the Shrines, we saw how people believed in luck because there would be little tags of promises such as (wisdom, be in love forever, safety in driving, pass entrance examinations for schools, and etc) for sale. People also believed that the gods would hear them but only under certain circumstances. You must first wash your self clean with holy water near the entrance of the shrine, and then offer money, ring a bell (so the gods would wake up), and then pray a prayer. Most Japanese folks actually do not believe in the gods but they continue to go to shrines because it is so embedded into their culture and tradition. To leave it would be a tremendous sacrifice because so many holidays and festivals are surrounded by Shintoism and Buddhism.

People in Japan are also extremely polite, and it has always troubled my heart because I wonder if they are really like that deep in their heart. What I learned was that they are actually culturally pressured to be a certain type of person - one who is smiley, thankful, and first to apologize at all times. At stores, they may seem very jolly, but I realized that so many Japanese folks seek love and companionship from others as I saw them so sad in the subways. Before this mission trip even began, I always felt God whispering to me to take advantage of all opportunities to witness to the Japanese people even if the mission trip did not officially start until the 2nd week. I would try to pray for every person that I could wherever I went and lift them up to God, and it was very spiritually exhausting. The first couple of days, I was scared to talk to people in the streets, so I gave out gospel tracts and placed them in people's bicycle basket with a personalized message and my email. I prayed that the Lord would bless the tract and bring them one step closer or to at least know the name of Jesus Christ for the first time. There was this one instance where one anime girl handed me a flyer, and I traded with her my gospel tract haha. After a couple of days, my teammate from Baylor was telling me to take urgency to share the gospel with people because it may be their only time in their lives to hear it. So as I was on the bus ride, the comfort of having God by my side and sharing in his strength and boldness brought me so much courage. I began to talk to some elderly women and men. Everytime I said "こんにちは" (konichiwa which means hi) they would be so surprised that a young teenager would speak to them. I spoke to them with the little Japanese I knew such as "you are very kind", "you are an awesome friend," or "you are beautiful," and their smiles made me so happy to see! I would also ask them their name and told them to write it down so I could continue to pray for them. Yet, the most important thing that I could ever share with them was that Jesus loved them! And all by God's glory, He gave me so much boldness to say it to them and to give them a gospel tract face to face. Some were very happy to accept it, while others were not so excited to hear that.

It was very easy to get discouraged when I felt rejected. During the first week, it was such an intense spiritual battlefield. It was so easy to get sidetracked by all the materialism, food, and comfort in Japan. It was hard to always remain mission-minded and focused, which I think is why Japan lacks so many missionaries, yet is one of the top places in the world to go as a tourist. Every morning, I would cry out to God, please use me in every way that I can. I don't have much time here, and You love the Japanese people so much. **Here I am.** And the Lord really did answer my prayers. One thing that I learned was that I couldn't let a guilty conscious of my sins block me from pursuing God and advancing His Kingdom. It was so easy to think that because many times I felt so imperfect before God's eyes, and maybe He wouldn't want to use me anymore, but He still did! It was as if God's grace continued to cover me constantly. I was daily strengthened by God's grace (Hebrews 13:9).

Even with one week of bonding, I felt it was still extremely hard for our team to feel completely united before the camp. Many of us didn't feel close to all the members, but I knew that was just an excuse and a lie in our hearts to let our guards down. Satan only wanted to separate us more.

So our first camp was the Outdoor Adventure Camp. The kids there were much older (ranging from middle school to college with the majority in high school). Many of them had exceptionally good English which was very helpful to many of us, but I became extremely close to this one girl who could only speak Japanese. Her name was Tomoe and she has been coming to church for about 7 years, yet has not made any decision to accept Christ or not. Many times when we would talk, she would speak to me in Japanese, and it was so difficult for me to understand what she was saying. It was easy to give up and think that I wouldn't be able to comprehend her message, but God's patience dwelled within me. As I calmed myself down, I actually could grasp bits and pieces of what she was saying. I would try my best to respond with encouragement, and she would tell me so much about the difficulties of her school work. We grew to become really close at the end of the camp. I learned so much about not being afraid even with language flaws because as long as the heart is willing to listen, the message of God's love can be even more better understood because we learn to hear each other not only through words but through all of our action. At the camp, we also were able to give our testimonies which were so powerful to hear. All of us gave such unique perspectives in how we came to grow closer to Christ. During mine, I actually was able to share about the cultural pain between the Chinese and the Japanese. Through God's guidance, I was able to speak to the elderly Japanese women the last night about the resentment that the Chinese bear from the Rape of Nanking. One of the women shared with me how her uncle was one of the soldiers who killed the Chinese people. She shared with me how when her uncle came back, he became extremely depressed after brutally killing so many people and realizing that their emperor was not a god after all. It was a night of racial reconciliation because for the first time, I was able to hear the story from their side. Praise the Lord!

So our second camp was the Basketball Camp where we were all basketball coaches. The kids there were much younger (ranging mostly from elementary to middle school). Me and another teammate coached 4 of the younger kids. Their names were Shunsuke, Saki, Shino, and Futa. Amazingly, we naturally bonded so quickly within the first 2 minutes that I met them before even knowing that they were all in my group! The oldest girl Shino, who was 10 years old, even taught me Japanese. All of these kids would speak to me and most of the time, I would have no idea what they were saying. Many times, it was hard to initiate a conversation because I didn't really know how to carry it on despite asking what they liked to do. Therefore, the simple actions and facial expressions of love were of primal importance. I was also able to share my testimony that night with the story of my family. It was very hard to share the brokenness of my family, but for the first time, I realized that God is really using my life story as a witness to the people of Japan! I was the only one in my team growing up without a Christian background so I was able to relate to the kids because many of them think that all Americans are Christians and Christianity is only a "Western" thing. At the end of the camp, all 4 of the children in my group accepted Christ into their hearts. That night, I wanted to make sure that they understood the gospel so I asked them, and all of them did! Praise the Lord! Within the camp, many more accepted Christ as well! Praise the Lord once again!

As I was heading back to Japan on the airplane, I knew the mission trip was still not over. Here I am Lord, use me. Next to me on the airplane was once again another Japanese man. He shared with me more about the Japanese culture and I shared Christ with him. His name is Tadashi, so if you could continue to pray for him that he would come to realize how much Jesus loves him.

I look back at this trip, and I learned so much that as a missionary, you will always feel inadequate. But our God is a God of all nations and can always overcome our limitations. I thought I needed to perfect the Japanese language before I could become a missionary there, but all I ever need was God which is the greatest I could ever have as my hope and my strength. Thank you so much for every single one of your prayers. I wish I could say this to you in person. I know it takes so much spiritual energy, time, and love to pray for us. I thank God so much for the body of Christ.

I have committed myself to praying for the people on the streets/buses and for the kids at both camps that they would in turn be witnesses to the people of Japan! Please continue to pray for the people in Japan.

There is still so much more to share! Hopefully, when I see you guys, I can tell you even more! May you continue to advance the Kingdom of God wherever you are.

All for Him,
Tiffany

P.S. To Mosaic, I'm not sure the next time I'll see you guys because I'm heading out with my family for some bonding time this weekend so I won't be at church on Sunday for a while. And afterwards, I'll be going back to school. It'll either be back in October or in Thanksgiving. I'll miss you guys so much!

P.S.S. To Baylor, I'll be back soon in two weeks!