

Journal on relief mission in Ichinoseki, Iwate Prefecture, Japan, August 2011

Base Manager Name マネージャー名: Woody Whitley

5th August, Friday

We arrived at base camp, Ichinoseki, Astro Roman Daito, Daito-machi after 6 hours traveling on 3 sets of trains from the airport.

Had a good meal and set the expectations for the volunteer centers.

PRAYER requests 祈りの課題

Pray for the type of work that we will be given tomorrow.

Pray for a revival in all of Japan.

Pray for the workers at the volunteering center.

6th August, Saturday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 14

Location: Kessenuma

Headed to Kessenuma volunteer centre and split into 2 teams: A & B

Together with 80 other volunteers, one of the teams *Team A* helped to disentangle the fishing lines of the farmers, whose sole livelihood depends on fishing. The team members were moved by the extent of the destruction.

Team A's members had the opportunity to reach out and sow seeds in the lives of 5 youths, and one of the members, Noriko-san, encouragingly reminded them that God sees their work even though nobody else seems to note that. We also had the opportunity to share about CRASH Japan with 2 volunteers, a mother and daughter pairing whom we gave a ride back to the volunteer center to.

Team B was tasked to clean up the shophouse of an elderly couple, the Saitos, and we were very touched by their hospitality. The team sensed that Mrs. Saito was keen on hearing about the Gospel and by the grace of God, He put the right words into Terry's mouth and he shared the right words with Mrs. Saito at the right time. Mrs. Saito agreed to let us pray with her at the end of it, and the team was delighted to have sown the seeds of the Gospel. The team also had the opportunity to share with the more stoic, religious Mr. Saito and despite the steely determination to be strong, we sensed a light flicker in his eyes when we shared the Gospel with him.

The seeds are indeed sown in the Saitos' hearts, and we are continually following up in prayer for the Saitos and hoping for God to open another door to minister to them again if it's His will.

Praise God for a good start! Everyone had a meaningful time blessing and ministering to the locals, be they victims or volunteers. Praise God for answering our prayers and giving us the right jobs.

Both teams were very united, and there was a close level of unity and fellowship between everyone despite different cultural backgrounds. Everyone was also eager and willing to help chip in to other tasks like cooking, cleaning

etc. Thank God indeed!

PRAYER requests 祈りの課題

God to continue directing our paths even as we try to make our own plans

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer

7th August, Sunday

Location: Rikuzentakata

The combined team from base camp spent the morning attending service at Rikuzentakata's church, Japan Bethel Mission Church and met up with Pastor Morita and wife. Spent the afternoon visiting the Tanabata festival in the same town and emerged ourselves into the local culture and food.

8th August, Monday

Our team of 9, spent the day at Morika town for rest and relaxation.

9th August, Tuesday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 13

Location: Kesenuma

Headed to Kesenuma volunteer centre and split into 2 teams: A & B

Team A cleaned up a china shop selling porcelain & glasses belonging to the Hondas. The team helped with the shop inventory and helped send the goods to the warehouse, and even helped to walk the dog! It seems that the seeds were already sown in Mr. Honda's heart - he came from a Catholic school previously and has a Christian relative.

It seems that Team A only ended up at the Hondas because they were a little too slow in grabbing the volunteering jobs. However it seems that Team A's Noriko san, through her conversations with the Hondas, found out that they were actually distant relatives.

Mr Honda was very touched by the presence of the overseas volunteers who came all the way from their respective countries to serve in Japan, and his son Kouichi cooked lunch for the team as a token of their gratitude. Samuel, from Indonesia shared that it was only rightful that they volunteer as he witnessed many Japanese volunteers who flew to Indonesia to help with the tsunami relief when Indonesia was hit with a tsunami and what he and his wife, Grace, were doing was just to return the favor. Noriko-san also shared with Mr. Honda that Jesus' door was always open.

Team B went to help Meiko-san. Some members of team B helped to do cleaning and laundry, while others helped to clean the debris-clogged drain. The team had to separate the debris from the drain and to retrieve the soil, which was especially precious as a commodity since most of it had been washed away by the tsunami. The team happened to meet 2 Japanese volunteers Ms. Marie and Ms. Yato at the volunteer center, and they joined the team for the day.

Terry of Team B invited Meiko-san to join the team for lunch, and over lunch she commented that Singapore must be a very blessed country with no tsunamis or natural disasters. Terry then responded that Singapore is

blessed, and this is why we must share our blessings with others otherwise God would no longer continue to bless us and hence we have come to be servants to the people of Japan.

Meiko-san was very burdened, both financially, emotionally and spiritually. Her beautiful house was only 6 years old, and yet it was utterly destroyed by the tsunami leaving her with a huge debt to pay off. Meiko-san is also very troubled by her 3 year old son who developed asthma as a result of the trauma from the tsunami, and is still psychologically scarred from the experience. The team sensed a heavy burden weighing over her as a result of these experiences.

Meiko-san believes that her life must be spared for some reason as there was an oil drum that was away from here place merely by a few inches. Had it been nearer, it would have caught fire and probably decimated her and her entire family. Chikako-san shared that Meiko, translated in English means *Child of light* and hopes she would come to eventually know the Lord who has broken through the darkness with His Light.

Team B eventually ended off with group prayer, and were joined by the 2 volunteers Ms Marie and Ms Yato as well. Meiko-san asked specifically for prayers for herself and her son and sobbed uncontrollably when the team prayed for her.

PRAYER requests 祈りの課題

God to continue directing our paths even as we try to make our own plans
Volunteering will continue to be an uphill task - both emotionally and physically. The teams noted that the area they volunteered in today seemed to experience a larger extent of tsunami damage as compared to the previous site, and unless we rely on God's strength and protection, we might risk a toll on our spiritual and psychological wellbeing. Continue to pray for strength for the team.

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer

One of the members has already taken ill today and had to rest in the hostel. Continue to pray for God to sustain our healths as we serve the people in Japan.

10th August, Wednesday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 22

Location: Rikuzentakata

Headed to Rikuzentakata volunteer centre as 1 team as job had already been assigned to Crash Japan.

Everyone worked together on the same project today, which was to clean the sludge from the drain belonging to Mrs. Kano who owns the land. It was a deep and long drain (150m long by 1m deep) and it was full of sludge that was not cleaned up since the tsunami.

The team opened up in prayer with Mrs. Kano. It was a hard work of cleaning the drain by the team worked in great unison and finished the task by 2pm. Passerby commented on the cleanliness of the drain after the team's relief

efforts and also noted how the team worked together, united, with joy on our faces!

The Crash team happened to be in the center so we were pretty much in public view and in a way it helped to generate free publicity.

The team thanks God for His blessings. Today was supposed to be a very hot day, but we were the only team that was blessed with the shadow of the pine trees by the road side to provide cool shade. Perhaps this is a physical reminder of how He sent a pillar of cloud by day to shade His beloved people who were journeying in the desert to the Promised Land. Each day, we don't know what lies ahead of us, what jobs we will get, who we will meet, what impact we will make, but as we journey on ahead in the next two weeks we are reminded of the little blessings He sends our way to make our work bearable.

PRAYER requests 祈りの課題

God to continue directing our paths even as we try to make our own plans
Volunteering will continue to be an uphill task - both emotionally and physically. Mrs. Kano (the owner of the land where the drain is situated) shared about a bus that was swept by the tsunami into the forest, and the people trapped in the bus died a tragic death. As the team ventures deeper into the heart of grief and disaster, we continue to pray for emotional strength as we witness sites where people have actually died, and the tragic scenes we watched on TV come to life.

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer

Sustained health for all the members, continued team unity.

Always seeking the Lord in prayer for our decisions, and praying for Him to put the right words in our mouths as we meet various people.

11th August, Thursday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 19

Location: Kesenuma

Headed to Kesenuma volunteer centre and split into 3 teams: A, B & C

Team A went to clean out old photos and books at a gym that was converted into a temporary holding ground for old photographs and other memorabilia that were found during clean up efforts. The photos would then be exhibited and owners of the photos can come forth and claim the photographs that belong to them. Some members of the team also went to brush and clean old school books.

Team A was also joined by Zach, Atsushi-san and Saijo-san. Zach taught English in Kesenuma previously before moving to Seoul, Atsushi-san is a student from Tokyo who came up to volunteer and Saijo-san was a local who lost her brand new car in the course of the tsunami and seeks meaning and direction from helping others through the noble act of volunteerism.

Ann and Michiko-san from Team A managed to talk a bit more with Saijo-san who seemed to show an interest in Christianity and knowing more about

Christ. Towards the end the team prayed together, and Saijo-san sobbed after prayer. Ann and Michiko-san got more information from Saijo-san to follow up with her.

Perhaps the most poignant moment of the day was that there was a one minute:s silence to commemorate 5 months since the start of the earthquake. It was a particularly emotional moment, especially after cleaning out the old photos and the old books. For the people who captured their happier moments in photographs, or their pictures or essays in yearbooks, one can only wonder where they are now and pray and hope they are still alive.

Team B, by God:s miraculous and divine intervention ended up at Sugimoto-san:s house again. The team obtained what they assumed to be yet another cleaning job at another victim:s house as the bus went along a seemingly unfamiliar route. The team was surprised and delighted when the bus finally arrived at a very familiar looking house – Sugimoto-san:s! Apparently the driver had taken a longer and more unfamiliar route to her place. Their surprise and delight was further compounded by the fact that Sugimoto-san had actually requested from the volunteer center to send us over to her place again but they replied that there would be no guarantees. Considering the sheer number of volunteers that day it was truly by God:s divine plane that we ended up at her house again.

Sugimoto-san had many despairs previously – the loss of her house, the mountain of debt sagging over her shoulders, her son:s asthma and the potential loss of her husband:s job. And yet despite the tumultuous circumstances, she felt a sense of peace since the team met with her for the first time. The team has always been on Sugimoto-san:s mind ever since the first meeting and wished for us too to go out and share the same God-given peace with the other victims as well.

Team B also met another Japanese, Tsukamoto-san. Who joined the team at Sugimoto-san:s. Tsukamoto-san is a quiet but thoughtful young man from Tokyo but feels comfortable about opening up to the group. The team shared the Gospel with him as well. Tsukamoto-san is jobless currently, but the team shared with him the good news about the God who has Everything, including our future in the palm of His hand, who gives His children a future and a hope.

Team C was tearing down the wall at another person:s house.

Prayer requests

God to continue directing our paths even as we try to make our own plans

For the volunteers to have open hearts as members of the team share the Gospel with them, but also for the team to recognize that we are but a node in the chain only, and not to overburden ourselves and assume we are the ones who will bring about salvation. We need to remember that at the end of the day we are God:s mouthpieces and salvation comes from God alone.

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer

Sustained health for all the members, continued team unity.

Always seeking the Lord in prayer for our decisions, and praying for Him to put the right words in our mouths as we meet various people

12th August, Friday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 18

Location: Kesenuma

Headed to Kesenuma volunteer centre and split into 3 teams: A, B & C

Team A and B were around the same area – clearing out padi fields and drains that were clogged with water and debris. Michiko-san talked to the land owner Onetera'san who was thankful to our team of multinational volunteers for coming all the way and their efforts. Michiko-san shared about CRASH and God's love.

Team B, through the course of their activities, deepened their relationships with any local volunteers they may have fleetingly met through casual hi and byes at the center. Through a serendipitous misunderstanding, Terry bought the team ice cream which they heartily enjoyed on a hot summer's day. A simple act of hospitality and generosity perhaps, but it proved to be a key element in forging the local volunteers' impression of the team and warmed the ice between everyone.

Team C joined with many other volunteers to form a team of 22, to help clear the debris at someone's house. They already broke down the wall on the 11th of August, but this time the team helping to sort and clear the debris was much larger. The day was incredibly hot, and many volunteers were crowded around a small stuffy area but the team still managed to take the opportunity to talk to the other volunteers as well.

Tsukamoto-san,, whom we met the previous day joined team C as well. There were members of Tama Plaza Church in Team C, and by God's blessing, Izumi'san and Tsukamoto-san were in the same team since yesterday (11 August) so it was easier for Tsukamoto-san to fit in and have someone to talk to as well.

Prayer requests

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For the volunteers to have open hearts as members of the team share the Gospel with them, but also for the team to recognize that we are but a node in the chain only, and not to overburden ourselves and assume we are the ones who will bring about salvation. We need to remember that at the end of the day we are God's mouthpieces and salvation comes from God alone.

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer

Sustained health for all the members, continued team unity.

Always seeking the Lord in prayer for our decisions, and praying for Him to put the right words in our mouths as we meet various people.

As the team continues to reach out to Tsukamoto-san, pray for the Tama Plaza team to enjoy a successful continual fellowship with him.

13th August, Saturday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 19

Location: Kesenuma

Headed to Kesenuma volunteer centre as 1 team

Everyone from CRASH went as a single team to sort out debris at a site where once-standing houses were utterly devastated by the force of the tsunami. The job basically comprised pretty much sorting through the debris into various piles - glass, metal, burnable items etc

The CRASH team, together with other volunteers made a total team of 40 people.

We had the opportunity to follow up with some of the people we met the previous day (11 Aug) to talk with them a little more and build on the relationships previously started.

We met some interesting people - such as a 25 year old man who looked like he was a yakuza member but when we talked a little deeper with him, we found out he quit his job in order to volunteer and was going to be a father soon. Just as how Jesus saw the potential in the tax collectors and the dying criminals that didn't have the exterior of holiness and moral rightness, it is a great reminder for us to never make assumptions of others based on initially impressions and be willing to hear their story and get to know more about them for who they are.

Saturday was the last day for most volunteers in the center before they went back to their hometowns for Obon. It also represented, in a way for us the coming of a closure of our time in Japan. These were people who were here with us since our first time whose names we could never get right, so we clumsily but affectionately attached nicknames to them \ *Orange Pants*, *Blue Pants* - and their names always popped up in our prayers.

We were thankful to God for granting us favor among the locals - that they were willing to talk to us and forge a friendship with us. The team probably had a prominent presence in the volunteer center and others were quite clearly drawn to us.

Prayer requests

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For the volunteers to have open hearts as members of the team share the Gospel with them, but also for the team to recognize that we are but a node in the chain only, and not to overburden ourselves and assume we are the ones who will bring about salvation. We need to remember that at the end of the day we are God's mouthpieces and salvation comes from God alone.

continue upholding the people we met in prayer

Sustained health for all the members, continued team unity.

Always seeking the Lord in prayer for our decisions, and praying for Him to pRE: Grateful for your service to Japanut the right words in our moths as we meet various people

14th August, Sunday

Location: Kesenuma

The combined team from base camp spent the morning attending service at Kesenuma's church, Kesenuma Baptist Church followed by fellowship with the congregation of about 25 members.

15th August, Monday

Our team of 9 plus 2 Crash Japan staff spent the day around Ichinoseki for rest and relaxation.

16th August, Tuesday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 19

Location: Kesenuma

Headed to Kesenuma volunteer centre as 1 team

Everyone from CRASH went as a single team to sort out debris at a site where once-standing houses were utterly devastated by the force of the tsunami. The job basically comprised pretty much sorting through the debris into various piles, like last Saturday (13th August), but this time we had to shift the piles into a spot convenient for the recycling trucks to pick up.

Most of the volunteers we have met last week were no longer around, but praise God for the opportunity to meet and speak with new volunteers!

The CRASH team opened the job with a prayer as usual, and invited the locals to join us if they felt like it. To our delight, those around us joined us, hand in hand, in prayer.

The CRASH team were definitely an unmissable bunch, cheering a van that was stuck in the mud when it finally managed to get onto the road from a distance! Thank God for surpluses in lunch that day, the team was able to bless other hungry looking volunteers with extra sandwiches, fruits, even medication for an injured volunteer etc and strike up a conversation. The CRASH team was already quite popular with local volunteers to begin with – people were drawn to us and always made it a point to come up and talk to us, or wait for us! Praise God for His favor!

The team managed to meet with locals who were curious about God – such as Arai-kun who asked Ann difficult but heartfelt questions like “Why did God allow the tsunami to happen?” And also, by divine intervention, the Dexters happened to meet with a man from Miyazaki who lived very near them, and exchanged email addresses so as to invite him to church the next time their own church had an event.

All in all the work was more laborious than a lot of the other jobs we've done

so far as it involved a lot of physical work – carrying logs, huge pieces of debris around. Praise God for cool weather. At 3pm the ground was finally cleared and the debris was sorted out into their respective locations. Just at that moment, it rained on the bare ground. It was a timely and meaningful moment – and we hope the coming of the rain signals a new beginning for Kesennuma, Tohoku, Japan

Prayer requests

God to continue directing our paths even as we try to make our own plans

For the volunteers to have open hearts as members of the team share the Gospel with them, but also for the team to recognize that we are but a node in the chain only, and not to overburden ourselves and assume we are the ones who will bring about salvation. We need to remember that at the end of the day we are God's mouthpieces and salvation comes from God alone.

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer

Sustained health for all the members, continued team unity.

Always seeking the Lord in prayer for our decisions, and praying for Him to put the right words in our mouths as we meet various people.

Prayer for the people whom we've met and managed to touch the past few weeks in Kesennuma be they victims or volunteers– after the team leaves, pray for God to send Christians to continue harvesting on the seeds that have been planted, as well as to strengthen the local church to build on what we have done so far, as well as to continue outreach, and for God to give the increase.

“I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” 1 Corinthians 3:6

17th August, Wednesday

Combined number of volunteers from base camp: 19

Location: Rikuzentakata

Headed to Rikuzentakata volunteer centre as 1 team

Today was the final day of volunteer work and we went back to Rikuzentakata. Praise God that we managed to land our job for the day swiftly, and all of us were dispatched to someone's house to help cut grass and clear weeds. The CRASH team went alone and was not joined by any local volunteers this time.

It was a hot day, which made the job tiring, but thank God for bouts of rain throughout the day which helped make things cooler, as well as a beautiful view of the scenery – where the lake meets forests and hills. David Dexter said that was one of the most scenic views (Takatamatsubara) and we were blessed with such lovely picturesque scenery on our last day of work.

The CRASH team opened the job with a prayer as usual, and invited one of the land owners to join us in prayer.

The day ended quickly at 2pm due to the heat. Two of the staff members from the volunteer center drove by, and upon knowing that one of them was celebrating his birthday today, sang “Happy Birthday” for him!

The team was blessed with delicious homegrown peaches from the landowner’s sister’s garden. It turns out that the sister actually knows Morita Sensei (The wife of the pastor at Rikuzentakata church) as they met through local volunteer work. Morita Sensei tried sharing the Gospel with her before but the sister is a staunch Buddhist.

Upon learning that the sister was an avid volunteer who ferried old folks to and from the local hospital, he shared that we are all part of a circle of love – the sister gives, and she in turn receives our efforts to clear her land of weeds.

We returned to the volunteer center after rewarding ourselves with ice creams and snacks, and to our delight, when Chikako-san spoke with the staff at the Rikuzentakata volunteer center, they specifically asked for CRASH to volunteer with a job they had the next day! Praise God for favor, and blessing us with a good reputation among the locals!

The evening ended off with our final debriefing, as the team sat down to consolidate the key learning points for the week, as well as to discuss ideas on what could have been done better and what we can do moving forward. It was a very lively debate, with a lot of interesting ideas being mooted forth which we hope can be incorporated into CRASH’s plans and policies moving forward.

Prayer requests

God to continue blessing CRASH with favor among the locals as well as the volunteer centers

Continue upholding the people we met in prayer and keeping up efforts to stay in touch with them.

Prayer for the people whom we’ve met and managed to touch the past few weeks in Kesenuma be they victims or volunteers– after the team leaves, pray for God to send Christians to continue harvesting on the seeds that have been planted, as well as to strengthen the local church to build on what we have done so far, as well as to continue outreach, and for God to give the increase.

“I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” 1 Corinthians 3:6

Written By

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