

Vivian in Japan! (July 2019)

Dear Way of Grace family,

As I enter into my third week in Japan I am reminded of my family in Christ that I left behind in Arizona. I miss you all very much and hope you are doing well.

I am doing well also. The people of the town of Yamamoto have been so kind to me and my team. As I am half way done with my trip, I wanted to give you an update on what I have been doing, what I have learned and how you can be praying for me.

I first arrived in Sendai on June 26th and was met by Laurie Lauer and Edie Cummings. They and their husbands have been missionaries in Japan for the last 30 years or so. We then drove from Sendai city to the small town of Yamamoto. It is a small farming community about 10 minutes away from the beach. It was one of the worst hit areas of the tsunami. There was a population of about 18,000 people living in Yamamoto before the tsunami. Now there's a population of about 11,000. One of the saddest things is that, because of the numbers, most people probably lost at least one person they knew. The Lauer's said that they once met a man who lost 21 people. The most devastating thing is that their entire world was washed away. Most people not only lost houses, friends, and family but also lost their livelihood. If they weren't fisherman they were farmers. You wouldn't guess by looking at it now, but the entire ground was filled with mud and garbage. The government helped pay for the cleanup and if someone's intention was to stay in Yamamoto they helped to rebuild their house. Unfortunately, a lot of people couldn't wait that long so they left Yamamoto for good. People whose families had been in Yamamoto for generations upon generations left the only home they had ever known because they needed to support their family and Yamamoto's economy had been completely destroyed.

I hope this paints a pretty clear picture of what these people have gone through. The funny (weird funny, not haha funny) thing is that meeting the people who come to Nazomi Center, they are usually very cheerful. However, when you step outside and look around it paints a completely different picture. When you observe people when they think nobody is looking you see just how much people are hurting. The Lauer's took us on a tour to see the devastation that is still visible. We came up to a memorial for the victims of the tsunami and there was a lady there who is a regular attendee of Nazomi Center. She was wiping off the memorial with a rag and her head held low. She paused as if she was reading names of people she knew. I've seen multiple people out in their gardens and they stand up, put their hands on their hips and look around in despair, looking over the vacant land that used to hold houses, cars and families.

Nazomi Center first started out as a disaster relief center. It was the first Christian establishment in this area. Before the tsunami there was no church, no community center...nothing. For the first six years Nazomi Center was strictly a disaster relief center. They slowly started introducing the gospel and holding church services every once in while. Now, it is a community center/church. They hold cooking classes, art classes and English classes, as well as church services every Sunday. The regular attendance for a church service is about 3 people. However, their English classes can range from 5 to 10 people. I talked to one lady who had lost her son and her house in the tsunami. She has been coming to the center for the last six years and she said it helped her get out of

darkness. She is still an unbeliever and she was skeptical to go to a place that was so open with Christianity. She said that she's glad she did. I pray one day she truly comes to Christ so she is free from darkness for good.

The emotional toll being here is really hard. Even when we go out to clean we see the scars of the tsunami and what it's done to these people. Most of the houses we've been serving in have been affected by tsunami. The first plot of land we cleaned up used to be a bakery, now it's just a vacant piece of land with weeds about as tall as my hip. The second was a huge plot of land that used to be a small farm...and so on. Most of the service we've been doing is cleanup since the people who own the land are retired and are unable to do the cleanup themselves.

We've had a lot of chances to share the gospel. Me and three other girls on our team went to a traditional tea ceremony. The lady in one of the English classes invited us to come and observe. The ceremony is totally pagan, but what was interesting was the head teacher of the tea ceremony tried to connect some of the items into Christianity. We politely told her she must be confusing Christianity with Catholicism. After the ceremony was done we talked with the ladies and they asked us why we came to Yamamoto. We all gave our different reasons, but we all said that we wanted to share the gospel with the Japanese people.

One of the biggest things I've been taking away from the trip is just how much the Gospel needs to be shared here and just how much Christians need to live here. They have no example of what it's like to live for Christ out here. I was talking with one of the other missionaries here and they said they have been praying for a long time for Christians to just move out here and live among the people.

Please pray for me and my team. Please pray that we finish our work and exude Christ in a way that breaks through the language barrier. Pray that we are kept safe from the elements and that we stay healthy, that we have opportunities to share the gospel with the Japanese people, and that the gospel spreads like wildfire through Japan.

This has only been a small update and I can't wait to come back home and give everyone a full update and share all of the amazing things that God has shown me, and all that He has done!

Love in Christ,
Vivian