



Episode 50: Land of the Rising Sun: Engaging the Japanese People – Warren Janzen

Warren Janzen, who, together with his wife Dorothy, serves as the International Director of SEND International. They currently make their home in western Canada, but Warren spends the equivalent of several months each year on the road, either working with our Home Offices in the US, or Canada, or Hong Kong, or the Philippines, or sometime travelling to connect with our ministry teams which now are engaged with over 50 people groups worldwide.

The Janzens have three grown sons, and a couple of lovely daughters in law, and they worship at Central Heights Church in Abbotsford, BC.

You first moved to Japan in the 1980s, but it wasn't your first trip to Japan. Tell us about that.

- After completing two years of bible college at [Columbia Bible College](#), I took a gap year and went and taught English in four churches in Osaka Japan.
- Through that experience, I discovered that God was bigger and more creative than I could have imagined.
- I returned home knowing that I wanted to go long term into missions. As I prayed over that, I expected to go to a country that had more physical need, perhaps Africa.
- I returned to the University of Manitoba, contemplating medicine as a means of going to the mission field. However, I stayed in touch with my students in Japan and God used that to turn my heart back towards the country and people of Japan and once I realized that God was calling me back to Japan, I realized it wasn't going to be in the realm of medicine.
- I returned to Bible college where I met Dorothy, who had just completed two years of nursing in Nepal and had come back for more training.
- We got engaged and married and headed out to Japan with SEND.

Let's talk about the preparation phase. When you first got there, you didn't speak Japanese. Tell us about language study.

- When I arrived, I spoke minimal Japanese and so Dorothy and I started full-time language study for two years. That's a grueling experience.
- It's amazing how much of your personality is tied to your ability to communicate.



Did you ever make mistakes as you learned the language?

- Of course! I think both Dorothy and I were willing to go out and make mistakes and I think that helped us accelerate in our learning.
- We were taught formal Japanese not colloquial Japanese.
- I had a friend who was walking home from language school and he met this lady who was walking her dog. She started giving her dog instructions and the dog was following the instructions. My friend didn't understand anything she was saying because it was colloquial and he felt like, "I've been studying Japanese for 6 months and this dog knows Japanese better than I do!"
- There was a senior missionary who would remind us that you work real hard but God will give you the language you need to accomplish what he'd called you to do.
- We got to understand God in new ways – it's like putting on a new set of glasses and seeing new facets of who God is. It's fascinating to read the Bible in another language.

Tell us a little bit about the Japanese culture.

- Wonderful people! Very friend, very polite, very busy, but very committed to whatever they're involved in.
- They're a first world culture so their needs are more relational and not so much physical. Their points of contact are more on an emotional and relational.
- Shintoism and Buddhism are the two primary religions there. Shintoism has 8 million God and no clear right and wrong expressly stated in their belief system.
- Buddhism, when it's put next to Christianity, is repulsed by God's wrath and judgement and the whole idea of eternal life is confusing because they're trying to escape from reincarnation.

Are most Japanese people seriously engaged in their religion or is it more nominal?

- In general terms, what is said about the phases of life is that when you are born you go to a Shinto temple, when you're married you have a Christian ceremony and when you die you have a Buddhist funeral.
- The Japanese are very inclusive and they really pursue harmony with each other – they are peacemakers.
- They follow the prescribed events that must happen according to the different religions, but when we asked our neighbors out the specifics of the religions, they were less than educated on the specifics of these belief systems, but they weren't strong advocates of it.

How is the Gospel going to be helpful to the Japanese people?

- The Gospel is about hope and it's about a personal relationship. What we saw in Japan was a lot of people who are really wanting to have a deep connection with someone and to be able to offer a deep relationship with your creator is an amazing gift.



- The Japanese say there are many paths to the top of Mount Fuji, a religious place in Japan – Shintoism, Buddhism, Christianity – but the remarkable thing about Christianity is that you don’t need to climb the mountain – he came down to us!
- So many people are alone or are trying to fill the relational void with something else, the Gospel is desperately needed in Japan.

There have been decades of missionary engagement in Japan and yet the evangelical church remains quite small. Can you speak to the barriers that keep the Gospel from spreading in Japan?

- As with many other places, it’s a deep spiritual battle.
- You often hear people say that when they arrive in Japan, there’s just a wait that came upon us – there’s a societal expectation and weight there. Part of this is expressed in the high societal value of conformity.
- For someone to become a Christian, they wonder, “Will I still be Japanese? Will I lose my group? My network?” They are a collectivist society and so having your network is essential for finding a job, finding a spouse, having a community.
- The practical difficulty of meeting people in a home – we often meet in homes here in North America – but in Japan it isn’t part of the cultural norm and just logistically it can be difficult as apartments and homes are not usually large, so meeting with a group of 12 people in your home may not be physically possible.
- The demands of their jobs and their schooling presses into the evenings most days each week. Finding a time to get together consistently with people is difficult.
- The exclusiveness of Christianity – we believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life – but this impedes on a harmony seeking group. This goes against what society in general is aiming to do.

Japan has a very high, expensive standard of living. It costs a lot to support missionaries in Japan, especially those in an urban center. Should we be spending that much money to send missionaries to Japan?

- During our 15 years there, we were often asked, “Is it worth the cost?” We came to the point of saying, “When God stops calling, we’ll stop going.”
- Jesus doesn’t distinguish between high cost and low cost destinations.
- Japan is a high cost, and it’s a low conversion rate environment, so when you go here, you need to commit to long term ministry. Your prayer partners and support team need to commit long-term, as well.
- It’s not just about sending the person you know, or someone from your congregation. SEND mobilizes people from all around the world and the cost of sending a missionary to Japan from one of these other countries might be out of reach, but we have a fund called the [Global Worker Initiative](#) and partnering with that might be a great way of getting involved.



A few years ago, there was a major event in Japan. Will you talk about how this event has impacted the ministry in Japan?

- That was a dramatic event in 2011 – it’s called the triple event – the earth quake, the tsunami and the consequential radiation leak that has come from the reactor along the coast.
- Dorothy and I travelled up there after the event, and one of the things we noticed immediately was a spiritual openness.
- Dorothy and another missionary went around door to door, and it was amazing the spiritual conversations were amazing. People wanted to know how to make sense of the event, the consequences and what now?
- Another thing that has happened is that it has awakened the churches and believers to think beyond themselves. Most churches in Japan are small – 30-40 people – and you hear in their prayers about how can they accomplish things as such a small church, but we’ve seen a more outward focus among the church in Japan since these events.
- This event has really shaken the confidence of people in their government and the power company and the ability to contain and create a safe and harmonious path forward. People are starting to ask questions and look in different places, such as spiritual places, for their sense of safety. This is opening up spiritual conversations.
- God uses everything and he works all things together – this was devastating and you hear horrible stories – and it makes you ask big questions and that’s exactly where God meets us and brings healing, hope and restoration. It’s a powerful opportunity.
 - [Forward From Disaster](#)

If people wanted to learn more about unreached people groups and Japan, what resources would you recommend?

- SEND has some useful resources and videos, so visit our [website](#).
- Check out both [Operation World](#) and [Joshua Project](#) as well.

If our listeners wanted to learn more from you, how can they reach out to you?

- wjanzen@send.org

Do you have any last thoughts to share?

- We are passionate about seeing a global movement of Jesus followers making disciples among the unreached – this won’t happen if we don’t intentionally learn about others, understand and overcome barriers to the gospel and share Jesus in word and in deed. I think about the Japanese and other people groups who are waiting to hear the gospel and to see the gospel. They are waiting for a Jesus follower to bring the gospel to them. Can I encourage your listeners to ask God, “What’s next?”

