



A Minute with the Masons



Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society
A newsletter of Michael & Chris Mason

Sakai International Bible Church, Japan
Issue 61 September 2011

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

It is time for another update from the ministry here in Japan. We were planning to get this newsletter out last month, but a computer crash wiped out everything on our hard-drive. If you have ever experienced that, you know how this has a way of bringing everything to a grinding halt. Anyway, with everything back in working order, we are finally ready to report to you.

SUMMER BLESSINGS AT SIBC

We had a really good summer at Sakai International Bible Church. In late July a short-term team from Cerritos Baptist Church in Southern California came to help out for a few days. As always, it was a great encouragement to us to have them here. On July 31st they participated in the Sunday morning worship service, and on the following day they helped out with a children's outreach event at the church. The event was called Kid's Bible Fiesta, and was geared towards kindergarten and elementary school kids.



Having fun at the Kid's Bible Fiesta

We started out at the church with songs, crafts, games, skits and a Bible lesson. The theme of the day was from 1 John 3:1 *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we might be called children of God!"* We then moved the event to the park down the street. There we ate picnic dinner together, followed by more games, singing, and watermelon smashing (a traditional Japanese summer game). The turnout was much better than we were expecting. We had over 20 children (and

their parents) with almost half coming from outside the church. **PLEASE PRAY** for those who heard the Gospel for the first time. May they each experience the love their heavenly Father has lavished upon them. Finally, we want to give a big shout out to Fifi Young for all of her hard work in coordinating this event. Thanks Fifi!

The following weekend, the blessings continued at SIBC as we had another baptism celebration on the roof of the church. This time, three people took this step of obedience and expressed their desire to walk with Jesus all the days of their life. First up was **Emily**. Emily is a junior high school student and the daughter of friends that Michael met while studying in seminary. She was just a few months old when we arrived in Japan back in 1997! Next up was **Omara**. Omara is from Jamaica and has been teaching English in Japan for a couple of years. She had a wonderful testimony of how God led her to the point where she was finally ready to say "yes" to following Him.



"Omara, I now baptize you..."

The last person was **Takako**. Takako first opened up her heart to the Lord after the death of her husband back in 2009 (you might remember, that was Michael's first time to perform a funeral in Japan). Earlier this year she decided to believe and now has a keen desire to grow in her faith. After the short ceremony on the roof, we went back

downstairs for a time of celebration, which included a potluck lunch and testimonies. All in all, it was a wonderful day. **PLEASE PRAY** for Emily, Omara and Takako. May they grow in God's love, God's word and God's power as they continue to discover how to walk with Jesus as their Savior, their Shepherd and their Friend.



(from L to R): Takako, Omara and Emily

SERVING IN TOHOKU

In our last newsletter we shared about how SIBC had been partnering with a group in Osaka called Be One Tohoku (www.b-1.jp/tohoku/). Since the March 11th earthquake and tsunami that hit the Tohoku region of Japan, Be One has been sending supplies and workers to the disaster stricken area. Well, in August both Michael and Chris had the opportunity to go to Ishinomaki City in order to help out with the on-going relief efforts. Michael went for a few days in early August and Chris followed about 2 weeks later. We are both very thankful for the opportunity to serve in this way, and though Tohoku is quite far (a 12+ hour drive), we are both hoping to go again this Fall. You can read some of our experiences on the following pages.

FALL ACTIVITIES

With the arrival of September, Luke started 5th grade at Kansai Christian School. Even though he is the only boy in his class this year (with 6 girls), he is excited to finally be in middle school. This year Michael is taking a break from serving as the school chaplain. Although he enjoyed being able to share with the kids each month, he feels that he needs to devote more of his time and attention to the ministry of SIBC.

Speaking of church, in September we started a new

sermon series called "Re-Thinking Church: Exploring God's Heart for the Church." In a desire to grow and truly become the people that God wants us to be, we are planning to take the next 6 months to look at what it really means to be the church. We believe that God has a wonderful journey prepared for us and are excited to see where He might lead us. **PLEASE PRAY** for the whole SIBC church family during this time. May we all have open hearts as we study God's word and open ears as we learn to listen to His voice.

Finally, **PLEASE PRAY** for Chris as her schedule this Fall is looking pretty full. Besides her English classes, the women's Bible Study she teaches for the women in Ikoma, the women's prayer meeting and mother's support group at church, Chris has also recently offered to help Be One with their homepage. Chris will be responsible for collecting testimonies from those who serve with Be One and then finding someone who can translate them (either from English to Japanese, or Japanese to English). These will then be put on the Be One website as a way to build community and recruit new volunteers.



Well, as always, thank you for your prayers and support. God is at work in Japan, and you are an important part of the lives that He is touching.

Blessings to you all,

Michael & Chris

Michael & Chris Mason



A common sight in Tohoku

MICHAEL IN ISHINOMAKI

August 9-11



Michael's team before leaving for Ishinomaki

I spent my first two days helping to deliver relief supplies to two of the communities that were hardest hit by the tsunami: Minamisanriku and Onnagawa. Because both towns were almost completely destroyed, thousands of people have been forced to move into temporary housing. We visited 10 of these housing sites and gave them whatever they needed to make their life a bit easier. Thanks to a generous donation from Ace Hardware in Hawaii, we had two trucks full of ladders, brooms, shovels, mops, flashlights, trashcans, axes, duct tape and gloves. Whenever possible, we also tried to take time to talk with the residents. Some people had no desire to interact with us, while others seemed to appreciate the opportunity to talk and share their stories with us.



The truck full of supplies that Michael drove

At one of our stops we met a wonderful elderly woman who eagerly told us about her experience on the day of the tsunami. She was at home with three of her family members when the tsunami warning sounded, but because they could not move her bed-ridden mother, they were unable to evacuate. Suddenly, with a loud roar, the water began to fill her house. Fortunately for her, the force of the wave actually pushed her out of the

window. Once out of the house, the rushing water carried her along until it smashed her up against the hillside. From there she was able to grab on to a tree branch until the water receded. Tragically, not only was her house destroyed, but no one else in her family survived. After hearing her story, we had a chance to pray for her and ask for God's healing and blessing upon her heart. She seemed genuinely touched.



With the woman who shared her heart-wrenching story

All in all, I was struck by how difficult life in these temporary housing sites must be. The houses were often in very isolated areas, far from any markets, banks or schools. On top of that, because most of the people lost their cars in the tsunami, they were virtually trapped in these remote locations. Honestly, some of the sites felt (and looked) a bit like prison camps. The people often told us of how isolated and lonely they felt. Add this to the trauma that they have already experienced because of the disaster, and it is easy to see that their biggest needs are emotional and spiritual. **PLEASE PRAY** that God would send Christians into these areas to love, counsel and care for those who are hurting and broken.



A temporary housing site in Minamisanriku

CHRIS IN ISHINOMAKI

August 23-27

I was able to serve in a number of ways while in Ishinomaki. I cooked for the volunteers, shopped for a BBQ to feed 100 people and helped to organize the Be One storehouse. But perhaps the best experience was when I was able to clean. You see, for many peoples in Ishinomaki, the first floor of their homes were flooded by the tsunami. So the first thing that most people did was clear away the mud, debris and water-damaged items from inside their homes. However, this is very hard to do for those who are elderly, and now, 6 months after the disaster, there are still homes that have yet to be cleaned out. So, one day, we went to the house of a 83-year old man named Mr. Hobara. A team of 15 volunteers went to work on his house, cleaning and removing debris. As the day went on, the countenance on his face completely change. He was so thankful to finally have his house cleaned up. At the end of the day, we had a chance to pray God's blessing upon Mr. Hobara.



Removing mud from under Mr. Hobara's living room floor



After a long day at Mr. Hobara's house

On another day, we did a similar thing for 80 year old Mr. Tsuenaga. He has a small, family-owned miso/soy factory that was still covered with mud and miso sludge. It was hard (and smelly!) work, but by the end of the day, his place was all cleaned up. Now, a half a year after the tsunami, he can finally think about getting his

business going again.



Chris scooping mud at the miso factory

These two experiences showed me that there is still so much work to be done in the tsunami stricken area. Even though it has been 6 months since the disaster hit, most people are not even thinking about rebuilding yet. The focus is still on removing the debris left behind by this enormous tsunami. It will take many, many years for life to return to normal in these hard-hit areas. The emotional toll on the people will be more than most of us can imagine. **PLEASE** continue to **PRAY** for Ishinomaki, Be One, all of the volunteer workers and the entire nation of Japan. More than ever, we need to experience the grace, mercy and kindness of our Lord Jesus. Also **PLEASE PRAY** about how you might be involved in the on-going recovery effort. A financial gift is one way to help out. Another way is to hook up with a group like CRASH or Be One (www.b-1.jp/tohoku/) and spend a week or two serving in the Tohoku region of Japan. You can make a difference!



Shopping for the BBQ

Learn more about our time in Ishinomaki
in the "updates" section of our homepage:
www.masonsinjapan.com