

John Osborne: 10/20/20

Yes! Church

Two of my favorite people in the world live on the other side of the planet – Mr. Hirosei and Mr. Suzuki. I met both of them when I was in my early 20s and newly graduated from university. I had just moved to Japan with my young and beautiful bride and we were ready for whatever the world had in store for us. We were eager for adventure and accepted jobs in a country we had never before visited. We didn't speak the language and were totally unfamiliar with the culture but we didn't care – we were ready to conquer any new situation you could put in front of us. Historian Will Durant would have described us as “all eyes and no brains!”

Hirosei san was President of Joyo Bank and had previously lived in London establishing the global operations for his bank. He was cultured, humble, and wise. He published a book about hiking in the Cotswolds of England. Each weekend, he would take the train from London to a countryside village to hike and record his observations. The signed copy that I have is a prized possession for me. Both he and his daughter played cello and gave us a private concert in their home one evening. I'll never forget meeting him at his office. I was escorted to the top floor of the bank and taken to a special room. Shortly after being served tea, he came into the room and greeted me warmly. I was impressed by everything about him.

Suzuki Sensei was the preacher for the Mito Church of Christ when we met. Trained as a lawyer, he became a Christian through the persistent efforts of his sister. He has an amazing story of how he came to faith that I'll save for another time. Eventually, he became an Old Testament Professor at a University in Japan. He suffered from poor eyesight - we always said a “special prayer” if we drove with him – sometimes he had to get out of the vehicle and run up to the sign on the side of the road so that he could see it....and I'm not making that up! Even though Suzuki Sensei's eyesight was very challenged he had some of the most incredible spiritual insight of anyone I've ever met. The eyes of his heart were better than 20/20.

I could go on and on sharing stories about these two but for Kelly and me, they were Oaks of Righteousness revealing the glory of God. While the small church they served in a non-descript Japanese city may not appear in any of our social media feeds, the history of their faithfulness will be recorded in the chapters of the Lambs Book of Life. Their untold impact will be resound for generations.

Almost 40 years ago, the city of Mito, Japan started a program in their public schools of welcoming teachers from the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia for short-term teaching contracts. Many of those teachers found their way to the Mito Church for worship and fellowship and forever had their faith shaped by the warmth, love, and nurture of those Christians. Without even knowing it, the Mito Church has been sending out hundreds of transformed people back to their home countries who are now serving as teachers, ministers, doctors, counselors, professors, and corporate leaders.

The reason I went to visit Mr. Hirose at the bank was to ask him if a small group of the teachers could start a community outreach effort using the church building. He politely listened and said

he would consult the other church leaders. A few weeks later I was invited to a meeting to share the idea with others and make the request. When I finished, they discussed it amongst themselves – in Japanese – for quite some time. Of course, I didn't understand what they were saying but occasionally someone would look over at me, smile, and nod their head.

When it came time to respond, Mr. Suzuki looked at me and said, "Thank you for coming to talk to us about this. We've been praying for 7 years for this so yes we will do this."

One of the most important lessons I learned that day, and have continued to think about, is that they said "yes". The reason it is so significant to me is that there were many reasons to say "no". And they would have been justified in doing so. We had very little knowledge of their language and culture. We didn't really know how you do things in Japan which is a country that values appropriate order. We certainly didn't have a full understanding of what might happen and have plans for all those contingencies. Our youthful enthusiasm focused more on the dream than the plan. It was risk for them to move forward. And yet, they said "yes"!

Springs Family – I pray that we will be a Yes! Church. I know we are faithfully praying for God to move in us and amongst us for His Kingdom to come. He is here. He is faithful. Let's say Yes!