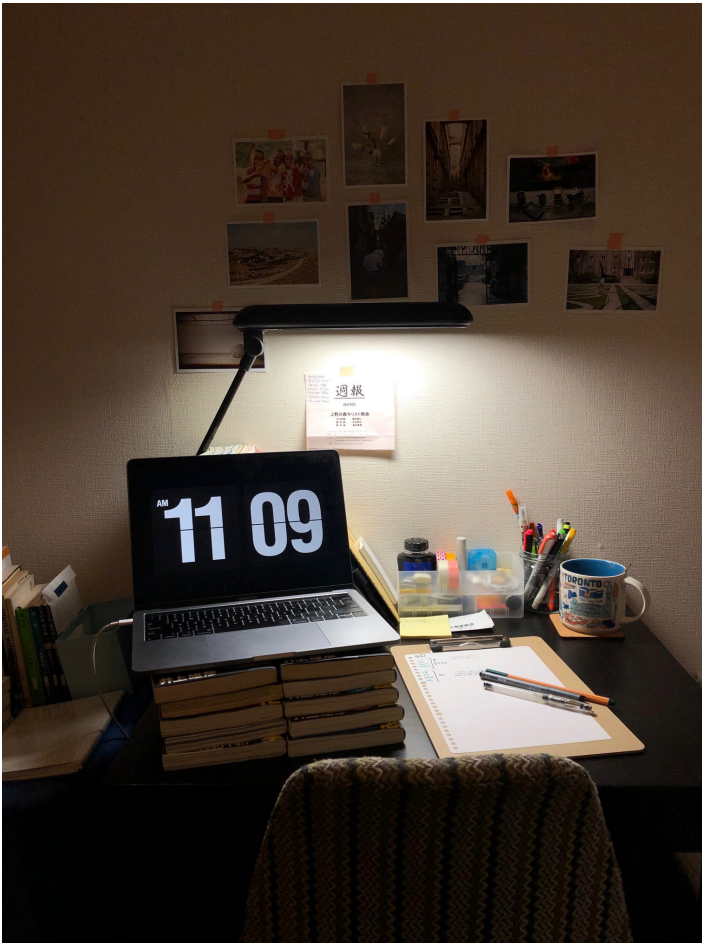


# Hesed

JAPAN: June & July 2020









# ON LIFE & HEART

June and July passed by in a blink of an eye. Most of the days were occupied by 4 hours of online Japanese classes and more hours of self studying. Sitting in front of a silent desk littered with piles of grammar notes and flashcards, I fought a fierce internal battle. Even as a child, I was competitive. My mother would repeat kindergarten stories where I memorized the multiplication table to earn the teacher's praise, or how I got angry because my classmate did something better than I did. In high school, I was unsatisfied with 95 and clawed for 100. God did some work around my perfectionist tendencies and fear of incompetency during university - it has been a while since I have had to wrestle with them. I did not expect perfectionism to greet me so earnestly in studying Japanese.

*You are not retaining vocabularies. You are not applying the grammar forms when you are speaking with your house-mates. Your progress is too slow. You will not be able to get licensed at this rate. Why are you not remembering the vocabularies?* These thoughts ambush me when I am in the middle of studying or conversing with classmates. Somedays, I am able to remind myself of what is realistic (*I mean I've only been in Japan for 4 months - isn't it ridiculous to expect fluent Japanese popping out of my mouth?*) and persevere in studying. Other days, the thoughts are very persistent (*I should've tried harder in studying Japanese while I was in Toronto*) and I cannot continue studying. A lot of times I end up distracting myself with Japanese drama or manga, trying to convince myself that these are also a part of studying.

"Missions is about the lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of life." My mentor reminded me a few weeks ago. Out of a desire for clarity, I have been caught up with goal accomplishment rather than living life in the present moment. The goal of this journey is not about getting licensed in Japan, speaking Japanese fluently, or networking with professionals. It is not even about sharing the gospel with x numbers of people or leading x hours of Bible study. The goal of this journey is loving, obeying, and depending on Jesus in all areas of my life, allowing His Spirit to work in and through me as He wills. I have to keep coming back to this truth, choosing to engage in the effortful dance of letting go and holding on to Jesus. I don't think studying Japanese will get easier, and I still dislike being incompetent, but I pray that through this process I will come to depend more entirely on Jesus and come to experience him as my competency. Perhaps competency isn't measured by what I can effectuate, but by the degree of perseverance until the end.

# PRAY WITH ME

## PERSONAL

- Pray for my internal struggle as I continue to wrestle with unrealistic expectations, task orientation, and a sense of incompetency in the process of studying Japanese. Intercede with me for the peace of Christ to fill my heart in accepting where I am and patience in long-term language acquisition. I will be continuing with Japanese classes 3 days a week until December.
- Pray for the licensing process as I learn to surrender the timeline and specific steps to the Lord. I am not sure what next steps look like in light of COVID. I met a Christian lady who works as a clinical psychologist and an admissions staff at a graduate school. The next step may be to meet with her and figure out what the admission process looks like so I can gauge how much I need to prepare for. For the next few months, I am also praying about contacting Japanese therapists and professors who are willing to meet with me and explore what doors the Lord is opening and closing.

## JAPAN

- **Japanese friends:** COVID continues to prevent opportunities to spend time with my Japanese friends. Some of my friends and I are connecting through social media, but we miss being together in person. Pray for M-chan as she continues to thirst for an intimate Christian community. I am also praying for opportunities to meet with C-san and M-san for deeper conversations about their struggles & faith.
- **Sharehouse ladies:** Praise God for giving me the opportunity to go on a Kamakura day-trip with Y-san and S-san. The trip allowed us to bond outside of the house as friends. Y-san, S-san, and K-san are in serious relationships and expressed their desire to get married soon. Pray with me for more opportunities to have spiritual conversations with them and for our friendship to flourish even after they move out of the sharehouse.



*Even in Kyoto—  
hearing the cuckoo's cry—  
I long for Kyoto.*

**Bashō / Haiku**





# KYOTO ENCOUNTER

A tall, slender figure stood in the hostel kitchen, his hands pouring out coffee as the crisp aroma imbued the dining area. It was 6:00pm, and I just came back from a long excursion around the city, wet from the relentless raindrops that found their way underneath my umbrella. I was exhausted from walking and longed for an evening of quiet introversion. I am on vacation - isn't that enough to warrant a break from human interaction? However, dinner was waiting in the fridge beside the figure. As I deliberated my next step, the figure turned around and greeted me, *konnichiwa*. Wearing glasses and dressed in black, he appeared to be in his 30's. I sensed a certain reservedness about him in his facial expression and demeanor. *Konnichiwa*, I replied, expecting the conversation to end quickly. He asked me about my plans in Kyoto, where I was from, what I was doing in Japan - the usual questions. I answered him without elaboration. Observing his frequent pauses and hesitation in directing the conversation, I sighed inwardly and decided to ease his load by asking him questions, not knowing where this will lead.

He was an architect. After working in a Tokyo firm for 2 years, he decided to quit his job and travel the world to expand his architectural vision. His 3-year journey has taken him to multiple continents where he made a point to visit and learn about local buildings. He said his journey is for the sake of designing buildings that transcend time. This guided and shaped his life. Our conversation took a deep dive when I shared I was a Christian and how my faith shapes my purpose in life. He asked me a lot of questions about religion, psychology, and the human condition. As the conversation unfolded, I felt frustrated at my limitation in Japanese expression. If only I could speak fluently and communicate without barrier in his heart language.

He shared that human beings are boring because he could predict people's response to his questions. He said he has never experienced close human relationships before and does not see the need to. *I can just read books and get what I need from novels. Isn't that*

*enough?* I was surprised and wondered how he has interacted with people on his journey. He said he makes small conversations but stops after they become boring. I asked him why he is choosing to converse with me. *What we are talking about is interesting, and you seem to be different than other people I have met. But I don't see a point to human relationships, they don't contribute to my goal. Our conversation will end tonight, and tomorrow we will go to hello goodbye. It's pointless.*

In the midst of challenging his assumptions, I felt conflicted. I did not know how far I could probe without drawing out too much of his vulnerability. I wanted to point him to his longings and to Jesus, the Creator and Satisfier of our longings. He said he could see himself committing suicide after he accomplished his career goal because there is no point in living afterwards. "Perhaps, if you allow yourself to take the risk in being curious about human relationships, you will discover something different. Interacting with a living human is different than experiencing human interaction through a novel. You are an outsider in the novel. You may get hurt in a living interaction. You cannot control the other person's response." He nodded in agreement. *Maybe you are right.* We parted without knowing each other's names.

As I reflected on this encounter, I grieve for this nameless man who typifies a large proportion of Japanese men. Fearful of intimate relationships and encouraged to suppress their emotions, men often take the position of detached observation, becoming increasingly disconnected with themselves, with others, and with society. I have heard my Japanese male friends comment that the only space they can relax is izakayas, where drinking give them the permission to express their discontentment and complaints. I do not know how God will use this encounter, but I pray that this nameless man will come to remember our conversation when he contemplates suicide. I pray that his curiosity towards faith and humanity grows, and he will open the Bible in his next hotel room.





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PARTNERSHIP:  
1) PRAYER  
2) FINANCE  
3) ADVOCATE