

JAPAN

Lessons for Mission Minded Kids

Lesson 8



Christianity Today

Japan

Lesson 8: Christianity Today

Goals for Lesson 8:

- Students will be introduced to the work of the E.C. Church in Japan.
- Students will understand some of the cultural challenges that Christians in Japan face.
- Students will be able to write by memory the verse for Japan and accurately apply it to the Japanese culture.

Verse for Japan:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”
Acts 17:24-25 NIV)

Before Class:

- Read through lesson and decide what you will use according to your age group and time allotted.
- Prepare all of the pictures including the one on the lesson cover as power point slides, or print them and back them with card stock for stability.
- Make color copies of the verse with border page. Collect pencils for use in class.
- Make copies of the Challenges to Christianity for each of your students, plus one for yourself. Fold each one on the dotted lines and write a large number 1 over each “Buddha” flap, a number 2 over each “Torii Gate” flap, a number 3 over each “Stuff” flap and a number 4 over each “People” flap.
- Read through the Penny Count Activity and prepare the materials as directed.
- Make copies of the Japanese Fan on white card stock paper. Collect scissors and markers if you will use it during class time, or send it home to allow students to decorate and cut it out on their own.

Lesson Plan:

- Open your time together with a welcome, announcements and a brief prayer. (5 min.)
- Review the Japan Verse by reading it through once together. Cover the Japan Verse poster, or turn it around so that students cannot see it. Give students a pencil, and a copy of the Japan Verse page with the floral border. Allow them to try to fill in all of the words, using only the first letter prompts provided. Allow older students to help younger ones as needed. When everyone is finished, read through it one more time together. (8-10 min.)
- If you have the space, move to the floor and sit in a circle, facing each other. Complete the Penny Count Activity, taking time to discuss and then pray as directed. (20-25 min.)
- Read or tell the story part of the lesson, using the “Challenges to Christianity” sheets to demonstrate how difficult it is for a Japanese person to become a Christian. (20-25 min.)
- Use any remaining time to allow students to decorate their own Japanese fan with markers. If it is on cardstock paper, they can cut it out with scissors and use it. (5-10 min.)

Lesson 8 Story: Christianity Today

Being a Christian in Japan is a difficult thing. Even though the government allows for freedom of religion, many parts of the Japanese culture make it very difficult for the people to understand who Jesus is and why they need Him. Currently, only 1% of Japanese people are Christians. That means that out of every 100 people, only 1 knows Jesus.

Do you remember in our last lesson when we learned about how God called John Masuda to be his missionary to Japan? John and Machi Masuda are both gone to heaven now, but others continue the E.C. work in Japan, showing the love of Jesus to their neighbors, and telling them how God came to earth so that He could know them.

Today, there are 3 E.C. churches, and the leader of this group of churches is Rev. Nobuo Abe. Rev. Abe, also pastors the Sagimahara (Sah-gah-me-har-rah) Grace E.C.Chapel, which meets in the lower level of Rev. Abe's house. **(Show House-Church from cover of lesson)** This church has about 30 members and also runs a daycare center for local children during the week. Rev. Nobuo's nephew, Yoriyoshi (Yoh-re-yoh-she) Abe, also planted a church at Ebina (about 30 minutes by car from Sagamihara Grace Chapel) in 2016. This is the newest E.C. Church, and there are about 12 people coming on Sunday worship.

The third E.C. Church is called Kyodo Grace and meets in a church building in Tokyo. This church established by Jon and Machi Masuda. And now, Rev. Ken Sudo pastors took over Kyodo Grace. Rev. Sudo pastors this church of about 50 members. **(Show picture of Rev. Ken Sudo at his church)**

Although John and Machi Masuda began the E.C. work in Japan in the 1960's, there are still only 4 E.C. Churches in all of Japan. Less than 200 Japanese Christians worship in those four E.C. churches, and in spite of years of ministry, thousands of Japanese people around them still do not know Jesus. Why do you think it is so difficult for the Japanese people to decide to follow Jesus Christ? Let's take a look at some of these factors. **(Hand out a folded "Challenges to Christianity" page to each student, telling them to keep it folded until you tell them to lift each flap)**

(Tell students to lift up flap #1) The first thing that makes it difficult for Japanese people to understand Christianity is Buddhism. This religion was brought to Japan thousands of years ago, before Jesus was born, and the Japanese feel that it is just part of who they are. Siddharta Gautauma was a prince who lived in India. He taught the people around him that pain and suffering were caused by desire. Desire could be overcome by meditation (thinking deeply until one's mind is empty of all thoughts). Then one would become "enlightened", which is what "Buddha" means. His followers named Gautauma "The Buddha", or "The Enlightened One". After he died, people made statues of "The Buddha", and began to worship him as a god, even though he never claimed to be a god, or expected to be worshipped. Today, one can find

statues of the Buddha, and Buddhist temples all over Japan (and Asia). The people leave flowers, light candles, meditate, and try hard to become “enlightened”. They are searching for the Truth, but Buddhism has been a part of their culture for so long, that they can’t imagine not following these teachings.

(Tell students to lift up flap #2) Buddhism is not the only religion competing for the attention of the Japanese people. There is another ancient religion that originated in Japan called Shintoism. The Torii gate in the picture under the flap is found at the entrance to all Shinto shrines. This religion teaches the people that their Emperor is descended from the sun god, and should be worshipped as a god himself. Shinto also teaches the Japanese people to worship the gods of nature, or “Kami”. They worship Mt. Fuji as well as any other natural element, and their own deceased ancestors. If you are Japanese, it is assumed you will practice Shintoism. A Japanese person who worships only Jesus Christ is considered to be disloyal to their country. In school, Japanese children learn to sing Shinto songs, and they visit Shinto shrines as fieldtrips and learn to pray there as part of their education. While many Japanese claim they have no religion, most practice some of the customs of both Buddhism and Shintoism. Since the Japanese have no trouble following more than one religion, it is very difficult for them to understand why Christians worship only one God.

(Tell students to lift up flap #3) The next challenge is not a religion, but many people try to use it to replace a belief in God. It is called “Materialism”. This is the desire to buy more and more “things”. For many of Japan’s youth, religion does not mean very much to them, but they are very interested in having the latest computers and technology. When things become the most important part of someone’s life, it crowds out all other needs and desires.

(Tell students to lift up flap #4) The last challenge to Christianity is actually the thing that is dearest to the heart of a Japanese person. This challenge is their family and friends. In Japan, it is most important to fit into Japanese society. It is hard for independent-minded Americans to understand the group pressures of Japanese culture. It is extremely important to fit in with the thoughts, ideas, values, and even clothes of those around you. A person who refuses to go along with others will quickly become an outcast and will bring shame on himself and his family. The average Japanese would rather die than bring shame or disgrace on the family name and honor. Even though the government provides for freedom of religion, conversion to Christianity is very unusual under the intense pressure of conformance.

Pastor Ken Sudo leads the Kyodo Grace E.C. Church.



Rev. Yoriyoshi and Emiko Abe with members of Grace Garden Church



Penny Count Activity

Preparation: Locate 100 pennies. With a red marker, draw a small cross on a small piece of paper, and tape the little paper around one of the pennies, with the red cross showing on one side of the penny. Put the 99 pennies into a small bowl, and keep the special penny out for the activity. Gather the purple prayer-of-request cards.

Activity and Discussion: Show the children the special penny and explain that it represents the number of Christians in Japan while the 99 pennies in the bowl represent those who don't know about Jesus. Put the special coin in the bowl and stir it in with your finger so it can't be seen.

Ask: "How many coins do you think are touching the special penny in the bowl?"

Discuss: "Many pennies are not even close to being touched by the special penny. If the special penny is one Christian, how can one Christian make a difference among so many unbelievers?"

Take a handful of pennies out of the bowl and give each child one penny, explaining that they should keep their pennies hidden in their hand. If they get the special penny, they should not let anyone know. Continue to pass out the pennies by giving everyone two at a time the second round, and then three at a time the third time around, until all of the pennies are gone. Some will have a different amount of pennies, but they should not let others see them. Explain that Japanese Christians are often afraid to tell other people about Jesus, and so they keep their faith a secret, like the person who has the special penny.

Ask: "If a Japanese Christian is afraid to tell their friends and neighbors about Jesus, how will they ever hear?" **Discuss:** "What should a Christian do if others laugh or don't want to hear about Jesus? What are some ways Japanese believers might be able to tell others about Jesus? If Christians in Japan are not able to tell their friends and neighbors about Jesus, do you think Christians from other countries should come and help out? Do you know any Japanese people who live in America? How can you help them understand that Jesus loves them?"

Ask: "Who is the person who has the special penny?" When the student reveals his identity, ask him/her how they feel being the only one in the group who has the special penny. Ask him/her if they would like to explain Jesus' love to all the "unbelieving pennies" all by themselves.

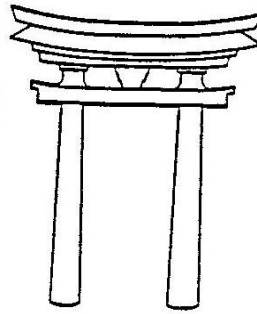
Finish your time by passing out the purple prayer-of-request cards to any 6 volunteers. Take turns praying for the items on the cards, asking God to help the Japanese people all over the world to know and follow Him.

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Acts 17:24-25 NIV)



Buddhism

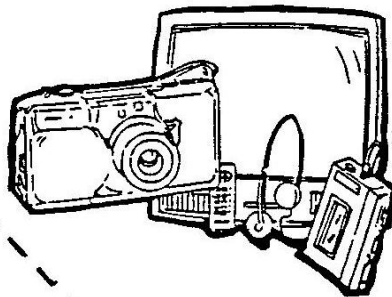


Shintoism

Challenges To Christianity

In Japan

Materialism



Family and Friends



