

Journeying with Jesus – from Korea to Japan

by Choi Hyo Jin

*How does a Korean end up as a mission partner in Japan training at a Japanese Bible Institute? In July 2026 three students and one part- time lecturer from Hokkaido Bible Institute visited us in Hucclecote as part of a 2-week study trip to UK. **Choi, who, unlike the others, is Korean, shared his amazing story at our 8:30 service.***



“My life hasn’t been very long, but looking back at my past, I realize I was a self-centered and arrogant person who only cared about himself. On the surface, I lived a peaceful and ordinary life, but inside, my heart was always dominated by a deep sense of emptiness. I carried a void that couldn’t be filled no matter how hard I tried, and I lived without knowing what true happiness was.

I first came to know about the church when I was six years old and entered a church-run kindergarten. However, shortly after entering, I was involved in a car accident and spent a whole year in the hospital, so I quickly lost touch with the church. During elementary school, I remember following my friends to church, but I wasn’t really interested in who Jesus was. I only went to play with my friends and get snacks. Then, after a fight with a friend, I stopped going to church once again.

Later, when I was in high school, I started going to church again, encouraged by a friend and a church deacon who lived next door. Truthfully, **I started attending because I had a crush on a girl there, and I even ended up getting baptized. However, I had absolutely no interest in Jesus Christ being my Savior and Lord.** I didn't think deeply about the issue of sin, and I only accepted God's love on a superficial level. When the girl I liked moved away, I naturally drifted away from the church once more.

After that, I pursued worldly pleasures and success, under the illusion that these things would satisfy my life. But the more I did, the more my heart became filled with emptiness. Around the age of 25, my father forcefully dragged me to church on a Sunday when all I was doing was playing video games. That incident led me to start attending church again. I met good friends and mentors in faith, and I began to enjoy church life.

Yet, the emptiness still remained in my heart, and I tried to fill it through serving at the church. I found satisfaction in planning things myself and accomplishing them with my own strength. Gradually, my heart grew proud, and I tried to solve every problem using my own ideas and abilities. To be honest, the phrase "rely on God" did not resonate with me at all. Even when I prayed, I did so with doubt, thinking, "There's no way this will happen." Rather than seeking God's help, I believed that only my own efforts and abilities could fill this void.

Then, during a church summer camp, I got into a fierce argument with my mother over the phone. My mother was unhappy with how passionate I was about the church, and it shook our relationship to its core. No matter how much I thought about it, I didn't know what to do. My heart was in true agony, I was completely exhausted, and I finally realized, "This is beyond my own power." I didn't know what to rely on; everything in front of me went dark.

During the prayer meeting at the camp, I fell to my knees and prayed desperately to the Lord. I called out from the bottom of my heart to the Lord, whose name I had only ever spoken formally before. "God, I can't do anything by my own strength anymore. Please forgive my pride. Please have mercy on me."

The moment I prayed those words tears poured from my eyes like rain. I felt Jesus coming to me and holding me tightly. An indescribable peace came over my heart. I felt a lightness, as if a heavy burden had been lifted off my shoulders, and I felt a warm love wrapping around me. God's word resonated with me in a completely new way, and I clearly

understood the love of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to save a sinner like me. At that moment, I realized and sincerely acknowledged that the master of my life was not me, but God. After that, my life began to change little by little.

When I was 30, my church planned a short-term mission trip to the Philippines. I made up my mind, telling myself, "I'm going, even if it means getting fired from my job." I went to my manager and said, "I want to go on our church's short-term mission trip. Please let me go. If you don't, I will quit the company." My manager was shocked, but eventually gave me permission. Through this experience, I learned to trust God, and I began to understand a little bit of what missions were all about.

In 2013, by God's mercy, I—who thought marriage was impossible for me—ended up marrying a wonderful older woman, which surprised everyone around me. When deciding where to go for our honeymoon, I insisted that we go to Japan. "A country with kind people, clean streets, video games, and anime." That had been my image of Japan since I was a child. However, during our honeymoon in Tokyo, I could hardly see any churches. Although it was a short trip, it opened my eyes to the spiritual reality of Japan.

The following year, when our beautiful daughter was born in December 2014, God put a heart for mission work in Japan into my soul. We started praying for a path to Japan to open up.

In 2018, in a situation where humanly speaking, the chances seemed close to zero, a path opened for us to go to Kanazawa Independent Christian Church in Ishikawa Prefecture as lay missionaries. This was made possible through the introduction of Pastor Kim Seung-ho, the representative of OMF at the time, whom we had never even met. Overwhelmed with the joy of participating in "Gospel Mission"—a task that even the angels long to do—our whole family decided, "God is calling us, so we must go." We wrapped up our life in Korea and arrived in Japan in March 2020.

For two years, from 2020 to 2021, we served at the Kanazawa Independent Christian Church and Hikari Educational Center. During that time, **we realized that in order to do long-term mission work in Japan, we needed to study at a Japanese seminary. We kept praying for God's guidance.**

And then, on January 1, 2022. It's hard to explain in words, but much like the wise men from the East who were guided by a great star, **the path opened for us to go to Hokkaido**. In the process of going, there were unexpected misunderstandings, hardships, and failures. However, I am confident that the Lord's good power has continuously surrounded us and led us on the best possible path.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

If this is God's will, no one can stop it."



Above: Hokkaido Bible Institute team hearing about the iSEB (International Simple English Bible) outreach: Choi is second from the left