

In Japan, Saving Face With Humble Hands

Hunger, homelessness and grief; more than 25,000 dead and missing, perhaps more to be counted: Japan remains a nation traumatized, vulnerable and needy after being struck by earthquakes, a tsunami and nuclear crises all this year.

At a time when the nation's culturally ingrained belief in "saving face"—avoiding public attention from disgrace or embarrassment—is making it difficult for the Japanese people to receive outsiders' help, local believers in Japan are finding themselves in a prime position to share the love of Christ.

"The Japanese are a very proud people and remarkably capable," says Joe Hurston, founder of Air Mobile Ministries and author of *Run to the Roar*. Hurston flew to Japan almost immediately after the earthquake to deliver water purifiers. "I see this disaster as an opportunity for us to wrap our arms around them, let them know how sad we are and that we simply want to help. We want Christ to shine."

In Japan, "face," which manifests as culturally conditioned pride, is a mark of personal dignity that gives people a sense of worth. The Japanese will go to great lengths to help one another save face—and to protect their own dignity.

Christian workers believe they can use this tragedy to give Christ "face" without shaming earthquake victims. They say if Christian groups from around the world equip Japan's believers—who make up about 1 percent of the population—with the resources they need to help their nation, a meek and lowly Christ can be exalted in a proud, religious nation.

"This is not business as usual," says Doug Stringer, founder of Somebody Cares America and Turning Point Ministries

International in Houston. "We need to empower local pastors and missionaries who are trusted in the community. We have to communicate in a way that is honorable and help these local Christians gain face with their people."

The opportunities abound for Christians to help. Countless Japanese are grieving after the magnitude-9 earthquake and subsequent tsunami, and the nation is reeling from the estimated \$300 billion worth of damage in its backyard. Many people remain homeless and hungry.

Local pastors can be equipped in trauma counseling, and Christian groups can include local churches in the process of distributing food and medical supplies, relief workers say.

In these ways, they add, Christians may be able to chip away at the "us against them" attitude in Japan. The Japanese are very cautious of being brainwashed by strange religions, according to Tim Clinton, the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

"As relief agencies seek to offer assistance to the Japanese, it is important that they tread carefully, listening to the needs and insights of local Christians," Clinton says. "Only the true heart and compassion of Jesus has the power to overcome the Japanese people's stereotypes of the church. Through the ministry of presence, the provision of basic needs and working under the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians must first seek to listen and understand the Japanese people's pain and loss."