



Life During the New Coronavirus "Hibernation" Season

I never would have thought that the Coronavirus would dominate so much of my conversation, time and energy when I briefly mentioned it in my last newsletter. For those of you who have been keeping up in the news, Prime Minister Abe declared that all schools, elementary to high school be closed for the month of March, and encouraged social gatherings, sporting events, etc be cancelled or postponed. Where possible, people are encouraged to avoid peak commuter times or work from home. With the Olympics being hosted in Tokyo this summer, it seems the government was trying to proactively get ahead of the epidemic so that the Olympics won't be cancelled, and tourists still show up to see the events (after all, it's the tourists that will help pay for hosting it.)

Many people willingly complied. Overnight, everything from the monthly clean up days at the danchi (housing complex I live in) to my English classes were cancelled. Many churches followed suit as well. At our church, the only activities still scheduled are the Sunday morning worship service and Wednesday night prayer meeting. Most Sundays I spend 6 hours at church (from 9am-3pm), now I'm there for only an hour. It feels very strange! Since the last two weeks of March are Spring Break for students in Japan (the new school year starts up in April) this is usually a busy time of year. But many outreaches have had to be cancelled, and our annual Pioneers Area retreat

has been cancelled as well, since many people were flying in from overseas to support that time together. There have been lots of disappointments and last minute changes to this month's events. Thankfully we live in a digital age where many meetings were held over video-chat, and I've been in constant contact with many friends via various social media platforms.

It's been interesting to watch the range of emotional responses to the Coronavirus. As with other national crises I've experienced in Japan, I was impressed at the way people quickly responded to the government's suggestion that public gatherings should be cancelled. Consideration of others is a strong traditional value, and voluntarily giving up their rights to protect those most at risk was a beautiful example of Japanese solidarity. However, unlike other natural disasters we're accustomed to, this one is never ending, and filled with uncertainty. There is no public protocol about how to respond to infectious disease. After the school closures were announced, people started panic buying, preparing to self quarantine. Their fears were not unwarranted; many cities in China and South Korea had already been required to do so. The result was a toilet paper/tissue shortage... that seems to have echoed across the globe in the days following!

However, as we learn more about Covid-19, people's anxiety seems to be lessening, and the inconveniences seem to be more apparent. In some ways, the drastic measures taken to halt the spread of the Coronavirus seemed to be working - there are far more cases in Europe than in Japan now. The Olympic Committee has said they will not cancel or postpone. However, there was a significant jump in numbers over the weekend - from 360 to 520 (not including the cruise ship), so I guess we are not out of the woods yet. We'll see whether life will resume back to normal or if self-isolation will continue to be promoted. Personally, I'm not concerned for my own safety, as much as for people I know who would be considered high risk if they got it. Although people like to compare it to the flu on social media, the risks are still higher for them.



While the Coronavirus has caused some disappointments and inconveniences, personally the various cancellations have been a blessing in disguise. I was able to write my final exam for first semester February 28 and jump into a very jam packed second semester the following Monday, March 2, with 3.5 books for required reading and my first paper already due this week. I'm not sure how I would have got it all done on my regular schedule!

Next week (March 16-20) we still plan on holding the Launch Group 3 Culture Class; a weeklong intensive training regarding Japanese customs and traditions. Please pray for the facilitator's preparation and that it would be a profitable time of learning and discussion for all involved.

In Christ Alone,
Stephanie Schatz



At the last English class I held before the cancellations began, I prayed at the end of class as I always do, this time including protection for the students in the midst of these anxious times. One of the students, who I've known for eight years, said, "I'm not a Christian, but I wish at times like this that I could have someone to pray to like you do." She's rejected many invitations to church events in the past and doesn't engage in spiritual conversations, but I hope that this would work to soften her heart.



On the day the first case of Coronavirus was discovered in Fukuoka, I came home that night to find dozens of firefighters and shattered glass surrounding the building next to mine. The next day, they announced that a gas leak had led to an explosion. It had us all on high alert for the next few days, wondering what will happen next. I'm thankful we have a Father who walks with us through each of life's uncertainties.

Please Pray

1. Pray for those affected by the Coronavirus around the world. Pray that we would continue to look to the Lord for strength when we are weak, wisdom when we are confused, and trust that He is in control, His perfect will not thwarted by the uncertainties of this world.
 2. Pray for Launch Group 3 Culture Class March 16-20. Pray for the facilitators' preparation and that ill health would not keep anyone from attending.
 3. Pray for the safe return of several units who are currently on home assignment and preparing to return to Japan in March. Short termer, Maggie, is due to arrive this month, provided she gets her visa and flights to Japan are
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able to continue. She will be taking over my English class at FBC. Please pray for a smooth transition.

4. For Takuma as he completes his short term trip in Malaysia on March 24, and transition back into life in Japan. It can be a difficult time for people, especially as they miss friends and new customs they've come to appreciate in a new land or see negative aspects of their birth culture for the first time. Lord willing, he is scheduled to share at Fukuoka Bible Church on March 29.

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