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November 27, 2018

# THE LONELY JOURNEY OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

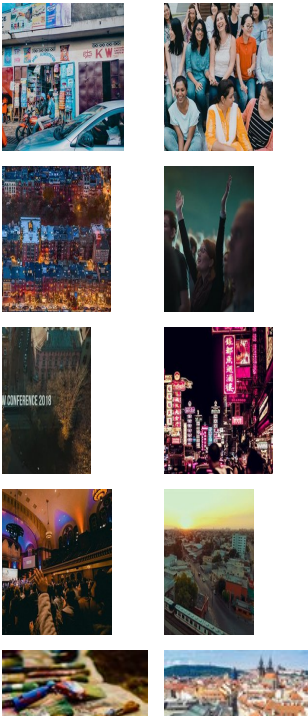


*By Utako Grateley*

When my husband, Damian, and I entered into church planting, we were too excited to consider any negative emotions or possible hardship. We were the kind of people who wanted to see every sickness and sin defeated but failed to see and trust God’s bigger story in the midst of suffering. With less than 1% of the Japanese population declaring themselves to be Christian, we praised God for each conversion and loved watching God move in people’s hearts. Unsupported by an organization, we established various businesses as a way of providing for our staff and ourselves. Each month we witnessed hundreds of unbelievers passing through our building and socializing with members of our small Christian community. We presumed our plan was working well until the day our business partner quit, taking with him a large number of clients and a portion of our income.

During the months that followed, I felt disillusioned with God and with church. As news spread, the sense of betrayal became overwhelming, and I realized how lonely life as a pastor’s wife can be. On the outside, I remained strong, but inside I was screaming, “God, get me out of here!” My momentum dropped, my pioneer-spirit cracked and hope slipped from my heart as I recalled other pastors’ wives who were also

Instagram  
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struggling to stay afloat. As the darkness became increasingly unbearable, my inner voice protested, “God, I did everything I could do for you, so how could you let this happen to me?” I realized church planting had become about my effort and not good news. The gospel had become something I preached to others but not to my own heart. In my time of need, God brought Parakaleo into my life.

Parakaleo is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to come alongside women in church planting and create a relational space for these women to experience a robust gospel that frees them to embrace and live their truest identity. It trains us with tools to coach our own hearts in the gospel, and the fruit of that will be expressed in our marriage relationships, family and the church. Being the first Japanese woman exposed to Parakaleo, I have been journeying with them through virtual cohorts, leadership training and apprenticeship to be better equipped to bring these gospel tools to women in Japan.

Japanese culture places huge expectations on authority figures — a pastor’s wife is no exception. Like our husbands, we need someone to come alongside and invite us into the “gospel dance” (a Parakaleo phrase referring to repentance, faith, love and obedience). During my first Parakaleo retreat in Singapore in 2015 July, I relearnt the freedom of just being me — as God’s beloved daughter. It was a profound experience, which not only opened my eyes to the depths of the gospel but also reawakened my compassion for others and enabled me to freshly embrace the role God has for me.

My journey is not uncommon. As Christians, we all have moments when we succumb to external expectations as the truths of the gospel leak from our hearts. But using the tools provided by Parakaleo, we, the wives of church planters, learn to coach our own hearts in the gospel. We assist one another to better understand our own stories within God’s bigger story of grace. Whilst many church planters network together with other like-minded pastors, the wives are often left out. Their need for someone to come alongside them is just as vital. Please pray for our humble beginnings here in Japan, and join with us in seeking to provide these women with the necessary tools to flourish.



*After growing up in Japan, Utako lived for six years in the UK, before graduating from Bible college and marrying her British husband, Damian. They returned to Japan in 2002 and spent the next*



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“People simply do not want to hear the biblical message of grace. It’s offensive to them.”  
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*thirteen years church planting in Shikoku. Utako and Damian moved to Nagoya, Japan in 2017 to lead Grace City Church. Damian is currently the director for the GraceCPNetwork, a multi-denominational network that assists church planters in Tokyo. In 2015, Damian participated in the CTCAP Intensive, and Utako had her first taste of Parakaleo.*

*Utako is currently serving as a Parakaleo trainer and group leader, as well as working for the “Joy of Japan Center” (a ministry which focuses on church planting and church revitalization). They have three boys—a fifteen-year-old and twelve-year-old twins.*

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Utako, that is so beautifully written! It's wonderful to hear a bit more of your story and God's grace in your life. I thank God for you and your ministry and have been so blessed to benefit from your leadership through the Parakaleo Implementing Basics online group.

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Our mission is to help leaders build gospel movements in cities. Our vision is for a world-changing, city-renewing, gospel-centered global church.



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