

May 10, 2026 — Hiroyuki Yamaoka

"Gospel A to Z"

(John 8:31–32 Reading)

Thanksgiving for the Prayers

Good morning. This youth camp as well also was supported by everyone's prayers, and without accidents or injuries, each person was able to return having received blessing and grace. We thank you for all of your prayers. Thank you very much. We would be grateful if you would continue also from now on to remember the needs of the young people and pray for them.

Also, regarding this youth camp report worship service that is held every year, this time I would like to speak dividing it into four points. First is a report about this camp, second is an introduction of Pastor Motoaki Shinohara, who was the speaker of the camp, third is a report concerning the messages that were spoken, and fourth, as a response to the message, I would like for us together to think about "standing in the gap together with Christ."

1. Report About the Camp

Then, first is the report concerning this camp. This youth camp was held from May 2 to May 4 at Nihon Bible Home located in Minakami Town, Gunma Prefecture, among more than 40 participants in total, inviting Pastor Motoaki Shinohara, the president of Tokyo Christian University, abbreviated as TCU, as the speaker.

In this age of declining birthrate and aging population, having more than 40 young people is an amazing thing, isn't it? At TCU they say that the students are treasures, but we also would like to cherish the young people who are the treasures of Tsuchiura Megumi Church.

Also, that was not all. Amazingly, this time, as an over-age category, three married men also joined us, and during free time, under the title of a love-and-marriage discussion gathering, each of them spoke about how they first met their wives, the grace they received in married life, and what they value in the home.

There was also a question time from the participants, and among them there was the question, "What do you do when the values of husband and wife are not necessarily

the same?" But when a famous line came out such as, "I think love is to draw near to my wife's feelings," I also quietly took a memo in the notebook of my heart.

At the next youth camp, I hope that the wives also can participate by all means, and that we may also hear the opinions of the women.

Bible Home PPT

And, Nihon Bible Home, which became the venue, was a wonderful space where, while hearing the murmuring of the river and the chirping of birds in the midst of lush green forests and listening to the words of the Bible, because the hot spring could also be entered as much as one wanted for 24 hours, both heart and body were put in order.

Also, perhaps because of the season, stink bugs were appearing in great numbers, and even during worship they would "plop" down from the ceiling or fly toward people and bring us comfort. In this world created by God, not only we ourselves but even the insects also together praise and worship God — we were able to have such a precious experience that made us think this way.

Pastor Thomas Tierney, who operates this Nihon Bible Home and whose previous profession was the highly unusual career of rocket engine developer, was also a very charming person.

For example, as an episode showing Pastor Thomas's personality, there was an announcement to all the participants explaining the kerosene stoves in the rooms, and at that time he said, "There is a stove in the room, but at night please do not leave it on and go to sleep. Otherwise your voice will become like thisss," and this American joke remains the most memorable thing to me.

Also, I heard just a little from Pastor Thomas concerning the needs of the campsite, and it seems that in the summer many workers are needed for service there. So that the needs of this campsite may also be met, and so that workers may be raised up from churches throughout the country, I hope that everyone also will remember this and pray.

2. Introduction of Pastor Motoaki Shinohara

Pastor Shinohara PPT

Continuing on, second, I would like to introduce Pastor Motoaki Shinohara, whom we invited as the speaker. Pastor Shinohara also is someone at whose university I myself

was enrolled until March. He has served as the president of Tokyo Christian University from August of 2024 until the present.

After Pastor Shinohara himself also graduated from TCU, he was active and studied abroad overseas, and because of that he is fluent in English, and since he also previously served as the dormitory director of the men's dormitory at TCU, he is a wonderful teacher who also draws near to the feelings of young people.

Actually, when I was doing my graduation thesis in undergraduate studies, Pastor Shinohara guided me in my thesis, and even now I clearly remember that when the thesis was completed, saying that it was a celebration, he bought cake for me and we ate it together in the TCU cafeteria.

Also, he is a teacher characterized by a unique way of speaking that could be called the "Shinohara style." Even at this camp, phrases such as, "Hmm, I seeee, haaah, wowww, naruhodooo," were heard, and I was relieved that this Shinohara style was still alive and well.

Also, Pastor Shinohara's specialty is missiology. Missiology is an academic field that searches for the way evangelism ought to be in the modern age by researching intercultural communication and the methods of world missions carried out in the past. Truly fitting for a teacher in that field, he said, "Well, I'm already from an old generation," and for the sake of this message, he apparently researched from his own university-age daughter the kinds of words that would reach young people. In the message, things such as "Ado", "Hiroaka" ("My Hero Academia"), and "Anpan" were incorporated as words for young people.

And, he also said that Tsuchiura Megumi Church is a church that he really loves. Apparently, when Pastor Shinohara was studying at TCU, during long vacations he secretly served at Tsuchiura Megumi Church. I heard that previously also he had been invited as a speaker at Tsuchiura Megumi Church, and it would be wonderful if we could again have an opportunity sometime to hear Pastor Shinohara speak.

3. Report About the Camp Messages

Then, from here I would like to share about the messages that were spoken during the camp, which is the third point. At this camp, a total of four messages were spoken through Pastor Shinohara. However, before that, what must not be forgotten is the

message from James 2:8–20 spoken through Pastor Kumon, the acting youth pastor, at Pisgah of Tsuchiura Megumi Church before departure on the first day of the camp.

This passage is a place where acts of love as the manifestation of faith are spoken of, just as the word in James 2:17 shows: "In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead by itself."

From there, he spoke by way of application that this youth camp is not merely for ourselves to enjoy, but is a church camp where we listen to the Word and face both God and ourselves. That we should not think, "Because I have been baptized, because I am already saved, it has nothing to do with me," but rather listen to the messages spoken through Pastor Shinohara.

And that we should once again think from the beginning about what kind of meaning the cross of Jesus had for ourselves, and about our own faith.

It seemed that this message had also reached the hearts of the young people, and even in the sharing times during the camp messages, it was shared that this time they wanted to listen with a completely fresh heart, and wanted to receive the message honestly. It was a message that opened our hearts.

About the Theme

And now, from here is the report concerning the message spoken by Pastor Shinohara. First, I would like to confirm the theme of this camp.

John 8:31–32: "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly My disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

The theme of this camp was "Gospel A to Z," proposed by the camp committee and Pastor Shinohara, taking John 8:31–32 as the theme verses.

To explain this simply, the gospel is the ABC of the life of faith — that is, the entrance — but believing the gospel is not "Okay, finished." Rather, it means continuing to abide in this gospel of Jesus until the very end; it does not end only at the entrance.

Just as Jesus said, "Abide in Me," and sought from us from beginning to end that we continue abiding in the gospel of Jesus, we also, while abiding in this gospel, stand in the gaps of this world together with Christ.

In other words, it was spoken as a consistent theme concerning the way of life of denying oneself and offering oneself to God — namely, dedication. And this dedication is not something only for pastors or seminary students, but is also something God desires from all Christians.

Camp Messages

Within this theme of dedication, in the message on the first day, Saturday night, from the theme verses, John 8:31–32, under the title "Freedom in Christ," it was spoken that the idol within us is a self-centered way of living, a way of living that says, "As long as I myself feel good, that is enough." However, it was spoken that Jesus, who is the truth, set us free and liberated us from the state of slavery to the sin of this idolatry.

In the Sunday morning message of the second day, from **Luke 9:23–24**, "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it,'" under the title "A Life Offered to Christ," we thought together about what it means to deny oneself. I would like to speak about this in more detail afterward, but Pastor Shinohara spoke his testimony of dedication and clearly taught us what it concretely means to deny oneself and follow Jesus.

In the Sunday night message of the second day, from **John 11:25–26**, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die forever. Do you believe this?'" under the title "New Life in Christ," it was spoken that resurrection faith is the core of Christianity, and from there, as those who believe in the hope of resurrection, we also testify to Jesus even through dying, speaking about the martyrdom of Christians. In that message, through quoting the martyrdom of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan and the words of Professor Emeritus Akiko Minato of TCU, "If the time of persecution comes, let us die smiling," a powerful question was thrown at us: "Do we truly believe in the hope of resurrection?"

On Monday, the third day and final morning, from **Matthew 5:9**, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God," under the title "Standing in the Gap

Together with Christ," it was spoken that because of the fall of humanity, four kinds of brokenness came into this world: brokenness between God and people, brokenness within oneself, brokenness between people and people, and brokenness between society and peace. And each person was challenged concerning exactly where the gap is to which he or she himself or herself is now being sent.

Pastor Shinohara's Testimony of Dedication

I would like to report all of the messages in more detail, but because of time limitations I cannot report everything, so I would like to share what I thought was Pastor Shinohara's testimony of dedication, which summarized these four messages.

Pastor Shinohara's testimony of dedication was like this. Pastor Shinohara grew up in a Christian home and was a child who properly went to church on Sundays. When he was in elementary school, he also often participated in Bible camps, and repeatedly heard the gospel of Jesus many times.

In the midst of that, from the time he was in junior high school, Pastor Shinohara wrestled with the problem of his own sin. He realized that within himself there was a sinful nature that he absolutely could not solve. Even though he had a desire to go according to the words of God, there was also a self within him desiring the exact opposite things.

Out of fear toward his unchanging sinful self and toward God's judgment, in the spring of his third year of high school, for the first time by himself, Pastor Shinohara picked up the Bible and read it on a day other than Sunday. It was not in order to seek salvation, but in order to know how God judges sinners.

Because, despite having walked in God's grace from childhood, despite having received baptism in his first year of high school, he concluded within himself that this self remaining in sin, this self being drawn toward sin — God would no longer forgive such a me. God was angry with me. I would never be saved.

In such a state of mind, in a dark room, Pastor Shinohara devoured the Bible as he read it. He also read many passages concerning judgment. And then the words of 2 Peter 3:9 caught his eye.

2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not delaying the promise, as some think of delay, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

When he read this passage, Pastor Shinohara found the patience of God's love. The patience of God's love was already covering Pastor Shinohara. Something hot welled up in Pastor Shinohara's heart, and tears flowed one after another from his eyes. While reading the Bible concerning God's judgment, Pastor Shinohara encountered the love of God that covers over sinners.

And at this time, Pastor Shinohara clearly understood the meaning of Jesus's substitutionary death on the cross, which he had heard again and again many times until then. He clearly understood that Jesus had stood in his gap and interceded to God for him.

He realized that for the problem of his own sin, which he himself could not solve, the substitutionary death of Jesus, the atoning death, was necessary. The message of the cross came upon him not as knowledge but as experience.

And at this time, Pastor Shinohara prayed a small prayer of dedication to God. "God, the cross was for me, wasn't it? I offer my life to You. Please make me a person who does what You think should be done."

In this way, Pastor Shinohara came to be someone whose sins were forgiven by the cross of Jesus, and someone who abandoned a self-centered life and walked together with Jesus, someone who stands in the gap together with Christ.

In this way, the camp messages this time were content that made us think about what exactly our own sin is, what meaning the cross of Jesus has for ourselves, how as those whose sins have been forgiven we are to deny ourselves and walk following Jesus from now on, and what it means to stand in the gap together with Christ.

4. Response to the Message

Then, fourth, the response to the message. Listening to this message, as a response, I thought that this matter of standing in the gap together with Christ is a challenge from God that is being repeatedly spoken not only to the young people, but now also in Tsuchiura Megumi Church.

The reason why is because after returning from the camp, I also watched the video of the Sunday worship service on May 3, and last week also, through Pastor Ichihashi, a missionary to Kenya, from the dry bones of Ezekiel 37, things concerning the gaps of

this world were spoken. Also, through the patient love found in 1 Corinthians 13, it was spoken that the gaps in the lives of Kenyan children were covered and restored.

While listening to this message, I thought that Pastor Ichihashi is a person standing in the gap together with Christ. And it sounded to me as though the person standing in the gap together with Christ was asking, "Then what will you do? Will you stand in the gap together with Christ?"

Therefore, listening to the messages of the youth camp, and also listening to the Sunday messages at Tsuchiura Megumi Church, I thought that God is now newly seeking people who will stand in the gap together with Jesus.

Standing in the Gap Together with Christ

Then, what exactly does this "gap" mean? Concerning the gap, it is written in detail in Ezekiel 13:5.

Ezekiel 13:5: "You have not gone up into the gaps nor repaired the stone wall for the house of Israel, so that it might stand in the battle on the day of the LORD."

The original meaning of "gap" refers to a breach in a city wall or barrier that allows the invasion of the enemy, but in a spiritual sense, "gap" means violation of the covenant with God, and therefore means being left defenseless before God's wrath.

To say it a little more clearly, even though one has sinned before God and the relationship with God has been broken, without repenting it is left as it is — the brokenness of the relationship between oneself and God, that is the "gap."

And on the day of the Lord, that is, on the day of the final judgment, God will come attacking through that gap for judgment against that person. Therefore, the "gap" is a very dangerous place where one faces the wrath of God.

Also, "to go up into the gap" originally means to prevent the invasion of the enemy at the place where the city wall or barrier has collapsed, but spiritually, "to go up into the gap" means to stand between God and people on behalf of the people and intercede to God, to stand between God and people as a mediator.

Furthermore, "to build up the stone wall" originally means to rebuild the collapsed stone wall in order to protect those living inside the city wall, but spiritually it means pointing out people's sins and causing them to return to God.

Therefore, a "person standing in the gap" is someone who, while facing the wrath of God, stands between God and people and intercedes at the risk of his life so that people may return to God and repent, so that people may not perish.

Whether such a thing is really possible for human beings — I think everyone, including myself, feels that way. However, throughout history there was only one person who accomplished this. That is the only begotten Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself accomplished this through the cross.

And the person whose own gap has been restored by this Jesus comes to be made into "a person who stands in the gap together with Christ." We do not stand in the gap by ourselves alone. We stand in the gap together with Jesus.

Have our gaps already been restored? If they already have been restored, then next, where exactly is the gap in which we are to stand together with Christ? Where is God trying to send us? I would like for us to pray together seeking God's guidance.

Prayer

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" Isaiah 6:8

Gracious heavenly Father God. Today, as a response to the grace of the camp and to the messages that were spoken, we all together thought about where our own gaps are, and where the gaps are to which we are being sent together with Jesus.

Please, even after this worship service, continue to let Jesus Himself speak in various ways to each and every person who is here, and we pray that the Lord Himself would clearly show each person the path they ought to go.

Also, not only as individuals, but as a community of faith, as the body of Christ, please also show the way that Tsuchiura Megumi Church ought to proceed from now on.

We offer this prayer before You in the name of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.