

Households in Focus

Bringing the Kingdom of God to the Japanese Business World: A Reproducing Social Cycle

by Mitsuo Fukuda

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One section of the business world in Japan has been experiencing the kingdom of God in a fresh and profound way. People within the Japanese foreign exchange margin trading sector have begun to circulate among three types of communities, and a once difficult field of ministry is beginning a reap a fresh movement to Christ.

If you study this urban movement to Christ you will discover an inter-dynamic between three types of social groups, each which collects around a distinct purpose. There's the Life Group, comprised mostly of non-Christians, that acts as an accountability group for practicing certain trading principles, and then two other groups, which are made up of active Christians. In this article I want to introduce this movement and explain the dynamic relationship between these groups.

I actually see this same group inter-dynamic reflected in the early church's experience of *oikos* (household, family, community). Those Jews within the temple community who responded to the gospel outreach of an *apostolic oikos* would then be nurtured and trained in a *disciple-making oikos*. That community would then form another apostolic *oikos* which was sent back to minister to the non-believers among the Jews. I want to suggest that in the New Testament we see a certain flow, a circularity between different groups (*oikoi*), that is strategic to this new movement among the business community of Japan.

Genesis of a Movement

Perhaps a brief chronological history is in order. Initially God told Mr. K, a former Japanese missionary to a Communist country, that if one did business according to the Upward-Outward-Inward principles: by being obedient to God (upward), seeking to bless others (outward) and demonstrating self-restraint (inward), he would be profitable in the foreign exchange sector. He calls these the Upward-Outward-Inward (UOI) principles of Foreign Exchange (FX) trading. In addition to starting a business to teach the Upward-Outward-Inward principles, he also started up accountability

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groups for non-Christians called Life Groups, to help those involved in the foreign exchange market (including managers, accountants, doctors, lawyers, investors, housewives, and retirees, rather than full-time traders) to put those principles into practice.

On the one hand, Life Groups exist to meet the felt needs of non-Christians, in terms of being a source of mutual support so that those putting the Upward-Outward-Inward principles into operation can make a steady profit. At the same time, they also meet a higher need, providing opportunities to meet Christ, and preparing their hearts to turn to Christ later. Members *develop an ordered lifestyle* as practice for developing a relationship with God (upward), *discover their altruistic mission* as practice for serving others (outward), and *support one another* as practice for supporting the Christian community (inward).

Life Groups are also a space where a Christian leader is able to exert a positive personal influence on the non-Christian members, and these non-Christian members of the group very naturally come to faith. Those who do are immediately brought into a second accountability group to help them grow, called a UOI Oikos; but, after conversion, they have remained in their Life Groups, and then become members of a third group, an apostolic community of Life Group Leaders (the LGL oikos). It is through this third group that they continue to influence the non-Christian members with the example of their lives. Furthermore, several of the members of the Life Group Leaders oikos have worked together to establish Life Groups across the country. The kingdom of God is coming in one sector of the Japanese business world and disciples are being multiplied as they rotate between evangelism, training and mission, represented by their circulation between the supportive Life Groups, the UOI Oikos and the LGL Oikos.

Three Groups in the Early Church

The social unit of oikos (relationships making up a family) refers not just to the nuclear family of blood kin, but also includes slaves. By comparison, in our modern urban settings there is increasing separation between home and work as more people travel from suburban homes to city-center workplaces. It creates a contrast to the days of Jesus and the early church, when there was considerably more integration between work and home within the oikos.

In Luke 19:9, when Jesus declared to Zacchaeus “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham,” the word for



“house” is oikos. Similarly, in Luke 10:5, when the disciples who were sent out were commanded to say “peace to this house,” this again is the word oikos. When Jesus went to the Jewish temple, his object was not to worship but to testify to the kingdom of God. The temple was his mission field. Jesus blessed the established family relationships and used them as a basis for kingdom expansion.

Similarly, for the disciples of the early church, oikos was the foundation for worship, evangelism, service, and fellowship. Those who had accepted Christ

continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with

glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47)

When they went to the temple in Jerusalem during those early days of the apostolic era, they went not to worship but to share the gospel, in teams of two people. Before the persecution arose, the temple was a place where it was easy for them to gather. One might think they were just going to socially catch-up with one another, but I believe it was primarily a place for the winning and harvesting of souls. It is noteworthy that we do not have a single record of their teacher, Jesus, during his public life offering worship or sacrifice at the temple. On the other hand, he said to the Samaritan woman “you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21), teaching her that the question was not where one should worship but that one should worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Did the disciples of Jesus—a Jew who did not worship at the temple—offer sacrifices at the temple? There is a passage in Acts 21:24, where James the brother of Jesus advised Paul to pay the expenses of some men who had taken a vow so they could have their heads shaved and join in with their purification rites, but we can see this as being an expedient way to allow Paul to deflect the charge of being a heretic. We cannot be sure, as we have no records of Jesus’ direct disciples attending Jewish rites, but it is difficult to believe that the only reason for meeting daily in the temple was to take part in Jewish worship. It would not be unnatural to believe that they met together and held their own worship services at the Temple.

Moreover, for the early church, the pattern of worship took place primarily within the oikos, as they “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.” When the leader of the household

broke bread, they would remember Christ’s sacrifice, and when they passed around the cup, they confirmed the reality of the New Covenant. As they broke bread and drank wine, they resolved afresh to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

During this apostolic period, we see the existence of three separate groups: Jews and God-fearing Gentiles worshipping at the temple, and two other groups, each which was a form of Christian oikos. Of the latter, the first one was the fellowship happening in the believers’ houses, and we will call this a *disciple-making oikos*. Their fellowship over the breaking of bread had three relational elements: upward, outward, and inward. The upward relationship with God commemorates Christ’s deeds and confirms their mission of proclaiming his death until he returns. Next, the outward relationship with the world: hearing the testimony of those who have been in missions and praying for their needs helps facilitate the strategic, natural, and loving progress of God’s mission. Finally, that inward relationship: the members making up the body of Christ together confess their sins to one another, share the determination to follow the Lord, and pray in solidarity together. As they share in one loaf together, they experience the fact that “though we are many, we are one body” (1 Cor. 10:17), remembering the solidarity of the body of Christ and the mission he gave them.

The joy of knowing God would naturally travel by word of mouth around the multiple networks of personal relationships of those who meet in the disciple-making oikos, and they would exert a personal influence upon the non-Christian world through the practical expressions of their love. We see this particularly through the fact that the community of faith “enjoyed the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:47).

The second oikos of this believing community was formed as they intentionally went out to evangelize in the

temple. We will call this the *apostolic oikos*. This was a more purposive and agile oikos, whose members would go each day to the temple and intentionally evangelize, through words and deeds, those who were waiting on the Lord, telling them that the Lord and Savior had been risen from the dead. I believe they were fundamentally sent out in teams of two (Acts 3:1); indeed, that was the regular, usual, practice as we see in Matthew 10 and Luke 10 when Jesus sent out the disciples. When the twelve were sent out, and when the 70 (or 72) were sent out, they went in teams of two. There are cases where people such as Philip (Acts 8:5) and Peter (Acts 10:21) went out individually, but one can see a principle of either pairs or small groups of 3–7 people. These teams which were sent out into mission would not simply break bread together in houses, but also belonged to another in a type of oikos. They would *be filled with the Holy Spirit* (upwards), *share the gospel with those in the temple* (outwards), and *work in teams of two*, supporting each

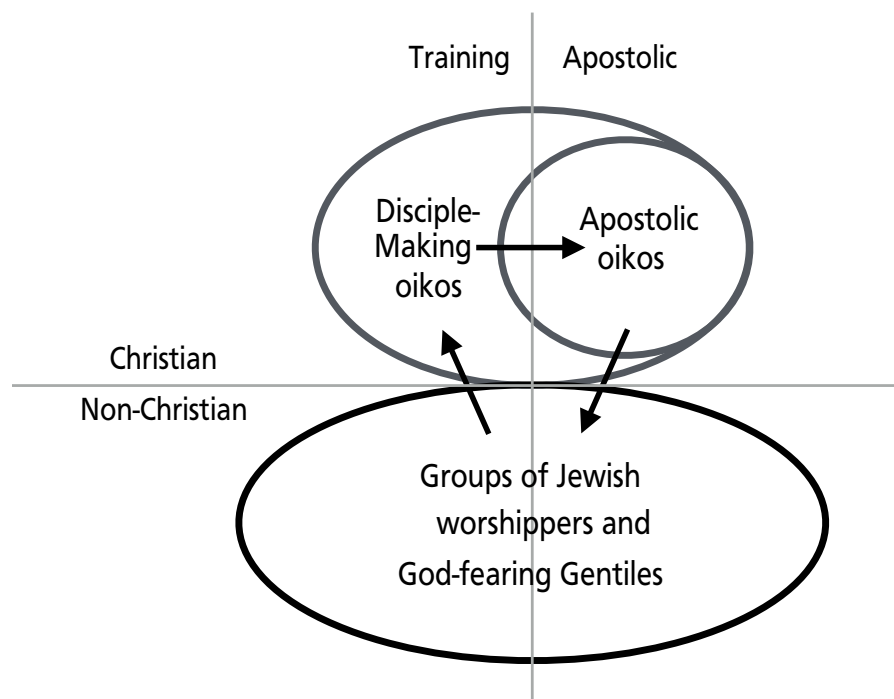
other (inwards). Examples are Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and Mark.

I want us to notice in this early church a cycling of believers through different social forms of oikos. Those who were evangelized by an apostolic oikos and had come to faith within the “group of Jewish worshippers and god-fearing Gentiles” would break bread and fellowship in the disciple-making oikos, and then be sent back out for outreach as a fresh new apostolic oikos. The circulation of people between these three groups forms a gradual cycle of evangelism, training, and mission, through which people became followers of Christ from inside a non-Christian setting. When persecution came, this circulation was reproduced all over the world, leading to the development of world mission (see fig. 1).

Three Characteristics of FX Trading

Within the Japanese foreign exchange trading community, we see a set of three groups similar to those in the

Figure 1. Circulation Between Three Groups in the Early Church



early church—and similar also in their patterns of circulation and development in evangelism, training, and mission. In particular, missionary business people are developing and multiplying this structure across Japan. The starting point for this multiplication was the discovery of foreign exchange (FX) trading principles by Mr. K, a missionary-turned-FX-consultant.

In 2002, K was sent from Japan as a missionary to a Communist country, but he became discouraged as the mission did not progress in accordance with his expectations. He taught at a local seminary and disciplined local workers, but was generally unable to do direct evangelism. After a while, he realized that despite being a missionary, most of his fellowship was with other Christians. On top of this, in 2004, due to sudden changes in the local currency, the financial support from his agency no longer covered his living expenses. To deal with this, he opened a real estate business. His mission agency had a policy of missionaries living only on donations, and so K navigated a difficult readjustment of expectations with his mission agency leaders. At the same time, his business was expanding.

At this point, he experienced something new. His relationships with local people, whose hearts had seemed closed when he was living off donations, became considerably deeper through doing business together. Once a trust relationship had been established, it became easy to share the gospel. For example, even though his business partners or clients might not come to faith in Jesus, he won the respect of non-Christians through the integrity and uprightness of his operations as a Christian businessman. The reason K started a business was to have the financial basis required to continue as a missionary, but as he actually entered the business world he began to realize that living out Christian principles in business could itself be a form of mission.

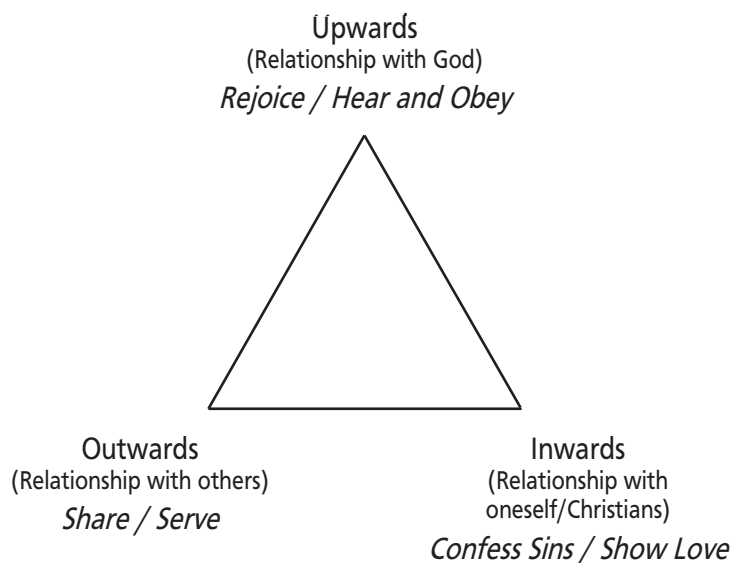
In 2009, while supporting some house church pioneers, he was visited by one of the workers who was himself in business. Not merely was this worker earning his own living, but through the profits of his business, he was able to support many other workers and poor people. He had also seen people come to faith through contact with Christians in the business world, and had then seen them trained up and sent out into the mission field. This man took K through a discipleship training course called Upward, Outward, Inward Training¹ and also taught this to the local workers. Again, “Upward” refers to the relationship with God, “Outward” to the relationship with the world, and “Inward” to one’s relationship with one’s inner life and an inner circle of other Christians (see fig. 2). It is a compact discipleship course aimed at sending newly converted people back into the harvest field. It consciously promotes daily practices in the three relationships of upward (rejoicing in God’s grace, seeking His direction), outward (sharing the gospel, serving the unreached), and inward (repentance and character building, showing love to brothers and sisters in the faith). After K received the training, he immediately put it into practice.

Without relying on clergy, programs, or buildings, and as he began to listen to God and follow His direction for his daily life, a miracle occurred. He saw signs and wonders, and family and friends began to be saved through their networks of personal connections, leading to the establishment of a number of house churches.²

As well as the UOI Training, the worker gave K another piece of important information. He recommended that K move from real estate to foreign exchange, introducing him to an investment e-mail newsletter produced by a Christian friend. As he learned about foreign exchange, K immediately understood that foreign exchange trading, unlike real estate, had three characteristics which corresponded to the upward, outward and inward relationships.

The first characteristic was upwards, in the sense that it re-oriented their purpose in life. K learned that a concentrated, principled session of trading could create the ability for people to go on to accomplish God’s mission for their lives. If traders would follow the principles of (1) limiting daily trading to at most 30 minutes, (2) limiting leverage to a factor of three, and (3) looking for patterns in the charts through objective eyes and

Figure 2. *The Three Relationships and Six Actions of UOI Training*



not with the eyes of greed, then they would be able to make the same amount of profit in a short period of time as a professional dealer. Staring at a chart all day was essentially worshipping an idol on the computer screen. They must not sacrifice themselves for a trade. Foreign exchange should instead be seen as a means for each person to financially support the mission in life that God has given them. The purpose of life is not to make money but to serve others, and one must never mistake the means with the purpose. In foreign exchange, one can achieve one's goals as well as being involved in trading. By setting apart a little time each day for trading, it became very possible to make the financial resources required for one's life goal.

The second characteristic of foreign exchange trading was their outward relationships with the world. Through appropriate foreign exchange trades, traders could learn a way of managing their money that would help them understand how to steward the resources given to them by others. In fact, foreign exchange can actually teach all of us how to live in terms of what we focus on and what we choose to restrict; this is the educational aspect of foreign exchange.

FX trading is not understood as gambling. In James 4:13–14, we are told:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

By contrast, foreign exchange is not this kind of one shot, win-or-lose gamble. It has more in common with farming. A farmer might suffer a crop failure due to poor weather, but we do not consider farmers to be gamblers. Similarly, someone might suffer a loss in foreign exchange but he should be able to overcome or overturn such a loss by faithful application of the small

One's success or failure is determined by one's ability to concentrate on an appropriate goal and not chasing after temporary achievements.

gains made through following the UOI principle of self-restraint. Cutting one's losses is a matter of recognizing a mistake and changing course. In life too, one's success or failure is determined by one's ability to concentrate on an appropriate goal and make rapid course corrections, rather than chasing after temporary pleasures, impulses, adventures, and achievements. Money is something entrusted by God to humans in order to bless others. How we use our money determines how we live.

Foreign exchange has two sets of indicators: fundamentals and technicals. When the fundamentals and the technicals line up in a pattern, this is called a stable pattern. If one only trades when this pattern is established, and does not miss it, even someone without specialist training can make a profit. In real estate and stock trading, a certain amount of money is required in order to continue making a profit, and in reality, only the rich can continue to get richer; the vast majority of people end up losing money, and it is a structure where only those with wisdom and resources (or the resources to be able to buy wisdom) are able to sustain a profit. However, in foreign exchange, by following the principle of only trading into a stable pattern, one can make medium- to long-term gains with even a little capital. So those familiar with foreign exchange are able to learn principles about money management. They begin to get a feel for what should be invested in. Life is, in a sense, an investment. We see this in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Anyone can learn the principles of money management through foreign exchange if they have this awareness. Those who have learned money management can even teach those whom God has entrusted with great resources

how to show the glory of God and bless others through the use of capital.

The third characteristic of foreign exchange trading was inward: the aspect of self-control required over their desires and impulses. FX traders can trade safely as long as they are aware of the price they expect as indicated by their own ability. Without knowing the expected value, it is difficult to continue to objectively evaluate their own trades. To begin with, dealers need to develop the skill of working out the expected value by trial and error. A vague judgement, such as "I'm generally just about ahead but I take a few losses sometimes," does not lead to understanding what measures are effective. Moreover, if traders can get into the habit of passing up every trade outside of a stable pattern, modestly reflecting on their trading history, avoiding the thrill of the chase, and being aware of the weakness of human beings, they will be able to safely make a profit.

In other types of trade, such as real estate and stocks, even professionals can have unexpected losses. How many people, during the outbreak of the Global Financial Crisis, could say that they continued to make a profit? It's like saying "I can see" when you are just as blind as everyone else. (John 9:40–41.) "Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). But in the case of foreign exchange trading, those who follow the UOI principles may post a temporary loss occasionally, but very few would continue to post a loss over the course of a one-year span. The UOI principles expounded by Mr K. place a check on the desires of those who are driven by profit, and allow people to use their energy and time for something truly meaningful.

Let us summarize the UOI principles in foreign exchange trading:

Upward: Follow a higher standard.

1. Restrict trading to thirty minutes per day.
2. Keep leverage to a factor of three (within 3x).
3. Look at the chart patterns with objective eyes, not the eyes of greed.

Outward: Trade rightly to bless others.

4. Remember money is a means to bless others.
5. Only trade in a stable pattern.
6. Gracefully cut your losses.

Inward: Work towards self-control.

7. Know the expected value and evaluate each trade objectively.
8. Be aware of your weaknesses, and pass up everything apart from a stable pattern.

When K understood these principles, they were like a shaft of light from heaven to him; it was like scales falling from his eyes. He returned to Japan in 2012, and the next year he began teaching UOI Principles to foreign exchange traders. As he helped those who wanted to put these principles into operation, more and more they wanted to be faithful to their mission (upward), use their money intentionally for the benefit of others (outward) and develop their own self-control (inward). K began to distribute an e-mail newsletter, and became involved in research and individual consulting. And he then began to form Life Groups so that those using his principles could mutually encourage one another.

The Formation, Purpose and Significance of the Life Group

The formation of the Life Group As we have stated above, people seek to live in three types of relationship. The upward relationship with God consists of rejoicing in His grace, being led by Him each day and doing what He leads. The outward relationship with the world consists of sharing

the gospel and lovingly serving those around us. The inward relationship with ourselves and with a circle of Christians involves checking ourselves to see if there is any sin in us, and showing love to the family of faith.

We hold accountability groups which meet together each week to ask how those upward-outward-inward relationships are going in life, groups we call *Upward, Outward, Inward Oikos (UOI Oikos)*. We find these groups to be an appropriate way, in the business of Japanese urban life, to intentionally practice loving God, loving each other and loving ourselves in the same way as was demonstrated by Jesus communities in the first century. After a time of checking how things are going,



members of a UOI Oikos will study the Bible together and put together an action plan for how they will put what they have learned into practice. The following week, the group will share how the plan went. If people have responded to the gospel and followed God, then we testify and give the glory to him. If we did not follow God that week, then we confess this to one another. Almost all of those who came to faith through their relationship with Mr. K were introduced into a UOI Oikos after their conversion, helping them to deepen their upward-outward-inward relationships and grow as well-balanced disciples of Christ. These UOI Oikos groups are places where those who have come to faith

can encourage one another to talk with God, to influence the world for the kingdom of God and to become transformed into the likeness of Christ.

There's a story behind how Mr. K created a similar accountability group for non-Christian FX traders, which he called the Life Group. It began with a meeting between Mr. K and Mr. S, an FX trader living in Okinawa, after Mr. K had returned from his missionary activity in 2012. Mr. S shared his frustrations with the instability of his trading and the inability to make a sustained profit. Mr. K decided to make a special UOI group for foreign exchange trade just to help out Mr. S. Both K and S were Christian and were both familiar with UOI groups, and so they began to meet every week over social networking to honestly assess their trades and develop and share action steps in an accountability relationship. Every week for around 10–15 minutes, they would ask each other two questions: "Do your trades this week reflect the action plan you decided upon last week?" and "What plan will you have for the next week?" This simple exchange of two questions was the structure of the first Life Group.

This fellowship was a great encouragement to Mr S, and he began to make more steady trades and steady gains. This interactive Life Group, a simple dialogue over action plans, spread through Mr K and Mr S's personal oikos, and in March 2014 it had seven members. At this point, the Life Group concept was publicly introduced in an e-mail newsletter (that had been started by a Christian investor with a subscription of a couple of thousand members.) This led to Mr K and his friends holding explanation seminars in Osaka, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Nagoya, Okinawa, Sendai and Sapporo to recruit new members, and at one seminar thirty people immediately joined the group. In August of the same year, Mr. K began to produce his own e-mail newsletter for the

FX community, and subscribers of that newsletter also joined Life Groups. Those members who seemed to have a gift of leadership became local leaders, regardless of whether they were Christian or not. These local leaders independently operated their area Life Groups, with delegated responsibility.

Currently there are Life Groups in operation in twelve areas of Japan, including Shizuoka, Kagoshima, Okayama and Matsuyama. There are around thirty local leaders, with national directors overseeing them. Mr. S is one of the three national directors, along with Mr. K. Mr. S is gifted in evangelism, and runs meet-ups in each location in which unsaved local leaders or Life Group members are led to faith. Out of 200 members, around forty have come to a decision for Christ. Currently all local leaders and subleaders are Christian.

When they come to faith, they are brought into UOI groups, but they also continue in the Life Groups, and testify to other non-Christian members of the life group through their personal influence and the changes Christ has brought about in their lives. At the beginning of 2014, there was a pattern whereby Mr. K, Mr. S and the other initial members would tour the country, recruiting Life Group members and then people would be led to faith at dinners or parties after the seminar, but now the local leaders themselves are leading foreign exchange seminars for their Life Group members and telling the non-Christian members about the greatness of God.

The Goal of the Life Group

Life Groups have three goals. They include the three UOI relational aspects in their groups.

First, they act according to the law God has written on their hearts. There is the upward relationship, which in this case means achieving a new, purposeful lifestyle ordered around God's law. The non-Christian Life Group

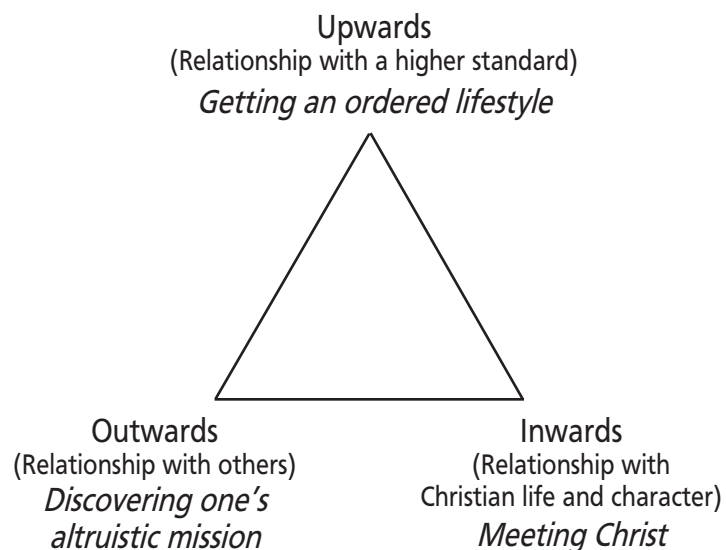
members are not directly connected with God, but they are encouraged to follow the demands of the law written on their hearts (See Romans 2:15). Their new lifestyle encourages them to follow a higher order, in terms of only trading for 30 minutes a day. If they keep fast to this principle of trading, even thirty minutes a day is enough for a high probability of profit. In the Life Groups each member returns to these principles, and within the group is asked three questions: "Did you follow the action plan you decided at last week's group?" "Did you deviate from the UOI principles?" "What is the action plan that you want to achieve before we meet at the next Life Group?" By creating an accountability structure where people feel that "your victory is my victory," they can encourage one another to follow the principles. Non-Christians are not directly taught by God at this stage, but by keeping themselves obedient to a higher law, they are preparing themselves to follow the purposes of God.

Second, they become aware of their altruistic mission to improve the world. For Life Group members, there are the outward relationships, which involves finding their mission in the

world. They have a high probability of making a profit by following the UOI principles, but money is not the sole purpose of life; rather it is a means by which they can each find meaningful ways to serve society. Trading simply to make a profit is against the UOI principles. To make a profit that leads to social contribution, members must never make risky trades for the sake of greed, but only make orders during a stable pattern and quickly cut their losses. Trades made for the benefit of others paradoxically bring a returned profit as a by-product. Life Group members think about how they can repair their existing relationships and what they can do for the benefit of others, for the happiness of their friends or for the society around them. By finding their altruistic mission, they can put this into practice. The non-Christian members are powerfully influenced by the Christian traders as they see them gaining a profit for the benefit of others.

Third, they meet God through the love and support of Christians. Their inward relationships, or fellowship with other Life Group members who happen to be Christians, give the non-Christian members the opportunity to meet with

Figure 3. The Goal of the Life Group



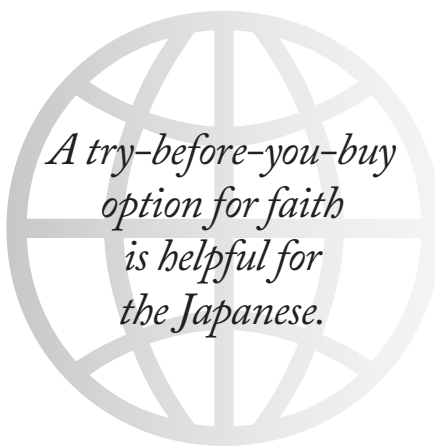
God. Their motivation to do so grows through the example of the lifestyle and character of the Christian leaders. As of March 2016, the Life Group leaders are all Christians, many of whom were led to faith by Mr. K or the initial group of Christian leaders. Life Group goals take great determination: it is not easy to be aware of one's own weaknesses and to trade according to a set of principles which include honest self-evaluation and intentionally setting expected value. When the non-Christian members of the Life Group experience the love of Christ through the warmth and fellowship of the Christian members, they become interested in this Christ in whom they trust, and they begin to want to meet him themselves. The personal magnetism of the Christians then becomes a way of connecting the non-Christian members with Christ (see fig. 3).

The Significance of the Life Group: The Halfway House

Because Life Groups are mostly made up of non-Christian members, and because Japan is a strongly group-oriented society, Life Groups function as a form of a halfway house. Baby orangutans in the Indonesian forests who have been looked after by conservationists and who have acquired the skills needed for life in the forest, are placed in a facility before going back into the wild, somewhere between the wire fence of the clinic and the wild of the forest. This allows the babies to practice the skills they have learned in an environment similar to the wild but where they are protected from predators. In the same way, Life Groups are a partial way for the non-Christian members to practice what it would be like to be Christian. As stated above, Life group members act according to the law God has written on their hearts (upwards), become aware of their altruistic mission to improve the world (outwards) and meet God through the love and support of Christians (inwards). As they come to faith, they remain in their Life Group,

but also are placed into a second group called a UOI oikos. Later they begin to function as Life Group leaders in their original Life Groups.

Having a kind of try-before-you buy option for faith is very helpful in allowing Japanese people to draw closer to God. Making a personal decision for Christ in the Western individualistic understanding is incredibly difficult for the Japanese. For example, when ordering food in other countries, one needs to make a choice from a wide variety of options on the menu, but the Japanese are not able to do this. Even if the shop or waitress provides them with information, they will not be able to choose. When ordering food in a Japanese restaurant, comparatively few options



are available. There is often a fixed “set plate” option, which allows the customer to skip the process of choosing salad, soup and sides; the customer just chooses the set plate, and the shop does the work of deciding what would be best for the customer. In fact, high-class sushi restaurants have no menu at all—the chef decides what food to serve in what order. Trusting the chef means that the customer gets the most appropriate food at the best time. It would be thought ridiculous for customers to order for themselves at this kind of restaurant.

I found it personally embarrassing when I studied in America, that when I shared my situation and feelings with

American friends, I would be asked very directly, “So what do you want to do?” In a high-context culture³ such as Japan, it is embarrassing to want something which is different from others. There are even cases where, in the middle of explaining something, one might be told “I get you,” and the explanation would then progress in a different direction. The usual pattern of communication involves observing the feelings of others and looking for points of connection. It is incredibly difficult—and somewhat frustrating—to decide everything by oneself, lay out those decisions, and then negotiate them with others. This is not to designate which culture is better, but a suggestion about which approaches to mission in Japan might be a good fit for the culture.

If one tries to evangelize without being aware of this tendency in Japanese society, one may resonate with a handful of Westernized Japanese people, but not with the majority. Western missionaries often act like Western waiters, setting out information and waiting for the Japanese person to make an order (i.e. make a decision), but the average Japanese person finds it very scary to enter an unknown world by themselves. It is particularly difficult to be the first ones to raise their hands for Christ in a country with a small Christian population where maybe there are no other Christians in their families, friends or local communities. Japanese people are simply not used to making an evaluation, then a decision, then taking responsibility for it individually. This is why, after many years, many missionaries find themselves with Japanese friends but no converts.

In this situation, the half-way house provided by the Life Group is a necessary step along the way. For non-Christian traders, the Life Group has a low barrier of entry. Some people who had dipped their toes into FX trading without much success got to know the UOI Principles through Mr. K's e-mail newsletter, and

from there naturally joined a mutual accountability group, since it was appropriate to their felt needs. Dealing with their felt needs allowed them to discover their deeper needs. When they joined the Life Group, they learned a lifestyle of correct and noble character (upwards), steadily working to achieve their vision for the world (outwards), self-control with consideration (inwards). Those non-believers who become Life Group members have something attractive about them. The Japanese have a concept of heaven (upwards), and feel a desire to live out their “heavenly mission” and work in their “heavenly field.” As people see their felt needs being met, in terms of gaining a profit, they begin to deal with their latent, deeper needs, such as needing to make a useful contribution to society (upwards), having a satisfying task to perform (outwards), and accomplishing something together with friends (inwards).

Circulation between Three Groups

Just as the disciples of the early church went into the temple to reach out to those waiting on the Lord, the Life Group Leaders (LGL Oikos) reach out to the non-Christian members of the Life Groups. However, we do not necessarily see the gospel preached boldly accompanied by signs, wonders, and a public persecution. Since the Christian leaders are seen by the non-Christians as models in terms of living out the UOI Principles of the Life Group, people are being led to faith without a particularly high-handed approach to evangelism. Rather, the LGL Oikos is perceived as those with a noble and altruistic concern, carrying out their mission and their trading in a steady and effective way, loving and encouraging one another, all of which clearly shows the non-believers that they are one body connected to Christ.

The Japanese Christian population is around 1%, and there are relatively few Christians who are secular leaders. But in the Life Groups, headed by Mr. K,

the leaders are all Christian, and their lifestyle, attitude and actions as Christians are evident to the non-Christian members of the groups. This breaks up the image of Christians as rarified “holy, poor and pure” monks, but allows them to be seen as attractive leaders who love one another and are exerting an influence on the world through their daily conversations with God. In many cases, people are led to faith right away during the after-seminar parties. People very naturally want to live in a way that follows the example set by leaders whom they respect and honor.

Many of the members of the LGL Oikos belonged to a Life Group when they were non-Christians, but when they came to faith they also joined a UOI Oikos and grew as Christians. It was completely natural for them to stay in their current Life Group to testify to non-believers, just as had been done to them. Those workers trained up in the UOI Oikos are sent back into the Life Group as part of the LGL Oikos. There, more people come to faith in Life Groups, get trained through the UOI Oikos, are sent out from the LGL Oikos, and the cycle of evangelism, training and mission continues.

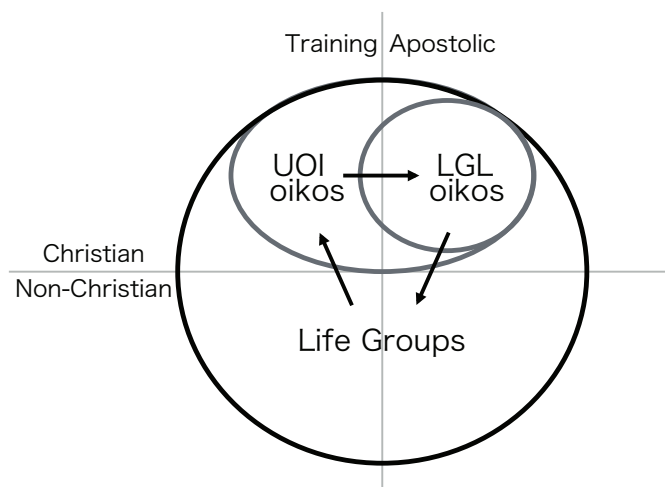
The difference between the three groups in the early church era and the Japanese foreign exchange world is that the two

Christian groups (the UOI Oikos and the LGL Oikos) are fundamentally insider movements within the non-Christian accountability groups. But the commonality between these two movements to Christ separated by two thousand years is that the apostolic cross-cultural ministry oikos is fundamentally part of a permanent local disciple-making oikos.⁴ Figure 4 shows the boundaries of the LGL Oikos within the disciple-making sphere.

The actual flow is as follows: (1) subscribers to the e-mail newsletter supply the life groups with non-Christians who need help with foreign exchange trades; (2) the life groups supply the UOI Oikos with new Christians; (3) the UOI Oikos supply the LGL Oikos with disciplined believers, and (4) the LGL Oikos then supplies the Life Groups with leadership of influential Christian character. As people circulate between the Life Group, the UOI Oikos, the LGL Oikos and then back to the Life Group, many foreign exchange traders are becoming connected to Christ and discovering a new life.

Further, this cycle gives new vitality to the Life Groups; people who hear by word of mouth or through Mr K’s e-mail newsletter are interested in what is going on and want to hear

Figure 4. Circulation Between Three Groups in the Foreign Exchange Community



more. As new subscribers are added to the mailing list, both the business and the provision of non-Christians to the Life Groups are increased.

The Extension of Life Groups

Another function of the Life Group Leaders Oikos is the pioneering of new Life Groups in other areas, as leaders co-operate together to reproduce the cycle. A UOI Oikos is comprised of two or three Christians, and so as someone comes to faith, they either become the third member of a pair, or start a new group with the person who led them to faith.⁵ In other words, UOI Oikos multiply by cell division, but the Life Group Leaders Oikos multiplies by being transplanted to a new area, and through this transplanting, new Life Groups are formed and the division of UOI Oikos begins.

Due to this coordinated planting into new areas, there are now Life Groups active in twelve cities. By the process of

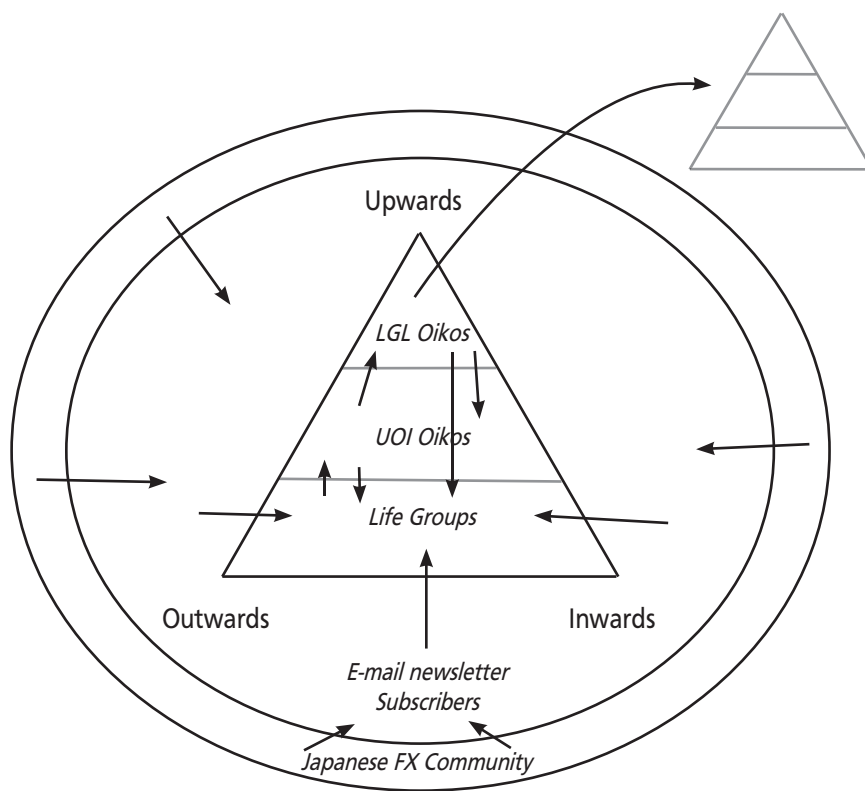
circulation between Life Groups, UOI Oikos and LGL Oikos, the gospel is impacting people outside of the traditional churches; indeed, for people who could not be reached by the traditional churches, this structure is one proving to be effective in bringing the kingdom of God to the Japanese foreign exchange trading community⁶ (see fig. 5).

Future Developments

Starting from the initial business model of teaching people the UOI Principles he received from God, Mr K and his team have established Life Groups all over Japan. There is an inter-dynamic of oikos in this movement of the kingdom of God amongst the Japanese FX community. We can see an oikos reality in the circulation of people between Life Groups, LGL Oikos and UOI Oikos. Beginning with a Life Group of seven people in March 2014, within three years they have experienced rapid growth, and as of March 2017, there are 200

people involved. Mr K aims to see 1000 members in Life Groups over five years' time. By then, if the current growth is maintained, we can expect to see 200 active disciples in this sector of business. This cycle, this concept of a flow between the three groups, is also something that can be used in other sectors of the business world. Mr K is already looking for opportunities to expand into Taiwan and Singapore, as well as making plans to transplant the same framework into the Communist country where he used to live. Notice he will no longer need to find a mission agency to send him out. Expanding the business goes hand in hand with expanding the kingdom of God, and this oikos reality is developing into a financially independent movement. As the Life Groups send out people who have integrated the Upward-Outward-Inward relationships into their lives, others begin to copy their example, new disciple-making *oikoi* and apostolic *oikoi* are being birthed, and the kingdom of God is permeating the country and the region. **IJFM**

Figure 5. The Process of Circulation through Life Groups and their Multiplication



Endnotes

¹ Mitsuo Fukuda, *Upward, Outward, Inward*, (Gloucester: Wide Margin Books, 2010).

² Mitsuo Fukuda, "Leaders in Asia with the Ability to 'Feel,'" in *Asian Missions Advance* 50 (2016): 18–23.

³ I am referring here to the comparative sociology of Edward Hall who distinguishes between "high context" and "low context" cultures. See Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, New York: Anchor Books, 1977.

⁴ The main function of the LGL Oikos is for apostolic mission, where more mature apostolic workers can train up the younger apostles.

⁵ Neil Cole, "Cultivating A Life For God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups," <<https://www.cmaresources.org/files/Cultivating-Neil-Cole-chap8.pdf>> 1999.

⁶ Not all Christian Life Group members are placed into the Life Group Leaders Oikos, but even without being part of the Leaders Oikos they spread the fragrance of Christ within the Life Groups. The arrow in figure 5 pointing from the UOI Oikos to the Life Group shows their influence as Christians