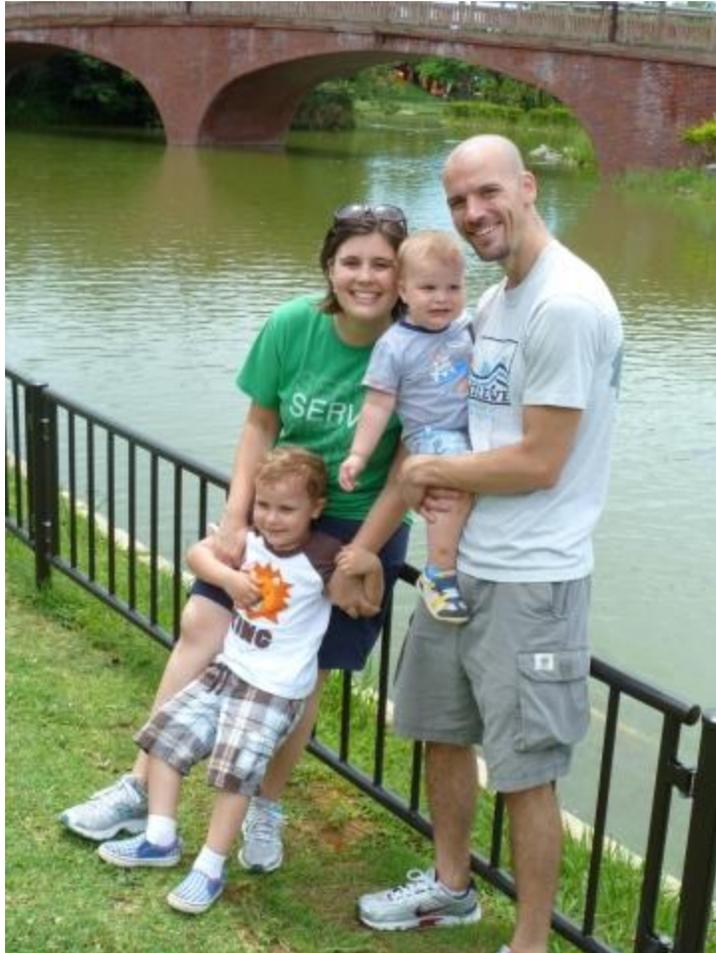


Missionary profile: Brian and Julie Woolery

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Since January 2010, Brian and Julie Woolery have served in the [Asia-Pacific Region](#) in Okinawa, Japan, as the pastors of [Keystone Nazarene Church](#), an international congregation of U.S. military, Japanese and Filipino people.

Brian also serves as the Asia-Pacific regional youth coordinator.

Previously, the couple served as tentmaker missionaries in Guam from June 2003 to June 2006. From June 2006 to October 2009 they were students at [Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary](#) (APNTS) and served as [Mission Corps](#) missionaries in Manila, Philippines.

They have two sons: Justin, 4, and Noah, 2.

Engage: How did you first recognize God's call to be involved in missions?

Julie: When I was a child, I always loved when missionaries came to speak at our church, and once, after reading a children's missionary book, I told my

parents I felt God was calling me to be a missionary. This was something that was always in the back of my mind as I grew up, but I didn't really know what it would look like. I participated in a number of mission trips while I was a student at [Southern Nazarene University](#) (SNU) that further ignited a passion for missions, but still just continued to pray and trust God with the future. God gave me confidence that my love for missions and living overseas came from him, and if it were his will for me to serve him in that capacity, it would happen at the right time. When Brian and I got engaged, we didn't know what would happen in the future, but together we prayed and trusted God. A pastor in Guam contacted us about serving there before we got married, and less than a year later, we were there!

Brian: When I was 11 years old I saw a video about being a missionary pilot and right then I knew that's what God wanted me to do. I got my pilot's licenses and even flew with Nazarene Mission Aviation in Africa but my love of flying got ahead of my love for God, and only He could be Lord of my life. He asked me to give up flying and I did, though it was one of the hardest decisions I have had to make in life. In college I did a mission trip to Calcutta, India, and was very sick. I didn't think I had what it took to be a missionary, but God continued to show me that if I just trusted Him, no matter where He led, He would take care of me. I've learned that missions is not about "what" you do (flying) or how you feel (being sick and culture shocked!) but about trusting Him and He has given me great peace and joy in this calling for my life.

Engage: What is your favorite aspect of what you do in your present assignment?

Brian: There are many things we love about our assignment here in Okinawa. One is seeing the excitement when someone finds Christ or learns something new in their relationship with Him. At first, it was a little weird for us to think about serving as the pastors of a church with a lot of Americans in Japan. We don't have any connection to the military, and we had already lived away from our home country for a long time. But God reminded us that we are committed to serve Him wherever and to whomever He sends us. Here we have unique opportunities to disciple people who have grown up in the church but are ready to go deeper in their relationship with Christ.

We also live in Japan, where less than 1 percent of the population are believers, and the hunger for Christ that we see in our Japanese friends is a huge inspiration and challenge to us. It is a privilege to grow together as disciples of Christ in this unique environment. For me, I get to meet each day with men and women and talk about what God is doing in their lives. Some of these are young Japanese men who are looking for something true in life. Some are young servicemen who have heard about Jesus but have never experienced Him. Others have grown up with a deep relationship with Jesus and are blown away by all God is using them to do with others. I can't imagine a better job!



Engage: What are some of the challenges that you face in carrying out your work?

Brian: The majority of our congregation is U.S. military, and they only live on Okinawa for two or three years. So, we lose about a third of our congregation every year. This forces us to always be training new leaders, because

soon after someone gets involved, they will need to be replaced. In the first two years we were in Okinawa, almost all of our new friends we had just made were gone. This is difficult because it is hard to establish deep friendships in such a transitional culture, but God always brings new people into our lives for us to minister to and who also love and minister to us.

Both of us take Japanese lessons from a Christian named Shu who has a heart to see Japanese come to know Jesus. But after all the responsibilities of church, sometimes we feel that our brains are too full, and with two small children we never seem to find enough time to study. This can be so discouraging.

One night I got a call from Vanessa, one of the ladies in our church. Her 5-year-old son, Daniel, was in a household accident and they were rushing him to the hospital. When we arrived we found out that Daniel had died. Thinking back I can't imagine what we could or should have said but God gave us grace, energy and words as we grieved with this family that horrible night. The next day at the church was

ladies' Bible study and Julie reminded me we needed to tell our Japanese nursery workers. They are not Christians, but deeply love the kids of our church. We went in and I began to explain what happened to Daniel. They were shocked. I then began to pray. Later, Julie said, "Did you know you did all of that in Japanese?" I was shocked. God has not only been our guide, peace, and comfort through this tragedy, but He has also shown He is the God of language!

Engage: Please share a story of a significant event or moment that has happened in your current assignment.

Julie: When we first thought about moving to the Philippines, the purpose was for Brian to attend seminary. Even though I never really wanted to, for different reasons, I also attended classes at APNTS and received a degree in Religious Education. While in the Philippines, I was blessed to teach ESL classes to students from all over Asia. Even though it was sometimes difficult to persevere through my own study, I was always reminded that God had a plan and would use this sometime in the future. About a year after we moved to Okinawa, I started taking Japanese classes at a local language school. Through conversation, the director learned of my previous experience as an ESL teacher and later asked me to teach an English class. Our children were still very young, and I wasn't even looking for something like this, but God worked out all the details, and for a year, I got to teach English to an amazing group of Japanese women. We became good friends, and God opened up many opportunities for me to share why we lived in Japan and how God was working in our lives. A definite highlight was sharing a Thanksgiving meal together at our house. Even though the class has ended, I pray that God will continue to work in our relationships so my friends might know Him.



Brian: My Japanese teacher had a young high school graduate that was interested in practicing his English and was willing to meet with a Christian and talk about the Bible. His name was Sho. Every Tuesday I would drive to pick him up and then we would go to Starbucks and talk about life and do an ESL Bible study together. At first it was so awkward and

difficult. His English was not very good and my Japanese was even worse! We had very little in common and I felt so often that we were not connecting much at all. Parts of me said, "You're too busy for this. It's clearly not working." But I knew God had put Sho in my life, so every Tuesday we would go to Starbucks and talk about life and Jesus.

Soon I began to notice that things were changing in Sho. He was asking questions and I felt that God was helping me connect stories in Scripture and promises God makes with the things he was

experiencing. I will never forget the day we decided not to go to Starbucks but go to the park by the ocean. We sat on a bench and Sho said, "I've been thinking a lot, and I want to give my life to Jesus." Jesus found Sho, and that day Sho invited Jesus to be his master! Since then Sho has moved to Tokyo to prepare for college. When I talked with him last he is sharing about Jesus with his family and his father is even slowly changing. He is also talking about his new life in Jesus with his friends. There is nothing more exciting on earth than being a part of God changing someone's life!

Engage: How do you maintain a close relationship with God and your family in the midst of the demands of missionary service?

Brian: We have learned, sometimes the hard way, that intention and follow-through are absolutely essential in all our relationships, especially with God. As a missionary you are a professional Christian and you can fill your day even doing good things, but not daily communicating and growing in your relationship with Christ. Jesus spent time with His Father each day and He's continually teaching us how essential it is for us to have time in the Word and in prayer daily. We're trying to create these habits as a family also, and we're getting better. We're learning how to say no sometimes, even to "good" things and guard the few times we have to be together, just as a family. We don't know how long God will let us stay in Japan, or even as missionaries in a different country, but our marriage and our children He has given us for the rest of our lives and we want to honor Him with these most important relationships!

Engage: What are some aspects of the culture where you live that you have come to love or embrace?

Brian: We love so many things about Japan. One of our favorite things is the food. We are blessed to frequently eat sushi, curry, ramen, tons of fresh vegetables and fruit, and the list goes on. We also love the simplicity of life and the Japanese people's intense love and respect of nature. For a nation who can be known for its crowded cities and neon lights, Japan is a very simple place. People live in small spaces and do not hoard in the ways that come so naturally to us. God has taught us a lot through this. We have also come to love the respect that youth have for their leaders. It is so easy to criticize leaders, but God has called us to love and respect those He has put in authority over us.

Engage: What do you like to do for fun?

Brian: As a family, we love to go to the beach and spend time at parks. Japan has amazing parks and playgrounds! I love bicycling around the island on Saturday mornings and hiking to waterfalls in the jungle; Julie loves reading and experimenting with Japanese cooking. And, we like to spend time at coffee shops.

Engage: What is something people would be surprised to learn about you?

Julie: People are always surprised when I tell them I am naturally shy; I guess I come across as outgoing. God has helped me learn how to be outgoing in new situations, but it's actually still very difficult for me.

Brian: When I was in high school I considered applying to the Air Force Academy and letting the government pay for all my flight training! But once I considered how long it would take to graduate and then how many years I would owe, I would just be getting out of the military now. He had different plans, but it's ironic I'm with guys my age now who did just that!

Engage: What advice would you have for others exploring a possible call to missions, or embarking on their first missionary assignment?

Julie: Pray, pray, pray . . . God has taught me so much recently about the importance of prayer in my relationship with Him. I love to be busy and involved in things, but God is teaching me to slow down and really seek His guidance before I commit to something or make a decision. No matter where we are living or where God sends us, I need to start every day seeking His guidance for where He wants me to go, what He wants me to do, and how I should interact with the people He places in my life.

Brian: Missions is not about where you go and mission is not about what you do. I see many people get caught up in a location or a specific job in missions. The truth is “missions” is wherever there is a need and wherever there are people. I had so many ideas of what God needed me to do, like fly an airplane and go to Central America. None of those things have happened. I never anticipated nor had a desire to pastor a local international church, but as I look back on the choices we have made as we listened to the Lord, and trusted the judgment and discernment of the church leaders God has given us which made some big decisions regarding our lives, we can see God truly is in control and not only do we have no regrets but our lives could not have more joy!