

# A New Perspective

(EMC) MJCF January 5, 2025

2 Kings 6:8-23 (Blessed be your name, or Open the Eyes of my heart)

<Title slide>It's good to be back and see you in-person again! A lot has happened since Rie and I sold our house and moved with our family to Tokyo. I'd like to start with a bit of an update on what has been going on in Japan. We have been serving in Japan as "Relationship Catalysts" since 2020.

<family slide> It's similar to being a traditional mission worker, but we are striving to develop a more church to church relationship. So, in that sense, when we're here in Canada we represent churches in Japan. When we're in Japan, we represent churches in Canada, through Mennonite Church Canada International Witness. Our support comes through both the Tokyo Area Fellowship of Mennonite Churches, as well as International Witness. Along with this, we will likely need to find part-time work in Japan for our own support as well.

For the past three years we have been working with Tokyo churches to renovate the Anabaptist Center so that it can be strengthened for earthquakes, windows, outside walls, and roof replaced, and so on. I have a few photos to show you some of what we did...<House old, scaffold, new house > We had the roof, windows, and outside walls changed. <living room, gutted room> The living room and dining room floor, walls and ceiling were removed. <Living room with wood> And in the dining room window we saw plants growing into the house! <bay window> And, in many places cement and steel bars were added to strengthen the house against earthquakes. < rebar and cement> <large room duo1, duo 2>It was a challenge to work with volunteers when we ourselves were learning how to do things like taping drywall. But, involving many people working together gave the community a greater sense of ownership. <crouch putty, Rena, several slides ending with final living room> We were finally able to move in about a year ago, but there is still wallpaper to strip, and some puttying and painting to do. The Center has now been reborn. We invite you to come and see for yourself! <black slide>

As you know, there are many differences between Japanese culture and Canadian culture. As we compare our different cultures and ways in which we live our faith we gain a new perspective. We learn more about ourselves as well as the other culture. We may learn something new about all our problems that we have trouble seeing beyond. It's like the photos I'm about to show you. Can you guess what these everyday things are? <images – pencil to paper clip >

<pathway>As we begin a new year, it's a good opportunity to think about our vision for the future. I will only be serving as MJCF pastor until the end of February. We will need to pray and discuss seriously the future steps we need to take as a church. <signal arrows>It's now a good time to pause and take a step back in order to see the true picture. Through prayer, we can pause and think about what God's perspective might be in any situation.

<Changing vision> The story we read from scripture, today, is one of my many favourites. Elisha's servant is panicking because they are totally surrounded by the Aramean army, enemies who are looking for them. Elisha prays that God would open the eyes of his servant so that he can see that God's army is greater than the enemy. In this story, there is strong theme related to changing perspective as shown through going back and forth between blindness and seeing. In verse 16, Elisha tells the servant, "Do not be afraid," there's more support for us than for the enemy. Elisha then prays that the servant may "see" so that he doesn't need to fear. The servant greatly feared the enemy horses and chariots. They represented strength, something very powerful. But, after Elisha prays, his servant's eyes are opened. He sees the protection of the LORD all around them. He sees horses and chariots of fire, something even stronger than regular horses and chariots. Of course, when he sees this, his perspective is changed and he can relax, knowing that God, their protector, is ultimately in control.

Elisha then prays for God to strike the Aramean army with blindness. (Again, we see the theme of blindness and a change of perspective). He leads them deep into Samaria where they would then be surrounded by their enemies, the Israelites. It's interesting that Elisha, the one they were trying to capture is the one who leads them into Samaria.

Finally, Elisha prays a third time for a change of vision, and the Aramean army's eyes are opened. They see they are deep in enemy territory, at the mercy of the Israelites. The Israelite King is excited, "Shall I kill them, Shall I kill them?" he asks Elisha. No! Normally, they would not have killed them had they captured the enemy by their own efforts. This time, God had miraculously given them power over their enemy. Elisha tells the king to instead give them food and water. The king then goes even beyond this, giving the Aramean army a great feast! It's amazing! Could this be an example of showing love for one's enemies in the Old Testament? In the New Testament book of Romans we read, "...if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. ` Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans chapter 12, verses 20 and 21). Instead of trying to "get even" when you are hurt by someone, showing love for even our enemies is an important way to overcome the cycle of violence. Instead of revenge, show care for the other. The enemy might not change, but in this case they did. We read that in the end they no longer bothered the Israelites, and there was peace in the land.

**<looking down into mirrors>**Sometimes, it's hard to see the bigger picture of where God is in control. We may desperately look for solutions to our problems, but all the while what we really need could be a new perspective on the situation. It's been said, **<Slide - "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." (Marcel Proust)>**.

**<slide – In the midst of turmoil>** I kind of feel like Elisha's servant when he was fearful of the surrounding enemies. My family has been in a situation where we've been wondering why God has allowed a series of difficulties. My parents have just celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The plan was for us to come from Tokyo to visit Canada to help them celebrate with all our relatives. I came on an earlier flight. But, my family experienced a huge tension with Rie not being allowed to board her flight! She had not yet received an important travel document allowing her back into Canada. We had requested urgent service when we noticed that the time was short, but I guess our online application was just too late. I had imagined that the worst that could happen would be for Rie to have to give up her permanent resident status and just come to Canada as a tourist. Normally, Japanese are allowed to visit Canada as tourists for up to 6 months. But no, she wasn't even allowed to come to Canada as a tourist. We'd have to have our trip without her, and we all felt terrible. Along with this, I realised that we would also lose a lot of money.

Since flights these days are so expensive, we had to work hard to find something less expensive. Needless to say, some of Rie's flights were non-refundable, and although I was the additional driver of the rental car that Rie had reserved, it was impossible to change the name to mine so that I could pick up the car. We ended up losing the pre-paid 6-day rental as well.

We did a lot of praying and I tried to see what God's perspective on all this may be. As I prayed, I started to remember that everything we have has been given to us by God. Over our lifetime, we have received blessings upon blessings. God has always provided for all our needs. The money we have is really from God. And, we are God's money managers. We had done our best, and still ended up with these challenges. But, we've sensed that God is still with us and leading us, even as we continue to lament that we were not able to be together for this trip as planned. Our family is all healthy, including my parents who are into their 80's.

**<Jesus in garden praying>**God is present and at work, but the reality is that we may not understand how God is at work, perhaps until we meet God in heaven. Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that God would give him a different way to go rather than face the torture and suffering of

death on a cross, but he also submitted, and continued on the difficult path, since it was God's way. He ended up dying on a cross. <Empty cross>But, we see that God blessed Jesus in the end by raising him to life, and now Jesus is Lord of all. Through Jesus, we see God's love for us. In him we have forgiveness, and we can have a closer relationship with God.

<slide – Hope for the Future on converging lines bkgd>Have you had to face major difficulties? Do you feel fearful of the problems surrounding you, as Elisha's servant? Has it seemed like there is little hope in the future? As we look to God in prayer, seeking answers we may find peace in a new perspective. We may begin to understand that God's army (God's power) is far greater than any challenge we may face in our lives. Often, we may later realise and understand why we needed to face the difficulties. But sometimes, we may not understand until we meet God in heaven. As we begin 2025, let's put our trust in our loving God. Let's pray.

Lord God, we confess that at times we forget that you surround us with your love and power. At times we may allow our fears and challenges to overwhelm us. Forgive us for time when we've forgotten you. We thank you that you are there to remind us of your presence as we look to you for strength and guidance. As we seek your will for each of us at MJCF, grant us your perspective for our future. Open our eyes to your wisdom, we pray. Over the years, you have blessed us richly in so many ways. We are your church, and you've now led us to a point where we realise big changes need to be made. Help us to turn our eyes to you rather than just dwell on our fears, through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.