



Contents

Foreword.....	1
Introduction.....	3
1 From Frisbee –	9
2 – to Faith.....	13
3 The Cost of Discipleship.....	19
4 <i>Kung Fu</i> Kid.....	25
5 Realising the Need	29
6 I Don't Have a Dream!.....	35
7 Saying Goodbye and Other Trials.....	39
8 But am I a Missionary?.....	43
9 Rediscovering Ultimate	47
10 Jesus Uses Throwaway-ers.....	55
Postscript: Run, Son, Run!	59



Foreword

The only way to live the Christian life is to be gripped by grace. Levi Booth came to realise this fact as a teenager and it led him to a life he did not plan. But it was a life he would never give up.

In this short book, Levi shares his story of how God used different people and a variety of experiences to shape his life and prepare him for a unique mission. How could a love of Ultimate Frisbee, Jackie Chan and *anime* possibly come together and be used by God to help spread the gospel? *Ultimate Grace* shows that whatever your situation, or whatever your passions, God can use them to fulfil his own gospel purpose.

As you read it, I pray you will be moved, blessed and, most of all, challenged to discover something of the wonder of God's grace. Grace

which is for everyone – even through missed opportunities, trials and hardships. And I pray it might help you think about how you could use the situations, passions and gifts that God has given you for his purpose and glory.

Chris Pain,
Field Director OMF Japan



Introduction

My feet were burning. I didn't know sand could get this hot. I dug my feet into the slightly cooler sand underneath. But not too deep so that I'd still be able to run. I looked across the pitch to the opposition, the Great British team. I could see they were not nearly as exhausted as us, the Japanese Mixed Masters Ultimate Frisbee team. It was an odd feeling, lining up *against* Great Britain. I used to dream that I might one day play for them; I had never thought that I would end up playing against them. But I had no time to dwell on the unexpected journey that had led me here – representing Japan at the World Championships of Beach Ultimate – their puller raised the disc: the next point was about to start.

We were in Royan, a little beach town in western France. Doug, one of the other non-Japanese on the team, had found a cheap cottage for us to stay in. And the boy had done good. There was no Wi-Fi, but besides that it was five star luxury. If you can imagine the stereotypical French beachside cottage then you're probably imagining where we stayed. Except that for a cottage it was huge: six bedrooms, two showers, a beautiful wooden dining table big enough to sit us all and plenty of lounge floor space for post-game stretching and rolling.

And the kitchen ... for France it may have been fairly standard, but after four years of acclimatising to Japanese kitchens that are just about big enough for a two-ring gas hob and microwave (my rice cooker and kettle lived on a stand half-way into the dining room) it was breathtaking. There were pots and pans and utensils in abundance and more amazingly there was actual surface space to put them on!

But two things stood out above all, basking in the late-afternoon sun pouring through the French windows (although I guess in France they're just windows?): ovens. Two ovens. Not

one oven with two sections, mind. Two whole ovens. And the farmers' market was just ten minutes walk away. On the way to France we had debated about whether it'd be better to do our own cooking or eat out, but now the right choice was obvious.

And so the night before the tournament began we gathered round the huge oak table to enjoy a meal of pasta, salad, cheese, bread, cold meats and more cheese (we may have got a bit carried away at the shops). In Japan it's customary before a meal to say together *itadakimas*. It literally means 'I receive this', but essentially is an expression of thankfulness and gratitude. I was waiting for the team captain to initiate the *itadakimas*, when one of the other members asked me, 'Hey Levi, why don't you pray for us?'

Before I could answer, I was met with a flurry of responses from everyone else.

'Yeah, do it! I've never heard a proper mealtime prayer before.'

'What's it called in English?'

'But why is Levi going to pray?'

'Don't you know? Levi's a pastor?'

‘Seriously?’

‘So is there a proper way we need to sit to pray?’

‘Wait, wait, wait! You’re really a pastor?’

‘We have a team pastor! How cool is that!’

‘Catholic? Or ... what’s the other one?’

After we had established that yes, I really was a pastor, or, more accurately, a missionary, and that I was indeed happy to say a prayer, or grace, for the meal, I explained how people were free to close their eyes or keep them open and that it’s traditional to end a prayer by everyone saying ‘amen’.

And then I led us in a simple prayer of thanks for the food and for the opportunity to play Ultimate Frisbee together. I think for most of the team it was just a fun thing to do, but for me it was an utterly unexpected privilege and the beginning of an incredible week playing Ultimate Frisbee for Jesus with the Japanese national team. And between the games we hung out in this mansion of a cottage having banter about everything from reasons for staying single to the possibility of seeing spirits.

INTRODUCTION

It'd been three years since I went out to Japan to start my first term as a full-time missionary. Three years of trying to work out how to fit in to Japan, what I should be doing and how, what it meant to be a missionary. Now I was starting to wonder whether it might all be as simple as me being me.

I'm guessing you've got a few questions about this whole scenario, one of the big ones being, 'So did you beat the British team?' The answer to that is, no. The answer to your other questions will, I hope, be found in the rest of this book.



From Frisbee –

OK so let's start with the big misconceptions.

Ultimate Frisbee does *not* involve dogs.

It's a team sport. Seven against seven. It's played on a pitch 100 metres long and 37 metres across with end zones at each end. It involves players passing around a regulation size and weight disc for 90 minutes or until one team has reached 15 points, scored by catching a pass into the end zone. It's kind of like a cross between American football and netball. It's ... not very easy to explain. Maybe it's best if you YouTube it.

Now I won't blame you for not knowing about Ultimate. The first time I heard about it my reaction was, 'Eh?'

I had just finished registering at university. With my newly printed student card in hand I

entered the hall where all the sports clubs were waiting to recruit new members. I was planning on joining the *ju jitsu* club and maybe one other sport. Perhaps rugby. I had played a little bit at school and my natural nippiness had been useful.

I found out afterwards that the clubs were rotated round each year. By the time someone had walked through the whole hall they were a bit overwhelmed, so the spots near the entrance were highly sought after. That year Ultimate Frisbee had top spot, so I came through the door to discover a table covered in scratched-up Frisbees around a laptop playing some kind of highlight reel. I stood watching for a bit trying to work out what was going on. I frowned at the guy behind the table. He smiled back.

‘Hi!’

‘Hi. Er ... what?’

‘Ultimate Frisbee.’

‘Right.’

‘Oh, check out this bit.’

He twisted the screen a bit so we could both see it. A Frisbee was flying through the air with someone running almost alongside it, a few feet behind, with a white line between them. It was

obviously going to land the other side of the line, which I was guessing would be out of bounds. I was thinking of a polite way to say goodbye when suddenly the person running launched himself across the line going almost horizontal. He caught the Frisbee in his right hand, and almost in the same movement threw it whilst still in the air. The camera panned quickly down the line to a rectangle between four small orange cones. The Frisbee was about to land within the rectangle when another dude came diving into frame, snatching the Frisbee from the air before landing chest-first and sliding to a stop.

I had no idea what I had just watched. But I knew I wanted to be a part of it.

‘They call that “a greatest”.’

‘Really?’

‘First practice is this Saturday 10am at the pitches by Boddington Halls. Know where that is?’

I did. Those were the halls I lived in. I decided to go along and try out Ultimate Frisbee for myself.

I got the information about practices for rugby plus a few other cool-sounding sports. But after my first Frisbee practice, I knew this was

the sport for me. I loved the energy of the game, the unpredictable nature of matches and above all I loved its ethos.

One of the defining features of Ultimate – and one that I continue to get flak for – is that it's a self-refereed sport. This means that players rely heavily on something called Spirit of the Game. It's broken down into five sections: understanding of the rules, self-control, fair play, positive attitude and communication. Or more simply, Spirit of the Game is about the two teams trusting each other. It's not so much that there's no referee in Ultimate, it's that *everyone* is a referee. And you know what? Somehow it works. If a foul is called, and the call is contentious, then that call is contested and the players chat it through until a decision is made and the game moves on. And then after the game, we high-five each other and sit down and give each other feedback. It's fun. It promotes sportsmanship and teamwork. It makes Ultimate Frisbee the sport it is, and over time it changes the people who play it. But, for me, in my first year at university, I was about to discover a spirit of a different kind.