

Ron & Cheryl Myers

GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

April 2015

"THAILAND"

(Land of the Free, In Christ, for All Who Will Receive Him)

By Ron Myers

Springtime Greetings to You In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Last month, I told you some of the formidable challenges missionaries (*including this writer*) have faced in their attempts to share the truths of the Gospel with the Thai people, in hopes that they would hear and believe. I also mentioned that, after the Gospel being in Thailand nearly 200 years, *less than 1%* of the Thai populace could be counted as genuine, born-again Christian. In trying to relate how difficult that can be, I have often used the analogy that it's like trying to beat, headfirst, directly through the thick temple walls erected in the hearts and minds of the Thai, in my attempts to find some key or soft-spot that might finally open the fortified doorway into their lives. And yet, Satan, the clever enemy of their souls, has established ironclad bastions that keep the average Thai securely under lock and key, be it through a sense of religion, national pride, societal norms, or...

This month, I want to share with you the pros and cons of various methods or analogies that have been used over the years by missionaries (*including this writer*) to relate the truth of the Gospel... all in hopes that something might "click" in the ears of the Thai hearers, turning them from their religious works and lifeless idols to trust in the risen, living Christ. I want to quickly add here that we *never* try to twist or change the changeless truths of the Gospel—Christ's atoning death, burial, and bodily resurrection on their behalf—but seek to personalize it in such a way that they will open the sealed doors of their hearts, just wide enough to let the glorious light of the Good News message flood in and take root.

Please understand that I am not discouraged or ready to quit, nor am I criticizing or finding fault with my fellow-missionaries here, but addressing and critiquing the challenges we all face, in hopes of finding workable solutions. But alas, receiving the Gospel is to the average Thai like selling their soul... not realizing that is exactly what they are doing in their present state. So, the crux of the matter is not the actual Gospel presentation, but first getting them to truly hear. By God's grace, I believe that after years of trial and error, I have discovered a provably-workable solution to get them to openly listen and consider, for which I am both elated and thankful to the Lord for His wisdom. I will fully explain later in this newsletter.

When we think of introducing the Gospel to the literate unreached, we usually think of using tracts, i.e., small, attention-getting leaflets that, once read, are supposed to pique the interest of the reader to consider the Gospel message. Countless types of tracts have been written in Thai over the years, some by missionaries, but most by Thai Christians. I have read many of these. Some are better than others, yet all seek to communicate the Gospel. These are all written in good faith; however, the problem comes in the style of writing used. Most Thai tracts are written using *christianese* terms and buzzwords—as if the writer is addressing fellow believers—not in generic spoken Thai, designed to address those who are outside the faith. And yet, hungry hearts have been drawn and accept Christ using these methods, here one, there another, but comparatively-speaking very few. Bottom line, the problem is not in using reading materials, such as tracts or booklets, but the writing style and content contained therein, the writer not always keeping in mind the lack of exposure, understanding, or mindset of the target audience.

Another effective method of presenting the Gospel to the Thai is through what are known as *redemptive analogies*. The Bible is full of these analogies, like Jesus being compared to the Passover "Lamb of God," etc. Thai culture also has many usable analogies, too numerous to mention here. One that comes to mind is the Thai story of the loving elder brother who willingly and sacrificially died in the stead of his guilty younger brother, thus setting the younger free. This redemptive analogy has been used much in both tracts and live dramatizations, and has garnered some success.

Many people have heard of the purported amazing success of the Jesus video. Actually, it may work well among some, as in remote tribal locations; however, we didn't find that to be the case within the confines of Thailand, where the Buddhist religion is well-established. Although the Jesus video serves to encourage and strengthen Thai believers, as it should, it strikes Thai unbelievers as interesting historical information about the life of the foreigners' "religious guru," not unlike historical information about their own Lord Buddha's life. In the end, it emits the same *canned* response that "*all religions are equally good, because they all teach us to do good...*" which is the same response one gets when presenting the Gospel, one-on-one.

Moving on, you would think (*as I did*) that Thai Christians would automatically be able to effectively communicate the Good News with their fellow countrymen much better than the missionary. Would that it were so, but it often isn't. In their sincerity, they often simply mimic Western-styled methodology (*which they learned from the missionary*). This doesn't get very much positive response, except in cases where hearts are open and hungry, willing to listen and learn. However, there's the ever-present problem of the grace-based Gospel being misinterpreted as merely another system of works. Remember that the Gospel message *never* changes, and therefore must *never* be presented in such a way that it can be misconstrued as a different set of religious rules that need to be followed or practiced, which tends to be the default mode of response.

Without establishing a solid foundation first, this is what often happens; and, unfortunately, we are usually oblivious to it. Thus, I am sad to report that this *works-grace* confusedness has infected much of the Thai church today. And, it is extremely hard to correct, once ingrained, due to faulty teaching, initially on the part of the missionary (*whether accidentally or by default*). So what's the solution? I believe the problem is alleviated by sound teaching from the onset, and corrected by the same sound teaching. And yet, the confused heart must first be personally open to receive corrective instruction, which normally isn't the case. But, if and when it is, the person grows tremendously in his or her faith upon understanding grace.

So, to help alleviate this pitfall, where along the timeline of Gospel events should one begin to communicate? The Old Testament prophecies, the virgin-born advent of the Messiah, His life and miracles, His betrayal, trial and crucifixion, the Cross, empty grave, His Resurrection? And, who is this Jesus? Prophet, teacher, religious leader, miracle worker, Son of man, God the Son, Savior and Lord? To promote right understanding, where should one begin in introducing the Gospel?

I wholeheartedly agree with my friend Dr. Henry Morse (*father of the modern Creationist movement*) when he emphatically stated: "*Before one can really know Jesus Christ as Savior or Lord, one must acknowledge Him as Creator, because He was our Creator first of all. This is such an important doctrine of the New Testament that it is remarkable how rarely it is emphasized in modern evangelicalism.*"

Does that make any sense to you? It should, because Jesus Christ is our Life-giving Creator and Sustainer first and foremost... This truth is clearly recorded in the New Testament in at least three separate locations (John 1:3, 4, 10; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2-3). According to Scripture, Jesus is not only all the things mentioned in the above paragraphs, He was first our all-knowing, all-powerful Intelligent Designer and the Originator and Sustainer of all things, both seen and unseen. Then, motivated by Love, He came down, took on human form, and sacrificed Himself to redeem His creation, including the Thai and Isan people, as well as all others who have yet to hear and understand who He really is.

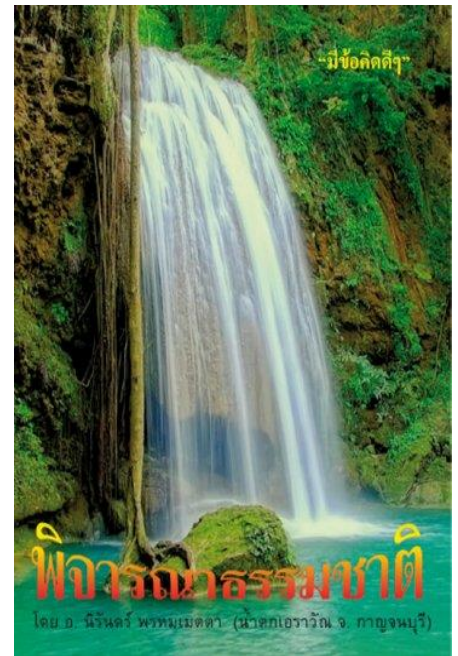
You see, what one believes about origins shapes one's personal view of life and eternity. This obviously includes the people of Thailand; because, without possessing the knowledge of Jesus as being their Divine Creator, life is just a fatalistic blob to be lived over and over again, following their belief in reincarnation. This, along with having a good religion to follow, which teaches them to do good in their quest towards Nirvana.

Ironically, all Thai and Isan people love Nature, i.e., Creation (*as do most Asian Buddhists*), yet are taught that everything merely happened into existence. Therefore, since they do not know the true identity of Jesus as Creator God, they view Biblical Christianity as just another works-based religion. However, once they learn that Jesus is their Creator, and Creator of "Nature" that they all adore, their whole point of view is transformed and their interest in Christ is piqued. Then, upon hearing the full story of Creation to Redemption, their trusting Christ is practically automatic... like putting a period at the end of a sentence.

This is the key of which I spoke, in effectively presenting the Gospel to the Thai in a meaningful way. I was able to develop it, commit it to memory and finally perfect it as a full presentation, which really captured the attention of all I spoke to, from peasant farmers to surgeons. I later wrote it down and printed in a pocket-sized booklet, which I titled "Considering Creation." It just makes sense to start at the beginning, i.e., Creation and Origins, the missing links in their being able to understand who Jesus really is.

I did a 5,000-count trial printing of *Considering Creation* in 2010, and have now printed 80,000 copies total, with less than 4,000 remaining (*time for another printing*). Most of these have been requested by missionaries and Thai churches; those who are aware of their effectiveness. Many now use them as a witnessing tool in place of distributing Thai tracts. I also, when possible, hold workshops to disciple Thai churches through this more-effective approach. Simply put, it's a friendly, non-confrontational means of witnessing through discussing *Nature*, which they all love. Thus, their Creator is introduced through Intelligent Design, i.e, Jesus Christ, who also became their Lord and Savior.

I say, to God be the Glory for what He is doing through this amazing little resource! It really works, even beyond my wildest dreams, as it gets the attention of the Thai Buddhist population, who are otherwise disinterested in the Gospel. After reading it, they often approach me asking: "*Where did you get that story. I really liked it. I read it through once and want to read it again, but last night I gave it to my wife to read. Is that alright?*" ("*Of course,*" I respond.) "*I never really thought about it before, but you make a valid point; there must be a Creator!*"



"Considering Creation" Thai Pocket Edition

What a great opportunity to share the Gospel that they previously shunned, but now hear through reading this little booklet. "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*" (Romans 10:17) My plans are to record it on CD. Ironically, although Buddhism teaches its devotees to shun love—a fleshly passion to be denied—a survey was done among new Thai believers as to what impressed them most about the Gospel. Their overwhelming response? God's love impressed them the most; Buddhism being a cold and impersonal path which offers little real joy or hope.

In conclusion, concerning the title of this newsletter, "*Thailand: Land of the Free, In Christ, for All Who Receive Him.*" The word *Thai* translates as "free" ... *Thailand* meaning "land of the free." However, they can never truly be free without first having been set free from sin and death by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ; their forgiveness having been purchased by His atoning Blood.

Although I presently need crutches to get around, I am only two weeks away from receiving a hip replacement (May 1st), done by orthopedic specialist Dr. Roger Freeman, using minimally-invasive high-tech Zimmer appliances. Pray that the procedure will go well and prove fully successful. I still have a serious Sciatica condition that needs addressing, but with a new left hip I will be much more mobile. I will be returning to Thailand after the doctor releases me, to continue the final review process on the Isan New Testament, hoping to go to print later this year. Please pray to that end.

Lastly, we remain appreciative as we depend upon your faithful prayers and financial partnership in this exceedingly important task: taking God's Word and the Gospel message to those still dwelling in abject spiritual darkness at the little-reached ends of the earth (*namely Thailand*), until Christ returns. Again, thank you for your participation. (*Romans 10:9-15*)

By God's Enabling Grace and for His Eternal Glory,

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