

A Synopsis of My Life, Call, and Ministry Experience
Past, Present, and Future
by Ron Myers

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Table of Contents

Part I (Upbringing, Conversion, and Calling).....	2
Part II (A New Direction)	5
Part III (A New Purpose)	6
Part IV (A Turning Point)	10
Part V (My Journey Back).....	11
Part VI (Marriage and Training).....	13
Part VII (Our First Term in Thailand)	14
Part VIII (Entering the Battlefield)	15
Part IX (Onsite Preparation)	16
Part X (Moving Forward).....	18
Part XI (The Isan New Testament – Preparation).....	21
Part XII (Bible Translation and Expanded Outreach).....	21
Part XIII (More Fruit for My Labors Amidst Spiritual Warfare)	23
Part XIV (Long Sabbatical Leave and Refugee Work).....	25
Part XV (Returning to Thailand to Finish the Job)	27
Part XVI (The Isan New Testament – Printed Version).....	33
Part XVII (The Isan New Testament – Spoken Lao Version).....	35
Part XVIII (The Isan New Testament – Audio Version).....	36
Part XIX (An Explanation of a Missionary’s Job)	37
Part XX (An Explanation of the Gospel).....	37
Part XXI (Further Ministry Achievements)	39
Part XXII (Culture and Redemptive Analogies).....	40
Part XXIII (Future Plans)	41
Part XXIV (An Autobiography)	43
Part XXV (Conclusion).....	44

Part I (Upbringing, Conversion, and Calling)

To put things into perspective, I need to contextualize a few details leading up to my receiving Christ and later call to the ministry. The eldest of five siblings, I was born in Auburn NY on Pearl Harbor Day (12/7/41) and raised on a farm along the eastern shores of Cayuga Lake in the scenic Finger Lakes Region of Upstate New York. Having grown up on a farm, I learned traditional conservative values and a strong work ethic. Our 300-acre dairy and crop farm was a fourth-generation family possession of prime land. We also farmed an additional 250 acres.

At age four, I had the unique privilege of riding *“In a one-horse open sleigh, O’re the fields of snow”* (jingle bells and all), nestled between my parents under a warm horsehair blanket in the chill. I enjoyed crop farming, especially the ambiance of harvest time. We had forty Holstein milk cows, which was fine, except for the daily 4:30 AM *rise-and-shine* grind to milk them—it got old quickly. I left the farm after high school. Dad wasn’t left in the lurch, though, since we had hired help, as well as my younger siblings. I held a variety of jobs where I acquired many valuable skills—all of which helped prepare me for the rigors of pioneer missionary life.

Raised in a United Presbyterian heritage (now PC-USA), I remember it being a positive influence during my earlier days. I understand it was once a solid witness for Christ, but I don’t recall ever hearing the Gospel being taught, i.e., the saving Blood of Christ and an admonition to receive Him as Lord and Savior. Yet my Presbyterian heritage gave me a lasting fondness and appreciation for the timeless hymns of the faith. Their words expressed spiritual insight and depth of meaning that *most* modern material is sorely lacking.

With nothing to really draw me, I stopped attending church during my teen years. And yet, thoughts of God continued to linger—feeling there was more I needed to learn. Each night at bedtime, I was careful to repeat a couple of ritualistic prayers yet God always seemed somewhere faraway. Life’s direction led me away from the liberal church I had grown up in and the moral lifestyle I had learned there in Boy Scouts and Explorer Scouts. Wanting to be accepted by my peers, I decided to follow the ways of the world, of which I excelled.

At age twenty-one, my life’s direction got turned upside down when I encountered a crisis point that brought me to my knees. My very nice girlfriend—with whom we shared hopes of marriage and settling down—had decided to end our relationship. I take all the blame as I found myself becoming mean and disrespectful. I was remorseful and repentant but to no avail. Sickened, I drove home where I retired to my bedroom – seeking God for answers. I prayed in earnest for the very first time in my life, pleading through my tears for God’s intervention to bring my girlfriend back—a selfish prayer at best.

I stopped mid-word and thought, wait a minute! My parents taught us about Santa Claus at Christmas and the Easter Bunny at Easter as if they were real. Perhaps God is just another childhood fairytale. I figured if there’s no God and no Heaven, I certainly wasn’t going to pray to an empty sky. I’m going in another direction, whatever it is. Then, for the first time in my life I prayed in earnest: *“God, if you’re real, I need to know now.”*

An amazing thing happened. Immediately, I saw myself, not as the nice person I had once thought, but as God saw me – a life filled with sin and degradation of every sort: disobedience and disrespect of my parents, disdain for my siblings, lying, cheating, stealing, filthiness, blasphemous language, meanness, evil thoughts, drunkenness, and debauchery. God’s Spirit revealed my utterly lost condition, convicting me of my sin, His righteousness; and my impending judgement according to John 16:8. I wasn’t fit for heaven, only an inescapable eternity in the Lake of Fire.

Terror gripped me. I knew instinctively that God was holy and righteous, and about Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. At Christmastime, our minister would announce, the “*Savior of the world is born.*” What does that mean, I thought? Having been brought up in a liberal church setting, I had never heard about His grace, Christ’s shed Blood, or the Gospel message. The only thing I thought to do was to cry out for mercy. I pleaded, “*God, please have mercy.*” At that moment, the terror in my heart turned to tranquility and the tumultuous storm churning in my being was gone, leaving a sense of warmth and quietness. There was only a sense of calm—the waves of panic became still, like a sheet of glass.

What just happened, I wondered? I decided to read the Bible to find out. After a prolonged search through the house, I found a Bible. I blew the dust off and plopped it open with my thumbs—not the preferred method of Bible study. My prayer was, “*God, if you’re real, I need to know now.*” My eyes fell on these verses.

“...You shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze I will bring gold, Instead of iron I will bring silver, Instead of wood, bronze, And instead of stones, iron. I will also make your officers peace, And your magistrates righteousness. Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, Neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; But you shall call your walls Salvation, And your gates Praise. ‘The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, Nor shall your moon withdraw itself; For the Lord will be your everlasting light, And the days of your mourning shall be ended.’”
(Isaiah 60:16-20)

And Isaiah 61:1 *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound...”*

God had heard my plea and saved me. I didn’t understand much but I knew I was different. I felt cleansed, forgiven, saved from an eternity in Hell! I immediately went out to tell others. My simple, heartfelt message was; “*You know, there really is a God in Heaven and we’re all asleep, just going through the motions, not realizing we will perish if we don’t repent and ask God’s forgiveness.*” I’m now aware that this Scripture portion is prophetic, concerning Christ, yet God used it to speak to me the day I became a Christian—Saturday, August 17, 1963.

My life took a dramatic about-face. I zealously witnessed to friends and strangers at every chance. Old friends avoided me, convinced I'd gone crazy. Meanwhile, newly-gained Christian friends suggested I enter the ministry. I was a heavy smoker, consuming two packs of unfiltered short Camels a day—three if partying. I sure I smelled like a smoke stack. I found myself hopelessly hooked and so convicted that I couldn't smoke around friends and hid my *smokes* in the top of my socks. I prayed daily for two years for deliverance. Soon, they seemed to lose their flavor: "*These cigarettes are stale!*" I thought. Every new pack I bought was the same—no flavor. Finally, in frustration I tossed all my smoking paraphernalia in the trash; expensive tobacco, pipes, cigars, lighters... everything but the cigarette lighter in my Corvette. As I did, I sensed an increasing infusion of strength. I went to our church prayer meeting that evening, asking for prayer. It was 11:00 AM the next morning before I realized I hadn't craved a cigarette—like I had never smoked! Gone! I literally had no lingering desire or withdrawal. It was God's miraculous doing for which I praise His Name. He answered my prayers and deserved all the credit.

During the spring of 1966, nearly three years after receiving Christ and while employed as a machinist at American Locomotive (ALCO) in Auburn, New York, I saw an advertisement in the Syracuse Herald newspaper. McDonnell Douglas Missile and Space Systems Division (MD-MSSD) in Santa Monica, California had placed the ad, stating they needed qualified machinists for their Santa Monica R&D location. They had sent a representative to Syracuse to conduct interviews in a major hotel there.

Upon seeing the ad, I felt drawn to the opportunity. First, I inquired of the Lord concerning His will. The answer God impressed upon my heart was a phrase from a letter that King Artaxerxes decreed to Ezra the priest; "*And whatsoever shall seem good to thee... that do after the will of your God*" (Ezra 7:18). Before that, "*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD and to do it*" (Ezra 7:10). Granted, my situation was unrelated to the immediate context, yet the general principle applied. Ezra sought the Lord's will and the Lord answered him, according to the desire He had placed in Ezra's heart. I sensed the Lord giving freedom to pursue the opportunity. By this time, I had been employed by ALCO for over three years and had advanced in experience and qualifications, holding job positions up to their *ninth bracket* skill-level operating engine lathes, one level below their highest, *tenth bracket* level.

Scheduling an appointment, I drove to Syracuse and talked with the McDonnell Douglas HR representative. He assessed my qualifications and decided I was the type for which they were looking. I was hired on the spot and my travel expenses to Santa Monica were covered by McDonnell Douglas. Once my security clearance arrived, I submitted my resignation at American Locomotive. After packing a few belongings into my now-classic 1963 Corvette Split-window Coupe and bidding my farewells, I set out. It was quite an experience for a 24-year-old former farm boy as I drove my '63 Vette out Route 66 to California in 1966. Before that, I hadn't been any further west than Rochester, New York.

Part II (A New Direction)

Making good time, I arrived in Santa Monica on Sunday evening, a couple days later. While on I-10 heading into Metro Los Angeles, I was awestruck by the endless line of taillights ahead as far as the eye could see—very different from the country roads of which I was accustomed. Reaching Santa Monica later that evening, I pulled into a large filling station parking lot at the westmost end of I-10 where I slept in my car. The following morning, my first inclination was to locate a good church where I could get some counsel as to where best to live and possibly join. Looking through the local Yellow Pages, I found *Bible Baptist Church*. It felt and sounded right, so I called from a payphone. Pastor Bill Koltovich answered. I introduced myself, explained my situation, and asked if I might come over and confer with him, to which he assented.

He later told me how he had numerous calls a day, asking for help of some sort, but sensed that my call was different—which I knew was of the Lord. Upon explaining my situation, Pastor Koltovich graciously invited me into his home where he introduced me to his family. They even invited me to have dinner and to stay in their little travel trailer that evening. The next morning, Pastor Koltovich took me around town, looking for apartments. We found a budget-minded place on a quiet street between Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards, where I resided during the time I worked at McDonnell Douglass.

I attended the little Baptist Church where Reverend Koltovich pastored, and became a member upon receiving baptism by immersion. I worked second shift at the McDonnell Douglas MSSD Research and Development department, which afforded me a lot of free time during the daytime. Instead of frequenting nearby Malibu Beach with all its attractive temptations, I sought a better way to spend my time. I did two things—worked out with free weights and read God's Word. Ken Taylor's Living Bible was just coming onto the market at that juncture. Purchasing a copy of *Living Prophecies; The Minor Prophets of the Old Testament*, I set about to read it.

I wrongly assumed it would likely be a dry, uninteresting read. Starting with the Book of Daniel, I was surprised how God's Word seemed to come alive before me. The more I read, the more it became apparent how Israel's stubborn attitudes and rebellious actions were unacceptable to God: doubt, distrust, unbelief, idolatry, spiritual adultery, stubbornness, rebellion, *et al.* “*What is wrong with these people?*” I reasoned. “*Why can't they trust God? He saved them out of slavery in Egypt, miraculously protected them from Pharaoh's armies, supplied all their needs during their desert wanderings, and yet they... they...*”

The thoughts no sooner crossed my mind than the Spirit of God impressed me with: *"And, how about you, Ron?"* I had to agree with God that I had trusted Him with my soul's eternal destiny, but wasn't willing to trust Him with my daily life and earthly destiny. I somehow imagined that, if I did, God might embarrass me by having me grow a long beard, wear a white robe, and walk around carrying a huge "REPENT" sign, or something equally absurd. Of course, that's what the Enemy would have us think.

I dropped to my knees, confessing to the Lord that I now realized He was more than able to lead my life in every way, and that all my negative ideas were vain conjecture. I prayed, *"Lord, I know now that you can be trusted with everything concerning my life. From here on, I want you to have my whole life for whatever you deem most important, no holds barred, no matter what – from here on my life is yours, period."*

Part III (A New Purpose)

I had newfound joy and purpose as I arose from prayer with a new spring in my step. The next thing was to discern what direction God had for me. Before that, I was not especially interested in serving the Lord, although some had encouraged me along those lines when I first received Christ. Frankly, I had been more interested in controlling the reins to my own life, pursuing the things I desired.

At that juncture, I prayed constantly that God would reveal His will and direction for my life. I had thoughts of pursuing a Christian education at Bob Jones University, following the example of Pastor Koltovich. I put my 1963 Corvette up for sale. To raise extra funds, I also sold my prized, recently-purchased pre-'64 220 Swift Winchester high-powered varmint rifle, including telescopic scope. I ended up giving the money to a needy missionary family who had visited the church.

By then, two weeks had transpired, yet my excitement in seeking God's purpose for my life had not waned. I pictured the possibility of becoming successful in some business endeavor, from where I would be able to support missionaries and mission projects. *(I had been invited by Christian friends to join them in a business venture of that nature previously, but declined.)*

The following Sunday, a young missionary who ministered among unreached South American Indian tribes visited our church. He announced during the morning service that he would be speaking to the young people's group that afternoon. I decided to attend, mostly because of my interest in a Christian girl to whom I was attracted, knowing she would be in attendance.

Before speaking, the young missionary (a couple years my senior) showed a few artifacts that he had brought back from the tribe where he was serving. One was a native blowgun with which he blew a dart across the auditorium into the bulletin board. Not necessarily impressed, I suffered through the remainder of his presentation. That is, until he suddenly paused, waited for everyone's attention, then addressed the room with; *"Who here is seriously interested in serving the Lord? ...raise your hand!"* It was as if he was speaking directly to me. I shook away my inattentiveness and raised my hand, as did a few others there.

What that young missionary said then brought a watershed turning point into my life, *"If you're serious,"* and I was, *"You need to understand that God doesn't need you to serve Him here in the United States. The Gospel has been here for centuries, and if anyone truly wanted to receive Christ, it wouldn't be very long before God could direct someone to explain the Gospel message and lead them to Christ. Yet, there are still places in the world today where the Gospel has never yet gone, nor have they ever heard about their Creator God or salvation from sin through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So, if you're truly serious, that's where God needs you."*

His message hit me like the proverbial "Ton of Bricks." I realized God was using this visiting missionary to reveal His will for me, and the life's purpose He had in mind for which I had been praying. However, instead of rejoicing, I was in shock; like having a bucket of ice water dumped on me. My response to this revelation was immediate. I can remember my thoughts almost verbatim, *"No, God! That's too much! I could never do that! I'll starve or die in some remote jungle somewhere, and no one will ever know!"*

I had prayed that God would reveal his will; yet, now that He had, I couldn't find it within myself to follow. I felt a sense of shame; torn between obedience or disobedience. On the one hand, I desired to follow God's revealed will to obey the Great Commission. Yet, on the other, I was conflicted. I wanted to get away and think, which turned into a three-year wilderness journey. I often quip that, when Jonah ran away, he rode around in the belly of a whale for three days and nights; whereas, I cruised around in my Corvette for three years, spinning my spiritual wheels – backslidden and out of fellowship with God.

While in California, a close friend, Fay Parnley, drove out from Upstate New York to me a visit. We drove around the Malibu hills and attended car races in Riverside on Saturdays. Fay also accompanied me to church, having been raised in the Venice Baptist Church, where I started attending upon my salvation. When it came time for him to return home, I decided to accompany him back—being homesick for Upstate New York

and the Finger Lakes. Yet I knew in my heart that, like Jonah, that I was running from God. I resigned from my dream job in Santa Monica and drove home with my buddy Fay in our two Corvettes.

During the following years, my once-orderly life turned into spiritual disarray. Thoughts of church or obedience were far from me. I became involved in a variety of pursuits; anything to keep my mind off God and spiritual things. Being a wayward Christian as I was, I was concerned that Christ might return in the clouds to call out His Church home while I was in a backslidden condition. The thought haunted me. I had the sense that I was walking down an ever-narrowing alleyway with tall brick walls on either side. The further I went, the more squeezed-in I felt. Yet God, in His grace, was watching over me; His disobedient child.

I held some good-paying jobs in various pursuits. While selling Chevrolets at a dealership, I decided to modify my Corvette in looks and performance, taking it from a 300hp stock ride to a 450hp screamer. This included a lightened body and numerous handling and speed modifications – turning it into one of the fastest street cars of the day with a 6.2:1 power-to-weight ratio. The first day I had my new Corvette in 1963, I was stopped and ticketed by a local deputy sheriff – quite unfairly, I might add. Vowing I wasn't going to be stopped like that again, I became a nemesis to local law enforcement. Despite some intense *midnight rides*, none could get close enough to identify me. Realizing nothing good could come of it, I abruptly ceased. I later sold my Corvette after entering the ministry. Cars like mine are now valuable collector cars, worth multiple times more than I paid for it new.

I competed in sanctioned motorcycle hill-climb events on my 900cc Harley Sportster, and in off-road enduros on my 250cc Bultaco woods bike, winning my share of trophies. During fall months, I hunted and during winter months I rode for a factory-sponsored Ski-Doo race team, where I did the engine tuning and modifications. We had a very successful team, competing in the Northeastern US and Canada. We also went to the *Snowmobile Olympics* in Rhinelander/Eagle River, Wisconsin, where my buddy Fay took fourth in the unlimited class while I led his pit crew.

These pursuits kept my mind off of God. However, I had no real peace, being backslidden and out of fellowship. Yet, God never forsook me, keeping me safe in potentially dangerous situations. Once, during a New York State championship, I was near the front when a jealous competitor purposefully jammed into the back of my sled. I tried to regain control as my race sled skidded sideways at speed on the icy track. That's when the sled's spiked track caught on the ice, flipping and hurling me and the sled against the bank, about a twenty-foot distance. Bouncing back onto the middle of the track, I laid there as the rest of the race sleds flew past me on either side, but never touching me, by God's grace. The race was stopped as the track's doctor came out and

manipulated my badly dislocated shoulder back into joint. Having occurred in the first lap, the officials restarted the race; whereupon my teammate and close friend Fay took my place and won—further angering the competitor who had caused the accident. We didn't pursue it since the more we won, the more we were targeted.

Being laid up for a month, my next race was in Ontario, Canada where I strapped my injured shoulder down so it wouldn't pop out of joint. I had won all the heats and was leading in the main event with first-place *in the bag*. Entering the final corner of the last lap, I skidded slightly in a muddy section, losing momentum. Beaten by a handbreadth, I received a second-place trophy due to that glitch in the final corner. Our team hardly finishing below second place. The following year, while I entered the ministry, one of my former teammates, Kenny Young, was awarded World Champion in overall points.

That spring, I joined the Morse Collins Inc. sales force; the company that sold and installed *UL Approved* lightning protection systems during summer months. They also sold and raced Bombardier Ski-Doos during the winter – the factory-sponsored race team that I rode with. This is what life's all about, I told myself. By then, I hadn't darkened a church doorway for over two years. I'm sure my Christian friends were convinced my salvation was fake, including those who prayed for me; instrumental in my coming to faith. However, every morning I awoke to the decision whether I was going to serve God as He had directed and I had promised, or continue on the path of disobedience to which I had become accustomed?

I was successful in sales, approaching their top salesman's figures within a few weeks, which earned me the owners' admiration and a word of caution by some of their sales staff for making them look bad. To further hone my sales skills, I attended the Dale Carnegie Professional Sales course in Syracuse, New York—the turning point God used to brought me back to pursue His will once again.

I want to interject here that I praise God for His grace, patience, and watch-care in allowing me to pursue these endeavors—both successes and failures, hazardous and harmless—which salved my restless spirit. All these kept me busy until I became tired of the self-life and left behind the things I once cherished, including my prize Corvette and some cheap trophies, which are rusty and gathering dust somewhere by now.

I'm reminded of Christ's admonition: "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Part IV (A Turning Point)

I was quite impressed with the Dale Carnegie sales class instructor, Bob Boes, a sales executive with Bear Abrasives; he was well dressed and professional. I learned a lot. For the final session of the six-week course, he instructed each of us to prepare a brief speech on any subject we desired. Class members would then critique each other for fluency, mannerisms, and general content. Bob said, I'll go first and give you an example to follow. I watched as he stood up front and began; *"I believe in the Word of God..."* he said. I almost fell over with surprise as he continued, laying out his personal testimony and the plan of salvation. The whole place was quiet. Bob's life and testimonial speech brought me to my senses, turning me back to walking with God. I thanked him privately later, explaining my situation.

I loved working for Morse Collins because we seemed to *click*, as we appreciated all the same things. They also appreciated my initiative. I thought, *"This is where I want to stay the rest of my life."* Yet, being the type who was hard to satisfy and always seeking that elusive perfect something to spend my life doing, it wasn't long before I became dissatisfied there too. I remember muttering to myself one day, *"This job is nothing but a rat race, just like everything else!"* I frightened myself with that thought and tried to tuck it back inside. I knew then that there was nothing with which I could find fulfillment and happiness on earth, which saddened me. Nonetheless, I swallowed my feelings and pressed on.

Around that time, God used a local farmer to whom I had sold lightning protection for all his buildings. Upon completing the contract, I asked if he knew of anyone else who needed lightning protection. He said that I should go see Bill Earle, who lived up on the hill, and that his place constantly gets hit by lightning. He added that Bill also has a very beautiful daughter in her early twenties who is a local school teacher and that I needed to meet her. As I went, I recalled that I had tried to get a blind date with her a couple of years previous, but she was away at school and already engaged. I learned later that her fiancé had been drafted and tragically killed in Vietnam. I went up there posthaste with two goals; to sell lightning protection to Bill, but most of all to meet his daughter. I accomplished both goals that same day.

I told Bill, a local pastor, that I too was a Christian, and asked about their Wednesday evening service. Making it a point to go, I desired to meet the girl of my dreams. I noticed Cheryl sitting a few rows ahead of me during the service. Afterward, Bill introduced me to his wife, Nell, and their daughter,

Cheryl. To my amazement, Nell invited me over to their home for coffee, cake and ice-cream that evening, where I met and conversed with Cheryl. She told me later that her mom was a prim and proper Southern lady, and that it was out of character for her to invite a stranger into their home on such a short notice. I later realized it was God's doing and that Cheryl's parents were concerned for her wellbeing, ever since she had lost her fiancé in Vietnam a few months earlier.

All the while, I was drawing closer to God, but still in flux spiritually. Ken, the younger brother of my unsaved motorcycling friend Dave Degraff, called me at work. Choking up, he announced that his brother had suddenly passed away the previous evening. He added that there was not going to be a funeral service, just a private burial with no one in attendance. I had many opportunities to witness to Dave, but didn't, being ashamed because I wasn't walking in fellowship with the Lord at the time. This sad news sobered me, further bolstering my resolve to serve the Lord.

Cheryl and I soon became close; although it was evident that she was still coming out of mourning for her deceased fiancé. We courted regularly, to the point where we explored thoughts of marriage. This beautiful, intelligent Christian girl was my dream come true. Then, Cheryl's Aunt Kathy came home on furlough—missionary to the *Maquiritare* tribal people of Venezuela's Amazonian jungles.

Having recently purchased a business car, I invited Cheryl's Aunt Kathy to accompany us to church. As Kathy sat in back, I noticed she was working on a looseleaf manuscript of some sort. Upon inquiring, she happily informed me it was a revision of the Maquiritare New Testament. I shuddered with a sense of disgust; muttering under my breath something I will never forget; which only God and I heard; "*Who would ever want to waste their life doing a foolish thing like that?*" Note: That telling statement is now a point of humor that God and I share because, due to a changed life-focus I'm now happily involved in Bible translation (cf. Philippians 2:13).

Part V (My Journey Back)

Aunt Kathy was given the opportunity to share her ministry during church. There were the typical 35mm slides of missionary living quarters, rivers, canoes, jungles, *Indians*, including a church; a rickety tin-clad bamboo structure with a makeshift cross. I'm sure onlookers thought that Cheryl and I made the perfect young Christian couple; yet, my thoughts were far from the things of God. Meanwhile, I was quietly planning my sales schedule for the coming week.

God was at work. My thoughts of everything being a *rat race* came back to mind; ever so softly at first. Resounding over and over, the volume increased in my mind until it became a loud crescendo. *“Yes, God! I hear you, I exclaimed in my heart! I now know that everything is just a vain rat race apart from your will. I’m ready to move forward to serve you now, as I had promised.”*

My sense of joy and purpose returned full-fold. I turned toward Cheryl to suggest that we should get married and serve the Lord, not settle down around home. However, I noticed that she had an odd scowl on her face so I decided to put off mentioning it until later. After Sunday dinner at her folk’s place, Cheryl asked if I would ride with her to Brackney Pennsylvania where she was a camp counselor at the AWANA camp there, then drive her car back home. She only had a driver’s permit, so needed me to ride along as her licensed driver. As she drove, I was contemplating how best to suggest that we should get married and serve the Lord.

Shortly, Cheryl teared up and began to sob. Pulling onto the shoulder, she asked me to drive. I wondered what was happening. She then blurted out through her tears that she knew I was going to hate her for what she was about to say; followed by, she couldn’t marry me because God wanted her to become a missionary and that she planned to enter missionary training under New Tribes Mission (NTM) that fall – now known as Ethnos360.

Admittedly, I was taken aback but then realized this is what the scowl on her face was about during church. Cheryl was struggling with the Lord concerning this decision. She told me later that, having grown up in a mission-minded pastor’s home, she had told God during her youth that she would serve Him. However, she had taken her life back during her years of study at The King’s College, Briarcliff Manor, New York.

I responded to Cheryl’s admission by saying that’s what I wanted to tell her in church, that we should get married and serve the Lord as missionaries instead of settling down. Her answer took me by surprise. Thinking I didn’t understand, she tried to discourage me, saying that there was no money to be had in missionary service. I assured her that I was dead serious, briefly explaining the three-year-long bumpy spiritual journey I had been on until just that morning.

Cheryl soon realized that I was for real. We conferred with her dad and Aunt Kathy. They suggested that the New Tribes annual mission conference was being held in Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania and that I should go down and attend; to see if it was what I wanted to pursue. After a few rousing meetings, and conversing with one of the staff members, it all clicked. I returned home more sure-minded than ever.

Part VI (Marriage and Training)

Cheryl and I decided we needed to confer with others before making any solid plans. We spoke with both her father (Pastor Bill Earle) and mine (Pastor Albert Garcia). We also contacted the New Tribes Mission headquarters to explain our marriage plans and our wanting to apply for the fall semester, which started the first week of September. At that juncture it was still early summer. We set our wedding date for August 26, 1963; two weeks before the beginning semester. Our marriage ceremony was held at my home church, Venice Baptist, Venice Center, NY, officiated jointly by both of our pastors.

After our wedding, the church reception and the rice throwing exit, a friend drove us back to my home where my Corvette was all fueled up and waiting. To play a trick on our two brothers, who had plans to decorate our Honeymoon car, I had left my Corvette parked in our back lawn with implicit instructions not to *mess* with it. I then packed our get-away luggage in my Volkswagen Beetle and parked it partially-hidden in one of our farm's smaller barns. I made sure my brother was watching me stow it away but pretended I was unaware. Upon returning from our wedding, I found my Volkswagen Beetle thoroughly "desecrated" by our brothers. I swapped our luggage into my waiting Vette, Cheryl and I jumped in, and we roared off for the Adirondacks and a week-long honeymoon.

One week after our Honeymoon we entered New Tribes Mission's primary training school in Ontario, Canada. These were called "Boot Camps" because of the intensity of the training undergone there. During our two years there we completed all Biblical studies and personal requirements. Some of us men went on week-long moose hunts into northern Ontario's forested lake area, designed to prepare us for remote jungle living conditions. Another aspect of training was the famed *Jungle Camp*. Families took all the supplies they could – toy wagons or wheelbarrows in tow – and backpacked into the local forest where each had previously erected a livable lean-to, as Cheryl and I also did. Everyone emerged six weeks later, a few pounds healthier.

This too was designed to prepare missionary candidates for the rigors of remote jungle tribal living. Cheryl and I went to Thailand where living conditions were a picnic compared to the deep jungles where many ended up. David, our firstborn, was born just before our advancement to NTM's Language and Linguistics Institute in Camdenton, Missouri. There, we completed all our studies, taking their advanced training program. I received my ordination diploma on August 14, 1972. Afterward, we took meetings and raised our support. Upon saying our goodbyes, we left for a life of ministry in Thailand in the fall of 1973.

Part VII (Our First Term in Thailand)

We had procured a flight to Thailand with SIAMAS, a Netherland-based travel agency purported to cater to missionaries' travel needs. It all seemed so apropos, especially the first part of their acronym, *Siam*, Thailand's former name. Boarding in New York City for an eastbound flight over Europe, we had a one-day stopover in Brussels. We had made previous arrangements with a German missionary family with NTM, also headed for Thailand. They picked us up for an overnight stay at their place in Germany, delivering us to Zurich, Switzerland, the following day to continue our flight. It soon became evident that SIAMAS purported catering to missionaries was greatly overstated since they – like a regular travel agency – merely booked blocs of seats for missionaries on regular airline flights.

Our continued flight into Bangkok was on a cramped old cigar-shaped DC-9 and what a flight it was. Smoking on board hadn't been banned yet. To make matters worse, the seat directly in front of us was occupied by a chain-smoker. He would light up one cigarette after another, take a few drags then lay them in the ashtray, leaving them to smolder and stink – giving the air a rancid blueish cast. Our next stopover was in Karachi, Pakistan, with its forsaken-looking, dust-laden airport lounge, replete with empty display cases. After a long flight over India, the following stop was in Colombo, Sri Lanka. I can still recall the thick stand of Palm trees that lined both sides of the narrow second-rate runway. We were filled with expectation when we landed at our destination; Bangkok, Thailand. Deboarding the plane, we were warmly greeted by a boiling-hot tarmac and a unique variety of unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells. We were *home*.

Our first year was spent attending language school in Bangkok. There, we improved our limited language ability and learned the complicated writing system. We rented a traditional clapboard sided, wood-framed Thai house, which fit our meager budget. It came with noisy ceiling fans, but no air conditioning. There were many ways for dealing with the mosquito population: poisonous spray, smear-on repellent; mosquito coils; nets for bedtime; fans that kept us cool and drove away mosquitoes, fly swatters, as well as door and window screens. The only escape for hot nights was to arise and take a cool shower, sometimes two or three times a night. If the water pressure was too low, we took dipper baths. While there, Cheryl delivered our second child, Angela, at Bangkok Christian Hospital. Our third child, Michelle, was also born there.

A potpourri of contrasting smells constantly wafted through the smoggy air: burning incense; sewage water; exhaust fumes; along with the raw smells of the open markets, from fish to piles of old trash, to fresh flowers, to deliciously-prepared Thai curries. There were also a variety of unfamiliar sounds, including a variety of foreign languages. The few familiar sounds we could readily associate with were crying babies and barking dogs. To put it mildly, we were totally out of our element; not unlike a fish trying to make its way on dry land. However, we took the challenge all in stride, not allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by culture shock, to which many had succumbed.

Our initial goal was to serve alongside another NTM couple among the pygmy Negrito; primitive nomadic tribes that migrated back and forth through the dense jungles; freely crossing the border between Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia. We knew them by the names of Sakai, Semang, and Senoi. We later learned that these were derogatory terms given to them by Thai and Malay nationals, which had the general meaning of slave or uncivilized. Our plans were short-lived because; sadly, the other couple had to return home due to moral failure. Our field leadership was concerned for our safety, due to militants, terrorists and pirates that freely roamed the Southern Thailand border area, so suggested we reconsider.

Part VIII (Entering the Battlefield)

Ironically, we ended up in Northeast Thailand. That was during the Vietnam War era when anti-government Communist insurgents had infiltrated the whole vicinity where we had located. There were also armed robbers and bandits who kidnapped and held government officials and businessmen for ransom, even killing some. Learning that one band was eyeing us, I prayed for deliverance. The following day, a police ambush killed them all, which was big news throughout the area.

A large population of pro-Ho Chi Minh Vietnamese sympathizers lived throughout the area. I knew and did business with many artisans and storeowners. Others avoided me or gazed upon me with disdain. One Vietnamese market vendor chastised me for ruining their culture and killing their people. I then asked what religion she held. She answered the *Ho Chi Minh* religion. I was later able to befriend her by making it a point to purchase needed foodstuffs from her. I also

learned to be as *apolitical* as possible, and am presently close friends with many. Initially, they were considered *persona non grata* by the Thai government and locals, due to their ethnicity and political leaning, but have now become fully accepted Thai citizens.

Upon moving up to Northeast Thailand from Bangkok in 1974, we first lived in the capital city of Sakon Nakhon province where we began our ministry outreach. Being under the auspices of New Tribes Mission, our focus was centered on unreached ethnic minorities or tribals, of which there are numerous separate individual people groups. The group we chose called themselves the Nyaw people. Although their customs were not unlike the rest of Isan, their language was more difficult, having seven tones. The Isan and Lao languages have six tones and the Thai language has five tones – Mandarin Chinese having four.

The northeastern area of Thailand—known as the Isan Region—could arguably be considered one large homogeneous unreached (or little-reached) people group. It also comprises a full one-third of Thailand's total population and landmass. When we first arrived, the greater majority of Isanians were indigent, village dwelling rice farmers, castigated, taken advantage of, suppressed, and generally looked down upon by their central Thai cousins. Now, however, Isanians have become accepted as the default labor class of Thailand. They also have, of recent, become a sizable voting bloc as they emerge from their former estate and have become more cognizant of the democratic system, and the huge role they play as a bloc vote. And yet, they carefully maintain their Isan ethnicity. This would include all ethnic minorities interspersed throughout the Isan region.

Part IX (Onsite Preparation)

That brings me to the subject of language and culture acquisition. I believe it is a proven fact that if any missionary, dedicated as he or she may be, does not understand the utmost importance of taking the time and effort to master the language of the target audience, the probability of that person doing so will likely never occur. The common conclusion (or excuse) they come to is, seeing that the Isan can understand what they say, there's no need to try to master another difficult language. So, they proceed only partially prepared. Unknowingly, they have passed up a golden opportunity and have created a barrier for themselves to a truly successful ministry... a principle that is true in any similar ministry setting.

The question remains, how much Thai do the majority of rural Isanians comprehend. Many of them listen to the 8:00 PM national news, which is broadcast in a semi-literary, formal style. However, to articulate an accurate, fluent conversation in Thai is beyond most of them. That is, unless they have had an opportunity to work in Bangkok for a protracted period. Typically, driving taxis, busses or chauffeur work, working on construction, janitorial housemaid work, etc.

What point am I making? All things being equal, onsite pre-ministry preparation is mandatory. Language and culture studies, and befriending the people are essential if anyone expects to have a truly fruitful ministry. Therefore, it is an integral part of any effective cross-cultural ministry, and not an option. To say that it's a prerequisite would be an understatement. For us, the rewards were great in terms of their accepting us and opening up to hear the life-changing message I had brought – the Good News of their creator and sin-bearing Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Bottom line: Speaking the heart language and culture of the people one goes to minister to is an absolute must!

I often chuckle to myself when I get asked whether I speak the language. I assure them that I do. In fact, how could I ever hope to minister effectively if I wasn't able to communicate? Meaning, be able to speak, read and write the Thai language, as well as speak other regional languages where one is going to minister. In my case that was Nyaw, Isan/Lao, and PhuThai.

Mastering both the national, and any local-area target language and culture, and befriending the people anyone wants to reach is essential for every serious-minded missionary. Certainly not struggling along in the national language, or trying to communicate in English through an interpreter. That is usually an unrecoverable mistake since it leaves huge gaps of comprehension on both sides, not to mention total miscommunication, which leads to syncretism instead of salvation on the part of the hearers. This, combined with ignorant bliss on the part of the missionary, thinking they have accomplished their intended goals when in fact they have not; even getting undeserved accolades from their supporters back home.

Speaking through an interpreter is an absurd notion that doesn't deserve consideration, especially when one is trying to communicate the deep truths of God in a different language! The main concern here is, does the interpreter understand personally, and how adept he or she is in effectively communicating the intended message. Or, does the message become obscured or

miscommunicated, which has caused no end of problems where this occurred on mission fields. Typically, this is due to an improper sense of urgency or rush on the part of the missionary involved, resulting in a juggernaut of troubles and unsolvable difficulties. The same is true if one proceeds forward with an ignorance of the peoples' culture and world view.

Part X (Moving Forward)

With essential tools in hand, and knowing that unexpected things might lay ahead, I set out on an extended survey trip from our temporary home base in Sakon Nakhon province while Cheryl and our two young children remained home. The goal was to locate a Nyaw village that would feel comfortable with us and invite us in. I traveled with a fellow missionary on separate motorcycles. Three weeks of survey work transpired, taking weekends off to spend time with our families.

We ranged far and wide for hundreds of kilometers over unimproved roads on 100 cc motorcycles in all sorts of weather before locating such a village. Its name was *Ban NaNai* or "Inner Fields Village," an average-sized Nyaw village of around 200 homes. The village was in Nakhon Phanom, a border province alongside the Mekong River, one hundred kilometers east of Sakon Nakhon province. The village headman was more than happy to have our two families move in; however, he struck us as being oddly overly zealous, announcing if he gave the word, the whole village would "enter our religion."

After a village meeting where the headman announced our intentions to settle there, we set about looking for livable housing, something not requiring too much renovation. I found nothing suitable, except I saw an ideal empty plot at one end of the village with two big shade trees. I loved it and decided to build there if it was rentable. I turned and saw a few men sitting on a house porch across the small dirt road. Walking over, I climbed the shaky ladder and introduced myself. Conversing in basic Thai they understood my intentions. Pointing to the empty plot across the road, I inquired about the owner. "*He's sitting right here,*" was the answer. The owner's name was Uncle *Gert*, the name meaning "to be born." We chatted a bit and made a deal right there. (*Gert became the first village born-again Christian the following year.*)

Upon doing a wide area search, I located an ample amount of suitable used hardwood lumber in the form of a single level store structure in a district town. Area renovation was in process and the building had been abandoned. After dismantling and trucking it sixty kilometers to my rented village plot, I set about to build a sturdy, comfortable, three-bedroom home using only hand tools, since there was no electricity. Six weeks later,

on Christmas Eve, 1974, we moved in. We then set about to master the seven-tone Nyaw language, employing the assistance of Mr. Giam. Giam knew Thai well, having learned it while working in Bangkok.

No sooner had we settled in than the former headman began telling the villagers that we were communists, then CIA, then KGB, also telling the local authorities the same lies. It was strange; he had changed and didn't like us, and wanted us out. I was becoming afraid for our safety. At that juncture, I learned that the village consensus was he was too corrupt and needed to go. He also mistakenly thought he could get money from us, so turned against us. A four-man committee was appointed to gather signatures to have him removed. Giam, a highly respected village member, was appointed to head the committee.

Upon the former headman's removal, Giam was voted in as the new village headman, all while teaching me the Nyaw language. It was a miracle. God was in total control over these unpleasant circumstances. Giam and I became very close, to where a ceremony was conducted where we tied a cotton string around each other's wrist, thereby becoming official *Siew*s – a term we referred each other by – *Siew Giam* and *Siew Ron* – akin to being blood brothers. Later, the former headman's own son came to Christ.

During one language session, Giam told me that he sensed the message I brought was of great importance but admitted he didn't understand very well. I knew he was serious because, as headman, he called a special meeting where I was invited to present the Gospel to the village men. I communicated as best I could in my faltering Nyaw, interspersed with Thai. Although I gave them the Gospel, I sensed I hadn't really communicated it to their hearts. Later, I developed a *Creation Evangelism* technique to effectively introduce the Gospel. *Siew* Giam and I maintained a close friendship until his unexpected passing after I had moved into town. I was greatly saddened, not sure whether he understood enough to receive Christ. I believe that God, in His mercy, accepted the sincerity of Giam's searching heart even with a weak understanding. I still tear up thinking about it; wondering... This caused me to strive even harder to speak languages as fluently as possible.

After numerous times of sharing the Gospel, my landowner, Uncle Gert, announced to me that he had received Christ. Gert had a Catholic background, which helped, since he already had a foundation on which to build, albeit faulty at best. That was the beginning of my spiritual ministry in that area. It soon became evident that Uncle Gert had the gift of Evangelism. He did quite well, boldly weaving the Gospel into most of his conversations. Around that time our second daughter, Michelle, was born.

Others also received Christ, some on their death beds; realizing that Buddhism offered nothing in the way of hope and forgiveness – like Christ did – only an endless cycle of dead works, deaths and purported rebirths. There are other accounts, too numerous to go into detail, how villagers came to faith amongst severe opposition, some growing in grace, while others succumbed to societal ridicule, like Aunt Paan, the lady who topped off our water tank each day. She came to us crying one day, returning the Gideon New Testament we had given her. *“People are talking about me,”* she said, a cultural bad omen.

Ministry among unreached tightly-knit village societies is extremely difficult. Practically no one is ready and waiting for the Gospel message. They go from birth to death steeped in superstition, deceased ancestor veneration, spirit appeasement, along with various other dark arts, all combined with a localized form of cultural Buddhism, mixed with Brahmanism. In fact, the enemy has them so locked in that it's impossible. Impossible, that is, apart from God's Spirit working in darkened hearts and minds as He shines the piercing light of the Gospel message through the foolishness of preaching as Paul said, “. . . faith comes by hearing; that is, hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Early one day, an elderly couple traveled to my home from a nearby village to buy some medicine, of which I kept a small stock to treat their typical ailments. After helping the old couple, I told them I had another type of medicine that could save them, purifying their hearts for Heaven. They requested to see this strange new medication, whereupon I went inside and brought out some visual aids. I taught them all that morning, covering God's existence, creation through to the plan of redemption. I also spoke to an old legend they all believe concerning the coming of a messiah, whose name I mentioned, *Pra-Sri-Ahri'a-Mettri*, or "The One Who Shows Mercy." I said His real name is Jesus Christ. He is all-powerful and can save you to the uttermost, but you must ask Him for mercy.

Immediately, they clasped their hands together in prayer and cried out to God. Their oldest son, now a church elder there, told me his parents had been enslaved in dark spiritual arts, passed down through generational heredity. They had given up on Buddhism years before and had been calling out to the Messiah, according to their legend. When I said His real name was Jesus Christ, they knew they had found Him, rather, He had found them. God instantly freed them from the spirits that had long enslaved them. Their joy in the Lord was palpable as they praised Him continually. That was the beginning of the church in that area; which, though small, is strong today. The old couple is now with their Lord and Savior, but their testimony still lives on. Others who were trapped in Spiritism have found faith in Christ through their lives.

Part XI (The Isan New Testament – Preparation)

While teaching the village believers using a then-popular Thai Gideon New Testament, I soon realized the need for a Bible in their own heart language. Isan was the prominent trade language throughout the Isan region. It was also mutually understandable among most ethnic minorities there as well, the languages being related. It became clear that Isan was the best option, as opposed to one of the minority languages, since it also took precedence in their minds, due to area-language *hierarchy*. It took some convincing to persuade the field committee, who thought I should wait; however, they finally realized the need and acquiesced – due in a large part to my consistency – not unlike the Ask SeeK Knock principle in Luke 11:5-10.

Before getting the go-ahead and before doing the Isan translation, I had conducted an area-wide survey, gathering data about regional dialects. I noted similarities and dissimilarities in tone, vowel, or consonant usage, including varied terminology – anything that might foster miscommunication. I also took computer programming classes while on our 1978-79 furlough. I also procured a good quality computer upon return, on which to input, store, edit, retrieve, and print the Isan Scriptures. I began by translating the Book of Beginnings; Genesis – not the Book of Mark as WBT/SIL translators advocate. They maintain one should begin with Mark because it's grammatically easier. I maintain that is debatable since, at best, Mark communicates nothing to the uninitiated heathen other than a strange-sounding story. Or, at worst, it could promote syncretism.

Part XII (Bible Translation and Expanded Outreach)

Upon returning from furlough, we moved into Nakhon Phanom's provincial capital city where a widely recognized dialect of Isan is spoken. Nakhon Phanom is situated on the banks of the Mekong River, thirty-five kilometers distance from our village home. I would begin the Isan translation in our new location while another missionary assumed my village ministry, also teaching in the village-area church. Our fourth child, Danny, was born while we were on furlough.

We located a very nice home for rent on a small dead-end laneway in Nakhon Phanom. It was quite spacious – large enough for our family, occasional guests, and monthly fellowship meetings. My initial plans were to concentrate solely on the Isan translation; however, God had additional plans. The city church – started through the combined efforts of OMF and C&MA missionaries – had become weak and floundering.

I learned that undesirable elements out of Bangkok had hoped to take over, called church stealing. This was not good since the village Christians automatically looked to that church as their example – their elder in the faith as it were. The one conservative missionary in town had returned home, leaving only me to oversee things. Realizing the need to strengthen the church and protect them from questionable doctrines, I assumed the additional task of interim pastor-teacher, although I don't believe that's what a missionary should be doing fulltime.

My first translation assistant was Jarat, who worked out quite well, catching on quickly. Jarat had grown up in a church setting that taught salvation by Grace plus works, i.e., accept Christ, but keep oneself saved through maintaining good behavior. The second assistant I brought on board was Uncle Prechaa, who was taught the same doctrine. Uncle Prechaa was a faithful witness and dependable brother, yet he was constantly concerned that his "fire" would go out if he didn't maintain proper activities, like attending church. He later understood that God was keeping him safe by Grace and that his fire was not going to go out because he was saved and kept by Grace.

Jarat's testimony was astounding. Before becoming my translation assistant, he had been working on construction in Bangkok. Jarat told me later, he had concluded that he could never be good enough to stay saved by his own strength; so, when I found him, he was fleeing from God and the church teaching that he had grown up under. He added that he had decided if he was going to end up in Hell anyway, he might as well enjoy himself living it up while still here on earth.

While working in Bangkok on a new wing of the SDA hospital, Jarat had gotten shocked by a live 440-volt power cable while disconnecting it, which was supposed to have been switched off. Stunned, as massive voltage coursed through his body, he fainted and fell into a deep pit of water. Involuntarily tightly clutching the arcing wires, the coursing electricity burned two large holes through his chest, near his heart. He laid there, dying from electrocution.

Meanwhile, fellow workers wondered where he had gone. One worker finally saw him, lying still under the water with the arcing 440-volt cables lying across his chest. Running to shut off the electricity, they pulled his limp body out of its watery grave and carried it into the hospital's ER a few short steps away. The emergency team was able to resuscitate him, clean and repair the deep burn wounds in his chest, then place him in a recovery ward until well enough to return home.

That's when I first met Jarat. He had moved back to Nakhon Phanom and had begun attending church with his parents, sitting under my teaching ministry. That's when he shared his testimony with me. Lifting his shirt, he showed me the deep scars burnt across his chest, which were still healing. He added that it was futile to avoid me, as it seemed like I was everywhere he turned. In actuality, it was the Lord working in his life drawing us together, not me stalking him, since I had only seen him a couple of times previously. Yet God had put a strong impression of him on my mind to help with the translation work, so I had been prompted to pray for him regularly, not knowing his dire situation as I prayed.

Through my Sunday morning messages, along with our devotion times before translation sessions, Jarat began to understand the truths of Salvation by Grace, apart from works. He took off like a rocket with his newfound understanding. His wife, Tiw, became a Christian around that same time. Cheryl was able to encourage her and other Isan ladies in the faith. Soon, Jarat and I took turns teaching Sunday mornings. Both Cheryl and I teared up with joy listening to Jarat confidently expound on the Grace of God, teaching the things he had learned during our previous week's translation devotion time. Jarat eventually developed into a profound, well-known spiritual leader.

Part XIII (More Fruit for My Labors Amidst Spiritual Warfare)

We translated Genesis first. This drew criticism by some; saying the New Testament was *usually* done first. I reminded them the Thai were without a Judeo-Christian foundation, so they needed the *Book of Origins* as a basis for understanding the rest of the Bible; especially Christ's true identity as Creator. Even though all Thai love nature, they hold a Buddhistic world view, so are void of any knowledge of origins or a Creator, as the Book of Genesis reveals. It's also on which all other Biblical truths are based, including the fall, curse, and promised redeemer – Jesus Christ. That's His real identity as Creator and Lord, not an underling to Buddha, Christianity coming five centuries later. Naysayers became convinced and began to use Creation-evangelism methods.

On Saturdays, Jarat and I would ride double on my Honda motorcycle fifty-plus kilometers south of Nakhon Phanom city on the Mekong River road to the district towns of Renu Nakhon and Naa Kae, adjacent areas where a large populace of the ethnic *Pu Thai* people lived. Their oral history included migrating from the ancient capital city of Hue, along Central Vietnam's coastline. We would spend the whole day, conversing and witnessing to whomever would listen, of which many did. As a result, some received Christ, were baptized, and small groups were established.

Jarat, after helping me nurture the struggling city church back to health, evangelizing the PhuThai people, and assisting in the Isan translation project, sensed the Lord leading him to Kusuman, a district town in Sakon

Nakhon province, fifty kilometers inland from Nakhon Phanom. Jarat and family remain there today; pastoring, teaching, training leaders and planting churches. Jarat also has a local Christian radio program. Later, Mr. Pinky, a PhuThai villager whom Jarat and I had visited, invited me to come back to explain the Gospel to his family and some fellow villagers. We had planted a seed on our previous visit, which had piqued their interest, so they wanted to hear more. This type of joint interest almost never occurs among lifelong Buddhists. Upon entering Mr. Pinky's home, I was greeted by a sizable group of enthusiastic friends, all gathered in his living-room.

Mr. Pinky and his friends were all ears. After an introduction, I transitioned to the *Sacred Writings* – pre-dating Buddhism, the Creator, His creation, the fall, the curse, and the promised coming deliverer (the Bible). After a few sessions, one of the men approached me as I was arriving. Dismounting from my motorbike, he walked up and thanked me, saying that he now understood. Tearing up, he pointing out across the fields, saying how he now realized that the Creator had given them: *"the rice in the fields and the fish in the waters."* This common expression means *plentiful*, like the biblical: *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey*. He wove that into his explanation, pointing to the rice growing in *his* fields and the fish swimming in *his* waters, exclaiming that *Our Creator* made it all, especially for our families to eat. He ended with, *"Isn't Our Creator Wonderful!"*

Sadly, that was the last I saw of these dear people, having been forced to leave without being able to present the promised one: The Lord Jesus Christ. Years passed before I was able to visit their village again. Inquiring of Mr. Pinky and his friends, I was told they had all passed away. This tragedy was due in part to our support being dropped, causing my return home. The lack of adequate support plays a huge role. If churches and mission committees would swap places with missionaries for a while, they'd get a taste of what we face and would not be so quick to drop much-needed support, leaving missionaries and their work struggling and in decline.

The major reason is how the Enemy fights so fiercely and underhandedly to hinder the Gospel; shooting fiery darts and planting seeds amongst missionaries – miscommunication, misunderstanding, fear, doubt, envy, mistrust, temptation, slander, one-upmanship, and spiritual pride. Committees on the field or at home can be equally at fault; forming biased opinions, making faulty decisions, and rushing to judgment without all the facts.

The best defense against our ultimate accuser, Satan, is to maintain awareness of his subtle tricks and how he deploys them; thereby, keeping him from gaining an advantage (2 Corinthians 2:11). Everything was going great when I was badly burnt. I was accused more than once of something trivial I knew nothing about and sent home by men in leadership positions that didn't have a clue, based on slanderous self-serving lies and unprovable hearsay, putting an immediate halt to a growing, productive ministry; including poisoning my close relationship with Jarat. Years later, I received letters of apology, asking forgiveness – after the fact and way too late to do any reparation.

Deeply hurt, forgiving those who wronged me was difficult, yet it gave a measure of closure and strength as a result. *"A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city"* (Proverbs 18:19). I harbored a deep sense of frustration and anger for what was done. I was confused and disheartened, and put on weight for a while, affecting my health. I sought out a wise Christian counselor who helped me. Wounds like these cut deep, linger on, and heal slowly, being psychological in nature. I had to overcome the hesitancy to act which I developed—fearing that something good might go awry, like the calamity that had happened to me. Those in leadership should *never* rush to judgement or deal with people on the strength of hearsay; but be sure the facts are known, and weighed fairly without personal opinions or biases.

Part XIV (Long Sabbatical Leave and Refugee Work)

After arriving back in the States—while involved in further mandatory training—I was introduced to a Pastor from San Diego by the name of Dr. Gary Coombs. Pastor Coombs, or Gary as we know him by, was involved with the huge influx of Southeast Asian refugee emigration to San Diego from their war-torn homelands – the Indochinese countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Traveling through, Gary stopped by to visit a missionary friend. The missionary told him about us, and that Cheryl and I could speak Laotian. Being apprised of our situation, he invited us to come help in the refugee work in which he was involved.

Meeting Gary was a Godsend. Since our future was uncertain at that juncture, it was a wonderful example of how God reveals His perfect will, especially during times of uncertainty. That's when I met Gary. One thing of which I *was* certain—I had a strong urge to return to Southern California, even though I didn't know where, what or how. I had lived and worked with McDonnell Douglass, Santa Monica, which was also where I had been called by God. Following Gary's invitation, the transition was so smooth, it was as if it had been planned. In fact, it *was* planned; planned for us by a loving and caring God. So, there was no uncertainty about it from God's perspective. Experiences such as this are great faith-builders because they build one's confidence in our Heavenly Father and His abiding watch-care.

Trust in the LORD, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the LORD,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring *it* to pass.

(Psalms 37:3-6)

"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.
(Matthew 28:20)

For He Himself has said,
"I will never ever leave you nor forsake you."

(Hebrews 13:5)

Initially, I worked with the Laotian church that had formed there. I later transitioned to begin a ministry with a small group of Cambodian-Chinese believers – Cambodian nationals of Chinese descent. I formed a strong bond with these dear misplaced people, many of whom had suffered beyond belief in the Khmer Rouge *Killing Fields* environment from which they had fled. I pastor-taught these folks for a period of fifteen years, between return trips to Northeast Thailand, continuing to minister and work on the Isan New Testament translation under the auspices of a more suitable mission organization with whom we remain today – Baptist World Missionary Outreach Ministries, based in Chattanooga, Tennessee. We are still close friends with the Cambodian-Chinese believers, of whom many have become quite successful in their new homeland in the United States.

When we moved to San Diego to begin working with Asian refugees, our financial situation became quite low, having lost support due to the transition. I called my former boss, Mr. Sam Schrom, VP of Corporate Affairs of Universal Marketing Inc., an East Coast advertising firm. I had been employed there in their east coast sales division when first arriving back from Thailand on our unplanned Sabbatical. Sam was glad to hear from me again, since he was disappointed when I had resigned to continue my missionary career.

Sam was confident of both my sales figures and administrative skills, and appointed me to the position of *Southern California Regional Manager*. I continued my sales figures while opening new sales territories throughout San Diego County, hiring, training, and managing a sales staff. I was set for life, so to speak, with a very comfortable lifestyle and secure income; and yet, my heart was not in it. I yearned to return to Thailand with a desire to continue my ministry and to finish the uncompleted Isan New Testament. I was fully committed, to that which I had committed my life, for the sake of the millions of unreached Isan populace, still without the Word of God in their own heart language.

At that point, I bade farewell to my good friends at Universal Marketing and joined Baptist World Missionary Outreach Ministries (BWMOM), having been accepted by a unanimous vote by their board of directors, all Baptist pastors, after an hour-long personal interview. Some of these pastors support our ministry to this day.

Part XV (Returning to Thailand to Finish the Job)

Upon returning to Thailand under the auspices of my new mission organization, I had the opportunity to travel with Pastor Pitak back to visit the PhuThai village where I had been invited to teach the Gospel many years before by Mr. Pinky. We met people I knew previously; however, the group I had taught had passed on into eternity. My only hope is that they had understood enough to have placed their trust in Christ before I was so unceremoniously forced home. Pastor Pitak and I distributed many copies of my creation-evangelism booklet, called *Considering Creation*. It employs convincing evidences of intelligent design, pointing to an Intelligent Designer, the Creator God they do not know, finally introducing the Gospel message at the end.

Buddhists love to read it and pass it around between themselves because they all love nature yet are oblivious of its origins – nature’s Creator and their own Maker. Over 100,000 copies have been printed and distributed in a pocket-sized format since 2010 and we’re constantly printing more. When Thai churches realize their effectiveness, they use them instead of tracts. These booklets generate genuine interest because of the Thais’ love of nature. The text gives various examples of *Intelligent Design*, culminating by revealing nature’s *Intelligent Designer*. It first alludes to the *Ancient pre-Buddhistic Writings* (our Bible), followed by God’s character, Creation, Fall, Curse, Redemption’s story, Promised Messiah with an opportunity to trust Christ, which many have done.

Another man who came to faith besides Jarat and Pitak was Prakop – all three are now pastors of their own churches. When I first met Prakop in his home village of *Goot Khao Poon*, he had the reputation of being a smalltime toughie or hoodlum who robbed and stole from local-area villagers. His deeds and macho-man personality earned him a price on his head and fear for his life. I was able to lead a humbled Prakop to Christ upon our first meeting as we sat opening the scriptures there in his village, sitting on the roughly-sawn floor boards of a rickety old shack.

Realizing Prakop would likely be killed if he didn’t leave the area; I made arrangements and then drove him to the OMF Bible School in Payao District of Chiang Rai, Northern Thailand, 1,400 kilometers distance. Prakop was quite a handful at first due to his former lifestyle. He would get angry, and then ask forgiveness. Yet it was evident that God was working in his life. Upon completing his Bible education, Prakop returned to his home village, humbled himself before those he had wronged and asked their forgiveness. That took a measure of courage and trust in the Lord because these villagers had been angered to the point of planning to kill him.

Having received forgiveness and acceptance by those who he had once wronged, Prakop remained in his home village, preaching and evangelizing. As a result, he started what later became a vibrant, growing church where Pastor Pitak, my present Bible translation assistant now serves as pastor. One person that Prakop led to Christ was Pitak's wife, Phuang Phan, AKA Sri. That was a few years before Pitak came to Christ while I was teaching through the book of Ephesians in the city church, which I had interim pastored. Prakop later moved to Pang-Nga province, Southern Thailand, near Phuket Island, where he and his wife Nawarat serve in a new church that Pastor Prakop established there, along with the help of his sweet wife, Nawarat – both graduates of the OMF Payao Bible School where we had taken Prakop, saving him from the death threats of the villagers he had wronged.

Pastor Prakop and wife Nawarat also worked together tirelessly, helping to oversee the cleanup and restoration effort after the huge Sumatra-Andaman Indian Ocean earthquake, which caused the immense 2004 Banda Aceh Tsunami, which killed untold thousands area residents and tourists in 2004. For their efforts, Pastor Prakop and Nawarat received high praise and a commendation award. I have visited them and have spoken in their church. To say that I am pleased with Prakop and his commitment to serve Christ would be an understatement. Prakop's Bible school graduation, return to his home village and resultant church-planting ministry began while we were home on our unplanned Sabbatical.

Upon our return to Thailand, we moved back into our former residence where I picked up the then-dormant Isan translation project where I had left off. I was also invited to share teaching responsibilities at the city church, which had grown strong under Jarat's ministry. At that juncture, Jarat had moved his family to resettle in the district town in Sakon Nakhon province. We soon saw the church grow even more as many in the congregation became involved in genuine grassroots movements among their friends and relatives, which spread out into many areas.

Another young man who came to Christ around that time was SomKit. Two of his older brothers came to Christ as well. Their mother was the head spirit mediator to the territorial owner spirit over Nakhon Phanom's provincial capital, the city where we were living. SomKit became active in the city church's music ministry, playing tambourine, guitar and drums. He also helped me with the Isan translation from time to time, working with me on the Books of John and Corinthians.

SomKit later married an attractive young lady by the name of Nam. I did not know her, yet she knew who I was. She asked, "*Uncle Ron, do you know who I am?*" After pondering a while, I said I didn't. She then revealed that she was the daughter of Burr, who was the daughter of Elder Samer, the oldest son of the couple that had received Christ on the porch of my village home in 1977. That was four consecutive generations of Christians. Standing alongside them was their young son, Yiw, making the fifth generation Christian. I rejoiced to see how the Lord was giving fruit and growth to the village church I had started. SomKit later sensed a call to enter the ministry, whereupon he and his wife Nam entered Bible College. They then became pastor and wife of a small church in a seaside fishing town on the Bay of Siam, southwest of Bangkok where they now serve. I later visited them there for a couple of days.

I have experienced both encouragement and disappointment, and have seen many miracles of the new birth as souls cried out and were rescued from hopeless spiritual darkness into the light of life that the Lord Jesus provides through the Gospel. One time, I was teaching in a Bangkok church, whereupon a grown woman came up with her saved family afterwards, announcing that she was now a believer. I didn't recognize her at first, until she introduced herself. She was the rebellious youngest sister of Elder Samer, whom I hadn't seen in decades. We had a great time rejoicing in the Lord. The seed that was sown years before had finally sprouted and bore fruit unto eternal life for her and her children.

Another miracle was Gui, the eldest son of a highly successful Vietnamese businessman. Gui, who had a rebellious reputation, was in his early twenties when we met. His dad being the proprietor of a large motorcycle dealership, Gui had ridden in motocross events on Suzuki's factory team. He liked spending time with my two sons, David and Danny, and they with him although they were a few years his younger.

A native Isan language speaker, Gui became curious about the translation of Genesis that I was doing; so, I had him read a few verses. To my surprise, he looked up and responded, "*Where did you get this? The words are captivating. I've never seen anything like it before.*" I explained that it was the words of an all-powerful living God who created everything and who reigns over all His creation. And, that this was His Holy Word that I was translating into the Isan language. I then explained the plan of Salvation. We began to spend more time together, even riding around together in his new Toyota diesel pickup.

One day, Gui stopped by, obviously troubled. We sat down at our dining room table, talking over coffee. He then said, "*I want to believe!*" Not yet comprehending the urgency of his demeanor, I started to explain that he could pray and receive Christ at any time. "*I want to pray now! Right here!*" he said emphatically. Gui bowed his head while seated at our table with me sitting beside him. He openly confessed his need and thanked the Lord for providing forgiveness. It was simple, yet clear and profound.

There was a week-long youth camp being held at the Southern Baptist Conference Center near Pattaya, Thailand. We loaded up our family and took a recently-saved Gui there in my old VW Van. The Christian youth camp meeting was something he was unfamiliar with, but he caught on quickly. The main speaker was a personal friend, Tawat Yenjai, a well-known Thai Christian pastor, writer and journalist of Baptist persuasion. Pastor Tawat preached a series of powerful messages around the camp theme: *Are You Ready? Ready to listen? Ready to repent? Ready to receive Christ? Ready to live for Him? Ready for His soon return? Ready for eternity?* By the time we left, Gui was charged up and on fire for Christ.

This was just before my being forced home due to the false accusations I mentioned above. This meant Gui was left alone; an untaught babe in Christ with no other capable missionary in the area who could relate to and guide him. Gui and I are still close, he being in his fifties and me now in my mid-seventies. I've talked with him candidly about his faith, to which he assured me all is well, which I am beginning to doubt. I once visited their Bangkok residence where his unsaved wife even told me he was a Christian and needs me to guide him and take him to church. His lifestyle has now taken on a worldly flavor due to my absence when he needed me.

Gui's dad has passed away, but the family business dynasty has grown exponentially. Presently, there are motorcycle dealerships in every Northeastern Thai province that go by their dealership name, Mit-Sin Motorcycles. The family also owns gas stations and car dealerships. Gui now owns two Suzuki car dealerships. I invited him to my birthday dinner in December 2018, to which he readily accepted, sitting beside me. His faith and growth have been unnecessarily stunted due to my leaving, forced home for no viable reason by faulty decision-making. Spiritual warfare is real. Even though Satan is a conquered foe – having been defeated at the Cross – he is still able to hinder and impede the spread of the Gospel.

There are numerous other Isan believers who came to faith under my ministry. Sargent Sanoh was a young, battle-hardened soldier who had been stationed in the mountainous border region between Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan provinces, fighting Communist insurgents there. Sanoh contracted Cerebral

Malaria while stationed at his remote army outpost in that then-communist-infested region. When I first met Sanoh, he had been recovering in the local provincial hospital. Miss SomSri worked in the hospital's office of statistics, also a member of the city church where I was interim pastor-teacher.

During noontime break, SomSri would walk through the hospital wards, witnessing to patients and handing out tracts. That's when she met Sargent Sanoh, who became interested; interested, not in the tract, but in the one who gave it to him, SomSri. An eligible bachelor at the time, Sanoh wanted to get to know her better. She said okay, but only by their going to church together would she agree to spend time with him. Not wanting to pass up the opportunity to court this attractive and personable young lady, Sanoh agreed. He came to church with her every following Sunday, where we became friends.

I saw much of the unsaved, battle-hardened Sanoh those next few weeks, sitting stone-faced as I taught. That is, until, one Sunday, while I was teaching a class. I asked a review question about the lesson: *"How is a righteous and holy God able to show lost sinners mercy and accept them into his family?"* I waited. Sanoh raised his hand, *"Through the Blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross for us."* **Bingo!** The correct answer, and stated very well. Unbeknown to me, Sanoh had quietly embraced Christ while sitting under my teaching ministry.

I later learned that Sanoh stood boldly for his newfound faith in the local Thai Army barracks. Sanoh and SomSri were later married by an Isan pastor friend and now have a grown family of godly children. Sanoh recently retired as Colonel, having held a position of command for years at a Thai Army base in Southern Thailand. While there, he wrote a new training manual, now used by the Army throughout Thailand. Sanoh is also involved in the Thai Military Officers Christian Association. He's not the tough and hardened fighting machine I once knew, but a wise and tenderhearted Brother in Christ. He now lay-pastors the village church at Ban Pone Boke village where Elder Samer lives, established under my village ministry. Sanoh and I get together for lunch on occasion.

During our twenty-some years living as a family in Thailand, I had the opportunity to befriend and minister to many people across a broad socio-economic spectrum: from peasant farmers to teachers, to civil servants, to politicians, to educators, to prominent businessmen – some being millionaires. These ranged from Thai to Isan, Lao, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Indian and Malaysian. One Isan believer, Pae-Tong became a valuable translation assistant. I noticed that he was often silent and gloomy,

to which I asked why. Pae-Tong told me that he was troubled because of the double standards in the Thai Bible, and not sure whether he was good enough, and saved by God's grace or by works.

Saying he felt like tossing his bible at times, Pae-Tong then showed me some Thai Bible texts that were grossly mistranslated, contrary to the Gospel message of Salvation by grace alone. A real shocker was Philippians 2:12. Instead of reading, "*Work out your own Salvation in fear and trembling in my absence,*" it read, "*continue to behave well in my absence; because in doing so you gain Salvation.*" No wonder Pae-Tong was troubled in spirit. I explained what these verses and others were really saying in the Greek, which transformed his gloominess into gladness. The Isan New Testament is accurate, I can assure you, having been checked and rechecked in a two-year final edit-review before publishing. Pae-Tong is now married and serving the Lord as a Bible monger and evangelist.

Another God-ordained situation occurred while I was in Nakhon Phanom doing translation work with Pastor Pitak. I needed to inquire with Thai Immigration concerning my visa. It was noon and we had taken a short break. I went to the Immigration office located at the border crossing, but everyone was at lunch. Only one official was there, who suggested I wait a few minutes for the others to arrive. I sat in the shaded alcove where he later joined me. Smoking and reading a book, he asked how it was that I spoke Thai so well. I replied that I had come years earlier and was involved in local-area rural development, something I learned to say initially instead of saying I was a missionary, as it often creates a wrong first impression.

As we chatted, the opportunity arose where I could tell him that I was a missionary. Expecting the typical "*Oh, all religions are good, etc.*" Instead, the Immigration official, whose name was *Detch*, exclaimed, "*You are? I want to find out more about Jesus. Can you help me?*" Picking myself up off the floor, I said, "*Yes, I can help you.*" Giving Detch the Creation Evangelism booklet I had with me, we agreed to meet for lunch the following day. I said that Pastor Pitak might join us, to which he readily agreed. The following day, when Detch came into the restaurant and sat, he began to unload his heavy burden over his increasingly sinful lifestyle -- typical of most Thai police officials -- confessing the things he had done, from taking bribes to forcing himself on young girls; getting them pregnant to... etc.

At that point I interjected; "*Would you like to pray for forgiveness right now by accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior?*" "*But what do I say?*" he asked. "*Just confess to God what you just told me,*" I explained. He did so out loud right there and became a new babe in Christ that day. Detch has continued strong in the faith and joined a Christian Police Fellowship. We keep in touch through

texting over the Internet. I recently asked how he was doing during this COVID-19 pandemic. “*Praising Jesus,*” was his immediate response. I praise God for the opportunity of leading Detch to Christ.

While conducting research for my Asian Studies Master's thesis at SDSU I had the unique opportunity of getting an interview with former Prime Minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh at his Nakhon Phanom residence. He had recently resigned as Prime Minister during the economic collapse and devaluation of the Thai Baht in 1997. The Baht had collapsed, being fixed to the US Dollar at an artificially high value. It dropped in value almost overnight from 28 to 54 Baht to the US dollar.

Although the collapse wasn't his fault, Chavalit was wise to step down. His English was excellent, so we swapped between Thai and English as we talked. He had a platter of hors d'oeuvres made, that we snacked on. Although top officials were waiting outside, he didn't care, outranking them. I had asked for ten minutes but we went way longer, discussing Thailand's political situation and the Isan region's economy. Thanking him before leaving, I took the opportunity to witness -- figuring he had probably heard the Gospel before and that I was likely watering seeds that had already been sown. I later met his attorney, sharing a table in a crowded restaurant. He gave me his card just in case I might need his services.

On another occasion, a close friend and professor at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary, Pastor Chatchai (AKA Eck), asked me to speak to his students. Most were hanging onto the erroneous doctrines they had grown up under – saved by Grace but kept by good behavior. This, as opposed to being saved by Grace alone, plus nothing and kept by the power of God, apart from works (1 Peter 1:5). This false doctrine has plagued Thai churches in pandemic proportions; something I apply foundational corrective teaching to at every opportunity.

I was also honored to speak in churches in Malaysia's triple cities' metroplex on four separate occasions; Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, and Klang. I found many strong Christians there, most being Chinese and Indian in ethnicity. Many were interested in serving the Lord among unreached people groups, to which I was able to provide information on how they could get involved.

Part XVI (The Isan New Testament – Printed Version)

On December 14, 2012, after two decades of hard work – interspersed with trials, interruptions and needless delays – the first draft of the Isan New Testament was completed with Pastor Pitak's faithful assistance. Following completion, we began a two-year-long edit review to triple-check for

grammatical, contextual, and historical accuracy against the Majority Greek text. We also checked for fluency, readability and comprehension in the Isan language. This was finished in December of 2014. After that, the completed first-draft text was read page-by-page by four Isan proofreaders. While that was being done, I took a necessary medical leave to attend to health issues I had put off, including a hip replacement that was badly denigrated due to osteoarthritis. Upon my return, Pitak and I reviewed the proofread copies and made any necessary adjustments.

Then came the tedious job of arranging and formatting the 540-page completed Isan New Testament document into A5 metric paper size using Microsoft Word, which included individual headings for each book, then converted it into PDF format. We printed 10,000 first-edition copies, done in late May 2016, by a Christian-owned printshop in Bangkok – who also prints Asian Gideon Bibles. The printer did a superb job, using high-quality imported materials. We printed ten-thousand first edition copies of the long-awaited Isan New Testament at a very reasonable cost, funded by Bearing Precious Seed Global. It was a surreal experience when I finally held and read from one of the very first copies, hot off the press, the fruit of over two decades of work.

Following printing, we organized a catered *Dedication and Presentation Celebratory Event*, held on June 2, 2016 in the large, airconditioned Rhombus Industries conference room with the owner's permission. It was attended by between 40-50 Isan pastors and Christians, as well as missionaries, donors and friends. The first 1,600 newly-printed copies were trucked overnight nearly 800 kilometers to the event by an Isan Christian's trucking firm, arriving the day before the event. It was a memorable occasion, especially after having spent many years of toil to see the task through to completion. Each attendee took packaged Isan New Testaments home, as needed, for local distribution. A Thai pastor friend, Tirakorn Kiatbanlue, volunteered to oversee the distribution of the remaining 8,600 copies throughout Thailand's Isan region and other locations where Isan people had settled – essentially in Bangkok where a sizable percentage of Isanians work.

In 2002, Wycliffe Bible Translators' Southeast Asian representative (SIL Asia) contacted me. She oversees translations into the Mon-Khmer related Katuic languages of Southeast Asia. She asked permission to use portions of the Isan translation as a source text for their translation teams, which I gave. In November 2014, another Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators representative contacted me, asking permission to check the Isan translation for accuracy and content, using their back-translation analysis methods. I submitted the sections that they wanted to back-check: chapters one of Mark and Romans,

thinking it would be nice to get their input. They reported back, concluding that it met their criterion for an *acceptable* Bible translation. Unfortunately, Wycliffe has downgraded their translation policy and now advocates using the Good News Bible for translation, a very simplified, paraphrased version. Thus, I conclude the term “acceptable” was used in their response. The Isan NT is more than acceptable; a study-caliber Bible, like the NASB or KJV/NKJV versions; reflecting the Majority or Byzantine/TR Greek text.

Since then, we have received numerous positive reports from missionaries, Isan Pastors and Isan Christians alike, including repeated orders for more Isan New Testaments. One lady missionary wrote: *"A while back, my ministry partner and I met two Isan women while we were sharing the Gospel and praying for the sick. We prayed for them and gave them a Bible in their own language – an Isan New Testament. Soon afterward, they chose to follow Christ!"*

Part XVII (The Isan New Testament – Spoken Lao Version)

It was an option from the onset to convert the Isan New Testament – which is written in Thai script – into the Laotian script for use in nearby Laos. The Isan language or Northeastern Thai is closely related to Lao. The Isan region, once under Lao Suzerainty, was annexed during a border skirmish by the Siam Kingdom of Ayutthaya (*circa 1350-1767*) – Siam being the former name of Thailand. The major differences between Isan and Lao are that Isan has gravitated towards Thai over the years; taking on some Thai-isms. Meanwhile, the Thai – whose language is one step higher up the socio-cultural language hierarchy scale – would like to assimilate Isan residents into the Thai culture (known as *Thaification*) wanting the Isan people to drop their distinctiveness in lifestyle, socio-cultural identity, and their Isan language, often referred to as Lao, the sister language from which it came.

The Isan region also has Northern Khmer language speakers – a dialect of Cambodian – living along its southern border region, adjacent to Cambodia. There are also ethnic minorities there that speak Khmer-related languages as well; Kui, Bru, and Soh. These Khmer-related languages, unlike Thai, are non-tonal, and members of the Katuic family of non-tonal languages of Southeast Asia. Southern Isan residents are very conversant in the Isan language and to some degree in Central Thai. Before the Thai government introduced the Thai alphabet and language in regional schools, the people of Isan read and wrote in the similar-looking Lao script, reflecting the country of their roots.

Concerning the script and writing system I used in producing the Isan New Testament – considered an unwritten language. If I had used the Lao script and writing system, I could have expected a swift socio-political backlash by the Thai government. Conversely, if I were to introduce the Isan New Testament into Laos using the Thai script and writing system, there would be a similar socio-political backlash by the Laotian government. This made the choice obvious; use the Thai script and writing system in Thailand and the Lao script and writing system in Laos – Laotian being the lingua franca there.

Part XVIII (The Isan New Testament – Audio Version)

Pastor Pitak and I have already recorded Genesis Isan, chapters 1-12, in audio format, of which I had 4,000 CDs professionally produced at a Bangkok advertising company, now with only a handful left. The next goal was to record the Isan New Testament in audio format.

The audio narration project of the Isan New Testament was initiated in October 2016; the same year we finished the printing, dedication, and presentation celebration event. Copies of Isan New Testament books are continually being requested and sent to locations around the Isan Region of Thailand and beyond by Pastor Tirakorn from his church location in Bangkok. I had also received many requests to produce an audio version, to which I agree, knowing that the potential scope of outreach is enormous.

After praying for direction, God brought Pastor Pitak and his sweet wife Sri to mind. I invited them to lunch and there explained how I wanted to record the Considering Creation evangelism booklet and the completed Isan New Testament. I had approached two local radio personalities, both of whom said they would be glad to help, even if it was about Jesus. However, being Buddhist, as soon as they it, they became convicted and went silent. I asked Pastor Pitak and Sri if they knew anyone with a professional sounding voice that could do the job. They thought for a moment and said; “Baaw Ter.” They explained how he was a new Christian and on fire for the Lord, figuring that he might want to help.

Enter center stage, Baaw Ter, radio talk show host and my Isan Christian coworker. Pitak set up a meeting where I proposed the opportunity; of which Baaw Ter was thrilled and readily agreed. He has a local radio call-in program which he also sends live video over Facebook, which is heard and seen by Thai and Lao around the world. As a believer, he often discreetly includes the Gospel, since his audience is mostly Buddhist. I learned that Baaw Ter once had his own small radio station in a building alongside his home. However, lightning had destroying all his studio equipment, whereupon he sold his remaining salvageable equipment, including his broadcasting license and steel antenna tower.

Nixing the radio idea, we rebuilt the studio, installed new equipment, made sure it was lightning proof, and are now recording there. Funding was graciously provided by God's people. The Creation-evangelism booklet, *Considering Creation*, was recorded first. Now, amidst delaying hindrances and setbacks, Baaw Ter has completed the audio narration of the Isan New Testament. Both of these recordings are invaluable tools and will prove their worth in reaching the Isan masses for Christ; especially those who cannot read well. The Isan people love to listen to Gospel-related messages in their own heart language.

The Considering Creation audio is now in use. When the Isan New Testament audio is ready, it will be published on my *Isan Bible* website; on Baaw Ter's *Good News* YouTube channel; broadcast on his live call-in program on Facebook; formatted for various Bible programs; circulated on Gospel recordings devices; and distributed on thumb drives for general use, including broadcast at village socio-cultural events.

Part XIX (An Explanation of a Missionary's Job)

What Is the Task of a Missionary?

The primary task of every Bible-believing cross-cultural missionary is to master the language and learn the culture of those he or she has come to reach. Then, communicate the changeless truths of the Gospel message in its entirety, clearly and accurately in their heart language – beginning with the foundational account of origins from Creation to Redemption (1 Cor 15:1-8).

What Isn't the Task of a Missionary?

Saving people is never the task of the missionary, nor can it ever be! That's God's department because He alone can save and forgive anyone of their sin, and engift them with eternal life. This occurs immediately when that one responds to the Gospel message by exercising "*repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 20:21)!

Part XX (An Explanation of the Gospel)

What the Gospel Message Is About:

The Gospel addresses the helplessly and hopelessly lost humankind with a positive message of help, hope, and forgiveness through the gracious provision of a loving and merciful God who offers salvation from sin, judgment, and death by simply placing one's trust in the Name, Person, and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the forgiveness of sin and restoration to a right standing before God the Father is received through simple, heartfelt trust in Christ's

work on our behalf, apart from human striving or effort! I like to use the term, "*embracing these truths as one's own.*"

The Gospel addresses the helplessly and hopelessly lost human condition. It is God's "Good News" message for everyone, especially effective for those who receive it (1 Timothy 4:10). It describes God's gracious gift of loving-kindness and forgiveness on our behalf. Upon one's acceptance by faith, God transforms that person from being a hopelessly-lost sinner into one of God's redeemed Saints (Holy Ones). In doing so, God freely gives eternal life and a future with Him in Heaven forever.

God alone can save people!

Dr. Lance B. Latham (AKA "Doc Latham"), Founding Director of the AWANA Youth Program and a charter member of the New Tribes Mission Executive Board, stated in his treatise, *Discovering the Gospel*; "*The Gospel is the Good News. It's not a new set of religious obligations or duties to be performed – new strivings or agonizings – but rather an announcement of what has been freely and graciously done for us. Therefore, we do not merely declare the 'claims' of the gospel. We declare a wonderful free offer by God Himself to the lost sinner who believes.*"

What the Gospel Message Isn't About: (In Layman's Terms)

Embracing one's own home-grown piety, based on self-imposed dos and don'ts, is a works-oriented attempt to save oneself. It must not be misconstrued with embracing the Gospel and is doomed to failure every time. No matter what you may call it, it's "bootstrap religion." Meaning, trying to levitate oneself off the ground by pulling up one's own bootstraps. Simply put, it's a manmade substitute for the real thing. In other words, relying on or trusting in religious practices, i.e., the performance of moral acts or religious prerequisites, can never save the adherent. That is because it is in direct opposition to the authentic Biblical message in which a sinner is saved through the Forgiveness and Loving-kindness by a gracious God, personified in the Name, Person, and Work of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ!

The Gospel must never be misconstrued with manmade religion. Godless religion is mankind reaching to attain to a self-imposed standard of attainment. Conversely, the heart of the Gospel message is God reaching down through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to provide Salvation as a gift to an utterly and hopelessly lost humankind. The Lord Jesus died on the Cross

in our place, paying the full price for our sins – the just One for unjust sinners. He then rose again bodily from the tomb on the third day, declaring victory over sin, death and Satan; thereby justifying every lost sinner who believes... transforming that one from an unrighteous sinner, to becoming a holy person or Saint, fully acceptable in God's sight (cf. Ephesians 1:1-14).

Therefore, Salvation is *not* lost humankind seeking to justify him or herself or by trying to erect a path up to God through their own self-effort, neither is it gained by a mixture of God's grace reinforced by human works, which God sees as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). This is unacceptable in the sight of a Righteous and Holy Creator-God, no matter how virtuous or satisfying it may seem to the one who seeks to practice whatever it is he or she is trusting in! God, by His mercy and loving-kindness, has already provided Salvation through Christ, full and free. All we can do to gain this wonderful gift is to recognize our need, open our hearts, and embrace God's gift with humility and thankfulness.

In summary, relying on religious practices, personal effort or self-worth to save oneself is analogous to repainting an old car over the underlying bad paint, dirt, and rust without first cleaning it up. Like a cheap paint job, mere religion cannot cleanse or save you from your sins; because, like the dirt and rust, sins remain underneath, undealt with! Whereas, when you receive the Gospel, God forgives and cleanses you from all your sins, past, present, and future and gives you eternal life... not unlike God engifting you with a brand-new shiny car.

Part XXI (Further Ministry Achievements)

Having experienced God's calling and using me in His service, the following are areas in which I am proficient – both in language learning and gaining socio-cultural insight. Through research, I discovered valuable redemptive analogies. With these resources, I was able to win many to Christ and establish two thriving village churches where there were none. I also rescued a dying city church, bringing it back to the point of solid growth. Also, through vigilance and foundational teaching, I kept out unwanted groups that cause division and teach a false Gospel.

Languages I have learned:

- I have both studied and become proficient in four Southeast Asian *Tai-Kadai* tonal languages to the point of fluency or near-fluency. I also read and write in Thai, using its 87-symbol writing

- system – 44 consonants, 28 vowels, 5 tone markers, and 10 numeric symbols – separated into three consonant classes and written, stacked up to three and four levels high.
- This is the only written language in Thailand that has language schools and published study resources. Similar to Thai and Thai script, Laos also has Laotian language schools and published study resources. I learned the following tonal languages in order of acquisition:
 - **Thai** (5 tones) – Central or Bangkok Thai is the *lingua franca* of Thailand, heavily influenced by Pali-Sanskrit (Pre-Indonesian), Hindi (Indian), and Khmer (Pre-Cambodian) in that order.
 - **Nyaw** (7 tones) – Language of the Nyaw ethnic people group of Northeast Thailand and Laos
 - **Isan or Lao** (6 tones) – The trade language of the people of Northeast Thailand. Isan is closely related to Laotian; the Isan region having been annexed from Laos over two centuries ago.
 - **PhuThai** (7 tones?) – A related language, the PhuThai trace their lineage from Hue, Vietnam; one of the largest groups having settled in Reno Nakhon district, Nakhon Phanom province.

Part XXII (Culture and Redemptive Analogies)

Any serious missionary must apply him or herself to learn as much as possible to be able to present the Gospel message as effectively as possible. In doing so, I have applied myself to the task by doing the following. I analyzed their culture and religious views and practices. For instance, gaining understanding of Buddhism's eightfold path and four life-principles. I also learned how Buddhism views Christianity and the Gospel and visa-versa. I also learned Buddhism's sayings vs. what Jesus and God's Word says. This information can be found on my website <isanbible.org> under the menu heading: [Buddhism](#)

To further assist in presenting the Gospel, I researched languages, cultures and asked the elderly, seeking out *Redemptive Analogies*. These are written about by Don Richardson in his book; *Eternity in Their Hearts*. And, *Peace Child*, the precursor to *Eternity in Their Hearts*. We are all eternal beings because God has placed eternity in each person's heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11), along with a God-shaped void that can only be filled by God Himself. These *redemptive analogies* are found in most ethnic languages, cultures, legends, and oral history, passed down through the generations – keys or springboards to help people understand when presenting the Gospel.

- **Pra Caw Mettrai:** The next coming Buddha (Enlightened One) who will show mercy. He was due to come 5,000 years after the first Buddha. However, if a woman enters the priesthood, the 5,000-year prediction will be shortened to only 500 years. The Lord

Buddha's advent was around 500 years before the advent of Christ. The Buddhist calendar reflects that, being dated 543 years before the Gregorian calendar.

- **WaYo:** The Creator who blew – *exhaled an incantation* – and the earth was formed. He *blew* again and our original parents came into being. In the end, when wickedness has reached extreme proportions, WaYo will blow again, causing the earth and everything in it to be destroyed by fire. WaYo also has another name, *PraTham*, which can be translated directly as *Divine Writings*. In fact, *PraTham* is the term I use in John 1:1 in the Isan New Testament for *The Word*.
- **Pra-Yah:** We know the shortened form of Jehovah or Yaweh is Yah. The same sounding term is found in the Thai language. The river that dissects Bangkok is called Caw-Pra-Yah, "*Pra*" being a deifying prefix for Yah, and Caw meaning owner. There is a legendary figure in Isan and Lao folklore who does superhuman feats. His name is Pra-Nya or Pra-Yah.
- **Plaa Timok:** The fish that held up the floating island, saving the people that were on it from drowning while everything around was flooded and everyone else perished.
- **A Thai Story:** A young man working in the family rice fields got hungry and asked his mother to bring him some food. Dissatisfied with what she brought; he angrily killed his mother. Arrested and sentenced to death, his older brother took pity on his younger sibling. So, he dressed in his brother's clothes, telling the police he was the guilty one and willingly died in his brother's stead.

Part XXIII (Future Plans)

Thailand, being a Democratic Monarchy and a state-ordained Buddhist nation – 94% of the populace holding to Theravada Buddhism – is highly resistant to Christianity, with less than 1% being evangelical. There is much more work that needs to be done, of which I plan on having an integral role. There is more than can be accomplished by foreign organizations and missionary effort. Unfortunately, the Thai are willing to sit back and let the foreigners take over and do the work as they watch.

They rationalize, why make the effort if someone else will do it, which is also typical in secular fields, not just Christian endeavor. The Thai have adopted beneficial things that missionaries have introduced, like medicine, hospitals, typewriters, dictionaries, and motorized transportation, but eschewed the Gospel message. Adoniram Judson and wife Ann entered Thailand in the early 1800s.

Ann taught English to the King, compiled a Thai dictionary, and by 1819 had translated the book of Matthew. The Judsons were accepted, but their Christianity was left on the plate.

Fortunately, that mentality is changing as Thai Christians have gotten the vision over the last few years to take ownership of the future of their churches. I also plan on being a part of that, as I have done throughout the time I have ministered there. First, not assume the role of a *Kingpin*-type leader, but always take a back seat. Second, to thrust new believers forward, not making them think they must attain to some standard of expertise before they can serve – not giving them an inferiority complex. Jesus didn't try to get the cured demoniac educated first, but sent him back to his people, instructing him to tell them what good things Jesus had done for him – the Good News then spread throughout the cities in the area. Mark 5:18-20

I believe that a groundswell of grassroots movements is the answer to church growth. Wives reaching husbands and families, children reaching parents, families reaching families, friends reaching friends, neighbors reaching neighbors, employees reaching employers, and vice versa. I've seen it happen and know that it works exponentially. It's the: each one reach one, each two reach two, each four reach four more, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four principle; called spiritual multiplication. Christ used that general principle, concentrating on mentoring a few and sending them forth to reach the many, until they had reached the whole known world at that time. Personal sacrifice is an essential part of the equation.

What key ingredient can make this happen? ...not by relying on things that collapse as soon as the source dries up; like big money, huge programs, or foreign methodologies. But by grounding believers in the foundational truths of their faith, or they will flounder. Expounding on things like the immensity of God's Love. The knowledge of who He is and what He has done for us. What He has given each of us the moment we believed – our eternal spiritual heritage. One of the most important things new and old believers alike need is to understand is the three-fold aspect of their Salvation – Justification (past), Sanctification (present), and Glorification (future). These things, along with giving encouragement and not criticism or legalism. Dale Carnegie promoted that principle in his bestseller: "How to Win Friends and Influence People." Criticizing or demanding others doesn't yield anything positive, but praise gives them something encouraging to live up to.

This is the methodology I plan on continuing to practice, providing that God gives me the strength and good health to do so. Through the multifaceted ministry God has given me, I have seen many come to Christ, disciples and mentored in the faith. Within that number, six or more men and their wives have become pastors and wives of their own churches in various locations around Thailand as well as serving fulltime in other capacities.

Another part I have played and hope to continue is to provide teaching and evangelism materials. Christ's great Go-Ye Commission states "...*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20). This would certainly include teaching the areas I mentioned above – providing foundational teaching and individual grounding of everyday believers in the basics of their faith; i.e., who God is; the immensity of His great Love; the knowledge of what He has done for us; and understanding the unfading eternal spiritual heritage He has given each of us the moment we believed. These would also include how to live, interact, raise our children while walking in the light of God's truth in a God-honoring way in godless societies.

Paul's prayers for believers reveal his insight about our spiritual needs: to grow in grace and mature in knowledge; to be able to become evangelists, pastors, and teachers, or serve Christ in other capacities, both men and women. His prayers are seen in Ephesians 1:14, 17-20; 3:16-20; as well as Philippians 1:9-11; and Colossians 1:9-12. Examples are: That God's Holy Spirit within us is the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance. That our understanding may be enlightened to know the hope of God's call on our lives, and the glorious richness of our inheritance in Christ. That having been rooted in Christ, we may understand that God's love is dimensionless and way beyond human comprehension. And, that we may know and walk in God's will, that He might be glorified.

Part XXIV (An Autobiography)

Considering the various things I have either observed or experienced over a five-decade period of serving Christ, mostly in the faraway land of the Thai people, many friends have strongly suggested I put it in a book, which I plan to do. I have already penned many of these accounts, posted under "True Stories" on my website menu bar <<http://www.IsanBible.org>>. I have tentatively decided on a

title and subtitle. The content will include numerous true-life experiences that I have had, or others have had that I have either observed or been apprised of.

FROM CORNFIELDS TO RICE PADDIES;
The Story of a Farm Boy Who Became A Missionary

The cover layout will likely be split, with photos or sketches of American cornfields being harvested using modern machinery on one side and Isan rice paddies being harvested by hand on the other. The content will include many true accounts of Thai-Isan people I knew; both encouraging to disheartening, intriguing and challenging; as well as dangers that God saved us from while serving Him on the mission field. As mentioned, some of these can be found on my website under *True Stories*.

Part XXV (Conclusion)

In conclusion, both Cheryl and I have seen the Lord use our lives over the years, provide for our family's every need and protect us from danger. Has it been worth it? Absolutely; despite some tough times. However, neither Cheryl nor I are finished yet since there's much more to be done. For me, that's Thailand related in the form of evangelism, foundational teaching seminars, producing materials, translation of Old Testament portions, etc. At age 78 at this writing, people ask me when I plan to retire. I tell them the word *retire* isn't in my personal dictionary and that I just *retread* from time to time as needed, adding that I'll retire when the Lord comes to meet us in the air or at my homegoing, whichever comes first.

Once, upon seeing a missionary involved in Bible translation for a remote South American Indian tribe, I muttered disgustedly under my breath; "*Who would ever want to waste their life doing a foolish thing like that?*" Only two people heard me, God, and myself—now a point of humor between us.

Now, having experienced the transforming power of Philippians 2:13 and the faithfulness of God in my life, I can boldly proclaim; "*The greatest privilege, the greatest joy, the most satisfying, most important task in all the world is to give one's life to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, taking God's eternal, life-giving Word to those still hopelessly lost in the depths of abject spiritual darkness at the uttermost, unreached, ends of the earth, until Christ's return!*"

I recently heard someone say concerning career choices, "*Love what you do and you'll be doing what you love.*" I love what I do, and I love the Lord for saving me and allowing me to serve Him.

Ron Myers