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"A LIVING SPIRITUAL HERITAGE"

(Establishing Fishers of Men to Advance God's Work in Thailand)

By Ron Myers

Greetings In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

HEALTH UPDATE: As I mentioned in our May 2015 newsletter, it was recently discovered that I had developed an advanced case of osteoarthritis in my left hip joint, and in need of a total hip replacement as soon as possible. As of Friday, May 1, I'm now the owner of the latest-technology ceramic and titanium hip joint. Dr. Roger Freeman, a respected orthopedic surgeon here in San Diego performed the surgery at Sharp Memorial Hospital here in town. I was able to return home after a four-day hospital stay. Healing is progressing well, and I can walk better each day. My home health-care physical therapist provided by Sharp turned out to be a committed Christian lady, which made things nice.

I recently saw Dr. Freeman for my six-week post-op checkup, which went well. Asking him when I could return to Thailand, he answered: "After your next six-week post-op checkup." Scheduled for the end of July, this would put me back in Thailand in August, if my recovery continues well. I can then proceed with the final review of the Isan New Testament. Please pray to that end. I still rely on a cane temporarily for stability. Recently, I had a possible *diverticulitis* attack, but feel better now and am on medication. Two blood tests I had earlier this week came back normal. This morning, I had an ultrasound exam. Pray that all's OK!

ESTABLISHING FISHERS OF MEN TO ADVANCE GOD'S WORK: Over the last while, I have thought much about what I should share with you concerning our ministry in Thailand. This month I would like to introduce you to some of the Lord's *Fishers of Men* whom He provided over the years as fruit for my labors. The question has likely arisen, "Who carries on the ministry in your absence?" or "Whom do you work with as team members?" Most of these men came to Christ and grew in grace under my ministry. (Listed below, not in chronological order—my best photos were in a stolen container. These are left.)

First, I would like to introduce my long-time close friend and Bible translation assistant, Pastor Pitak Upatum. Pitak recently wrote saying he would like to meet me in Bangkok upon my return to Thailand. Pitak and wife Puang-Pahn will be there in September to receive their diplomas in Bible, earned at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary. Cheryl and I have been honored to support both Pitak and Puang-Pahn towards their degrees there. This deserving couple studied hard and received good grades over the years.



Pitak & Puang-Pan

Puang-Pahn, came to Christ in the mid-1980s through the witness of Prakop Tinno, one of my converts who later became a pastor. Puang-Pahn's husband, Pitak came to Christ in 1992 while I was teaching Ephesians. This was while I was pastoring a struggling C&MA church in Nakhon Phanom city upon returning for our third term in Thailand to continue the Isan translation. The church is now strong again (*more later*). Pitak now pastors a growing church in their hometown a few miles south of Nakhon Phanom city.

Concerning Prakop, he was a hoodlum and thief in fear for his life when we first met in 1982. He said those in his village and surrounding area whom he had continually wronged, had put a price on his head. I explained there was something even greater he needed to settle first... his lost condition before a righteous and holy Creator by receiving forgiveness of sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. Prakop listened, and then followed me in the *sinner's prayer*. He became a new-born Christian that day as we sat together on the wooden floor of a rickety old village shack. Prakop was a handful at first, due to his former lifestyle, but it was quite evident that God had hold of his heart. Be that as it may, he now needed protection from the vigilante death sentence that hung over him.



Prakop Tinno

To keep Prakop safe, I enrolled him in a good Bible school I knew of in faraway Chiang Rai province in Northern Thailand. Three years later, upon completing his Bible training, Prakop returned to his home village, sought out those whom he had wronged, and asked their forgiveness, which they freely gave, noting his changed life. Prakop stayed around, evangelized throughout his village, and saw a fledgling church established for his labors. Today, the church is flourishing under Pastor Pitak. Prakop later married a fellow Bible school alumnus and together they established another new church in a spiritually-needy province in Southern Thailand, where he now pastors.

Then there's Sanoh, a very notable man who trusted Christ around the same time as Prakop, yet under much different circumstances. Sanoh was known as "Sargent Sanoh" at the time; he recently retired with the rank of Colonel. When I first met him, Sanoh was a combat-hardened Thai Army Sargent who led a team of men stationed at a lonely outpost in a dangerous Communist-held area in the mountainous regions of Na Kae district, Nakhon Panom province. His Salvation testimony is quite unique. When I first heard of him, Sanoh was lying in the ICU of Nakhon Panom's provincial hospital, fighting a severe case of cerebral malaria, having contracted it while at his outpost, a fortified bunker surrounded by Communist-held mountain villages. This was during the Vietnam War era and insurgency was a real problem in Northeast Thailand. (On a side note, Sanoh later wrote a recruit training manual that is used throughout the Thai Army today.)



Sargent Sanoh

One of our faithful city church members was a young lady named Som-Sri. Som-Sri worked in the hospital's administration offices. Each day at noon she would visit patients to witness and pass out Gospel tracts. When she visited Sanoh's room, he immediately showed interest—not in the Gospel message, but in the attractive young lady who was witnessing to him. He asked Som-Sri out, whereupon she said he could spend time with her in church each Sunday. That's where I first met Sanoh. He was always polite and professional, but had a tough-as-nails look to his battle-seasoned countenance.



Colonel Sanoh, ret.

Sanoh was there every Sunday, sitting beside Som-Sri, listening intently as I taught God's word. One day, during Sunday School hour, I asked the class a question concerning by what means God redeems and forgives us. Sanoh immediately answered: "By *The Blood of Christ*." (Eph 1:7, Cor 1:14) He had received Christ over the last few weeks, evidenced by his changed life. Sanoh and Som-Sri were later married in a Christian-styled Isan ceremony and have raised a God-honoring Family. His years as a soldier found him being an unwavering witness. Sanoh has recently desired to serve the Lord in a greater way, and is now serving as an itinerate lay-pastor to the remote church in the village of Pone Boke, established near the village where we lived while active in village ministry.

Backing up a few years; upon moving from our remote village ministry to Nakhon Phanom city to begin the Isan Bible translation project, my first two translation assistants were Jarat Sirimontri and Uncle Preecha. During that time, I also assumed teaching responsibilities at the struggling, pastorless C&MA city church until it was able to get back on its feet. When I first met Jarat, God had placed him on my heart, but he was avoiding me, thinking I was similar to a works-based group he had been under, he later told me. Jarat, having grown in grace and having teaching gifts, assumed the pastorship during our first furlough. It was such a blessing when Jarat began to understand salvation by God's grace alone, plus nothing. We later switched off teaching responsibilities Sunday mornings. Cheryl's and my eyes would well up just to hear him expound on salvation by grace, following what I had taught him the previous week. Saturdays, we would evangelize in the *Puu-Thai* ethnic district, 50-60 kilos south of town. Many there came to Christ and were baptized during those days.



Jarat preaching



Uncle Preecha & Ron

After Cheryl and I returned from furlough, Jarat felt called to minister among the *So* ethnic people. He moved his family to the Kusuman district of Sakon Nakhon province, 52 kilos west of Nakhon Panom, where he began a new church-planting ministry and leadership training among the *So*. Jarat and family still reside and minister there today.

Concerning Uncle Preecha, he was a faithful man who grew in his understanding of salvation by grace alone. We first met during our village ministry. After helping with the translation he returned to his home town in Mukdahan province, 130 kilos south of Nakhon Panom. There, he sold vegetables and dry goods in the local market to support his family. He also did evangelism, and started a new church that met in his home. I visited them a few times, and was privileged to teach in his home church.

Another faithful man is Pastor Somkit Ton-Ngern and his attractive wife Nahm. Som-Kit claims me as his spiritual father. Nahm is a fourth generation believer who grew up in the Pone Boke village church; she informed me of this when she asked if I knew who she was. Their son Yew is fifth generation. Unbelievable! Somkit helped me with the translation of John's Gospel (1997), and later with Colossians (2005). The more Somkit ingested God's Word through the translation process—and through our conversations—the more he desired to serve the Lord full time. He chose the Central Bible School in the province of Khon Kaen, under C&MA jurisdiction. He and Nahm now pastor a fledgling but growing church in a small fishing province southwest of Bangkok, situated right on the coast. I have visited them there. They now have a new son, Samuel. This young family is a real blessing to my heart and to the Lord's work.



Somkit & Nahm

Lastly, one of the people with whom I invested considerable time and prayer is a young man by the name of Paetong. He looked 18 when we first met, but was actually 28. At the time, Paetong was a student at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary, and volunteered to help me with the translation in his spare time. I developed a deep appreciation for Paetong over the period of time he assisted me. He was both brilliant, and extremely gifted, and we got along famously. Very possibly he was one of the best translation assistants I ever had. And yet, there was one thing I could never understand; Paetong certainly understood grace, but always seemed to have a dejected countenance that he couldn't quite shake.



Paetong & Ron translating Corinthians

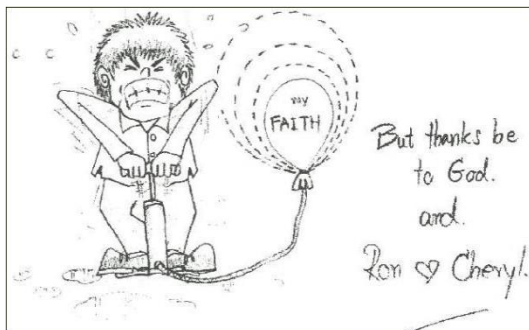
I remember when we translated Hebrews. This was while staying in his remote home village in the high mountains of Non Bua Lam Pu province, near the western border of the Isan region. The date was circa 2010. Their home was quite nice; well-kept and clean. Paetong's dad, also a believer, loved to converse on various subjects. Paetong had me stay in his bedroom, while he slept on the porch—we're talking thin mats. At times, I would arise at night to go outside to use their restroom, a separate little structure situated a few meters away from their house. I was always amazed and humbled when opening the bedroom door to see Paetong still awake, reading his Thai Bible by lamplight in the wee hours.

While we were working on Corinthians, besides discussing word choices in the text, I would also address various aspects of faith. Finally, Paetong turned to me and said, "Read *Philippians 2:12* in the Thai translation and see what it says." I did, and was amazed, because it said, "Try to behave properly, because in doing so, you know you'll gain salvation." Wow, I knew many of the problems in the Thai Bible text, but this was gross negligence... actually implying that the believer is saved by good behavior? This was in the popular 1971 edition, which was upgraded in 2011. Some problematic texts were improved, yet others were left. It baffles missionaries and confuses Thai believers. These versions belong to the Thai Bible Society, which has had very dubious objectives for quite a while. Paetong then quizzed me, "So which is it, salvation by Grace or salvation by works? It's really confusing, because when I read my Thai Bible, it is very unclear." Finally, the truth came out. This was the reason for Paetong's gloominess, always wondering, never sure due to the ambiguous Thai Bible text! I was then able to show him what each questionable portion actually said in the original text. He immediately became relaxed and at peace, saying laughingly that he felt like tossing out his Thai Bible at times.



Paetong re-typing Corinthians

I want to share a very thoughtful and encouraging letter that Paetong sent to Cheryl and me while we were on furlough. It was in the form of a cartoon, but the message was loud and clear. It depicts how his faith "ballooned" because of our input into his life when he began to better understand grace, trumping his personal struggles caused by the badly translated Thai Bible text.



Desiring to serve God, Patong became an evangelist in the Isan region. We didn't see each other much, but kept in contact. He later shared how he had joined up with an outreach group based in Korea. They helped him by supplying a means whereby he could support himself. Everything seemed fine, at first. Later, while both Patong and I were in Bangkok, he invited me to attend one of their meetings. I was inquisitive, of course, so I went. Everything seemed alright on the surface. They seemed to accept me with open arms, which I now think was a distracting ruse. Later, Paetong stopped communicating altogether; no emails or phone calls. How untypical, I thought. It was then that I called Paetong's older brother, a lay-pastor in Udom province. The brother shared how Paetong had unwittingly been sucked into a cult, along with their own father.

Paetong's brother was beside himself with sadness, as was I. There was just enough truth in the group so as to not throw up any red flags, and their doctrine seemed correct on the surface. Yet, these people slowly put the screws on, disallowing any further contact with old friends and acquaintances. Like most Korean groups they had a revered leader whom they idolized. All teachings came through him, not entirely unlike Sun Myung Moon's cultish group, but much milder. I have prayed for Paetong constantly. My only consolation is, I know Paetong is a true believer who got sucked in, like many do.

The latest news on Paetong is that the last time I tried to call; I was able to leave a message. To my surprise, he later called me back. We had a great chat. He said he thought about me often, and invited me to call back any time. I believe that he has begun to see through the group he was in, with God's help. Please pray earnestly for Paetong, that both he and his father will make a clean break. Also, pray for all these men and their wives, all sold out and active Fishers of Men Advancing God's Work. There are others, but these six families (and Paetong) will give you a picture as to how God has blessed, and continues to bless our ministry in a spiritually parched and thirsty land. The Glory all belongs to the Lord. In Closing, your prayers and partnership are not forgotten.

By God's Enabling Grace and for His Eternal Glory,
Ron (and Cheryl) Myers
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