

*"Behold, there went out a sower to sow ... these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred."* (Mark 4:3, 20)

Four decades ago, shortly after our honeymoon, Cheryl and I entered intensive missionary training in preparation for ministering in remote, primitive conditions. We had given our lives unreservedly to serve the Lord, and were trusting Him fully. We were wholly committed and ready to walk through whatever doors of service the Lord opened for us—ready to go forth in Jesus' Name and sow the *Good Seed* among the unreached tribal people there.

Many of our missionary classmates ended up serving in places fraught with difficult or extreme living conditions. Some ended up hundreds of miles up the remote jungle rivers of South America, traveling by river launch, to reach the yet-unreached tribes there. Others ended up serving either in the steaming mosquito-infested swamps or rain-forested mountains of New Guinea, to serve among lost tribes there. Others went to other remote areas of the world, to serve among tribes where the only way in and out was by small bush plane. God blessed us all in every way.

We all went forth, trusting the Lord with joyful hearts. We raised the needed support, made personal sacrifices, got the required travel documents and said our goodbyes. We then left for lands unfamiliar to us at the time. There, we made the necessary adjustments, ate strange foods, and learned strange languages and cultures. We also did survey work and got permission to move into remote tribal villages. We built our homes, cared for the sick, and made friends as we learned their languages. Eventually, we were able to share the message of Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Cheryl and I did the same in every respect, only the people that the Lord led us to reach in Thailand were not nearly as remote geographically as many other locations. They even listened to local news on portable AM radios. We could drive to their villages on semi-improved dirt roads, and supplies were easy to get. However, the people were much more remote and hard to reach spiritually, being content with their lifestyle and religious heritage: Orthodox Buddhism.

After language school in Bangkok, we moved into the target area, did survey work, then transitioned into a primitive ethnic *Nyaw* village. The year was 1974, a few months before the Vietnam War ended. Signs of Communist insurgents surrounded us, yet God was with us. The many ethnic subgroups that comprise the Isan region are rich with taboos, legends, myths, and superstitious stories of dark crafts, all inseparably interwoven. At first we pooh-pooed these things away as being mere fables, yet these beliefs are still considered absolute truth in the minds and hearts of the unsaved locals, passed down as accumulated wisdom and knowledge from their highly-esteemed ancestors.

These folk beliefs are syncretized or meshed with localized adaptations of Buddhism, Brahmanism, Spirit Appeasement, and Ancestral Devotion (providing deceased relatives' needs in the afterlife). It's a totally different sphere of reality, where God's Word and the Gospel is as strange and disjointed to them as their beliefs are to us.

As a result, this large conglomerate of people called "Isan" remain tenaciously resistant to outside influence or change, be it medical, agricultural, sanitation, etc. This also means that they are highly resistant to the Gospel message! Therefore, having a good working knowledge of these things is a major part of the battle towards reaching the people.

All else being equal, why is it that some people groups seem to readily respond to the Gospel message, and come to the Lord in droves, while other people groups, like the Thai and Isan, are much harder to reach? Not unlike Christ's parable of the sower and the *Good Seed*, there are many variables that enter into the picture, affecting the outcome. Such is the case with the people of Thailand, especially those in the Isan region where we minister.

Their overall response to the Gospel is comparatively poor, due to their lethargic attitudes. (*That being said, a portion do actually believe.*) I have come to the conclusion that much of their lack of response is due to their low level of interest and unwillingness to listen, influenced by internal and external causes, both secular and spiritual.

Secularly, this is due to tightly-knit sociocultural bonds, which make them hesitant to show interest. Spiritually, it is due to long-standing beliefs that become obstacles, strewn in their way by the *Angel of Light*. These supplant the Gospel, preventing them from understanding and receiving Christ. Like Karl Marx once noted about religion, Buddhism is *truly* the opiate of these people, lulling them into lethargic satisfaction, unable to discern their need or lost condition.

When I say this, some might respond with: *Hey, where's your faith? Just give 'em the Gospel or hand them a tract and they will be convicted by the Holy Spirit and believe.* Interestingly, those ideas once mirrored my own views; however, I have learned that it is a naïve over-simplification of what typically occurs in cross-cultural missions.

Furthermore, to be totally candid, I feel, for various reasons, that part of the blame can also be laid at the feet of the messenger or missionary... perhaps not being adequately proficient in the language, lack of understanding the

underlying unseen cultural pitfalls, and lack of adequate preparation. Or, implementing pet methodologies familiar to the missionary in trying to convey the Gospel message, but which leave the hearer bewildered and misinformed.

As a result, the Thai typically blithely dismiss what they wrongly presume as being the message, while the actual Gospel never really filters through. In that case, did they really reject the Gospel, or did they reject what they wrongly perceived as being the Gospel? I am convinced that the Thai don't actually listen to Gospel presentations, because their presuppositions take over. Therefore, they never reach the point of enlightenment where they are actually convicted of sin, judgment, and righteousness, to where they either receive or reject the actual Gospel message, and not just dismiss a works-oriented counterfeit--based on their misconceptions. This is a major problem.

Why am I sharing these things? Because of the hardness of the work, supporters sometimes feel that perhaps they ought to invest their support where fruit is more easily realized. This is an unfortunate assumption, since response to the Gospel in most Buddhist nations is very similar, Thailand included. Consequently, it's best to take impressive-sounding accounts of Buddhists flocking to Christ *en masse* with a grain of salt. Would that it were true, but it rarely occurs.

On the brighter side, after years of faithfully preaching the Gospel among the Thai, many of us have learned a thing or two, me included. What was it Einstein said about insanity... doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results? With that in view, how many times have missionaries to Thailand plowed headlong into the impenetrable Buddhist temple walls, erected in the hearts and minds of these precious Thai people for whom Christ died, thinking our feeble efforts were getting anywhere, or would maybe produce the desired results next time?

I'm sure most of us are familiar with the *Serenity Prayer*, attributed to the American Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971): "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference."

The inference being, in and of ourselves, we cannot change the complex worldview of the Thai people, nor can we change their beloved Buddhist heritage, and we certainly would never dream of attempting to change the unchangeable Gospel message. What we *can* do, is to consider what needs changing or adapting concerning our methods and approaches in delivering the Gospel, so as to change their typical response! God can then change their hearts.

I believe the missionary's most important job is to strive towards presenting the Gospel in as clear, concise, and understandable form as is possible—so listeners hear a clarion call, and not a jumble of disjointed sounds. This calls for constant self-assessment and improvement, instead of continually thinking that one's own feeble attempts are at all adequate or satisfactory. I say this with all due respect, having seen it firsthand, even in my own ministry.

By God's enabling grace, I have now developed proven methods of presenting the Gospel to the disinterested, unsaved Thai that actually piques their interest. Namely by supplying the missing essentials through dialoging about Creation and its Creator, then segueing into the Gospel. It really works, and makes perfect sense to them, because they truly listen!

I trust this treatise was enlightening, giving insight as to how you need to pray for us missionaries and the Thai.

My recent back surgery is healing well, so my neurosurgeon has given the okay to return to Thailand, Lord willing, by mid-November. There, I will continue working on completing the last remaining books of the Isan New Testament, **but I need your help.** I presently have no available funds to make the trip. China Airlines now has a special price of \$930, round-trip from L.A. to Bangkok. Adding the cost of a commuter flight from San Diego to L.A. increases the total to around \$1,150. Pray, and if you sense the Lord's prompting you to help underwrite this need (over any regular monthly support), we would be very grateful—mission agency address below.

Thanks again for your prayers and financial partnership in this, the greatest job on earth!

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

*Ron Myers*

Ron (and Cheryl) Myers

Missionaries to Northeast Thailand

SEE: God's Word For Isan – [www.IsanBible.org](http://www.IsanBible.org)

