LEADING BUDDHISTS TO FAITH IN GOD

WINNING HEARTS

Edited by Gregory and Amy Whitsett
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Winning Hearts
Leading Buddhists to Faith in God
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GLOBAL MISSION SERIES

INTRODUCTION

We live in a diverse and often fragmented world that brings fresh challenges to Christian mission. Each day we are confronted with news of war, culture clashes, religious intolerance, and migrant crises. These events press Christians to an increasingly delicate balancing act as they consider how to be true to God and faithfully share His Word in all nations and cultures of the world. Christian mission continues to face three major challenges: a resurgence of the world religions; the spread of post-Christian or postmodern thought in once-Christian areas; and the call of vast urban areas of the world where the majority of earth’s population dwells.

The Global Mission Series is a collection of volumes dealing with the very real mission challenges of today’s global landscape. These books, produced by the Global Mission Centers, are intended to be practical resources to help Christians be a thoughtful witness in religious, geographic, and ideological areas that have been difficult for Christian mission. Because the contexts vary greatly, the books in this collection are also diverse. Some volumes of this series are written by single authors who write out of their experience. Others in this series are edited works from conferences confronting the very real challenges in mission.

For years we have heard requests for more works to be published to assist practitioners in their work, and it is for practitioners that the Global Mission Series was initiated by the Global Mission Centers. The Global Mission Centers are a part of the Office of Adventist Mission of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Each of the Global Mission Centers carries a special concern for a particular religious or cultural group. The Global Mission Centers exist to equip Seventh-day Adventists to understand people of other religious and cultural backgrounds, so that our witness may be more effective.

RICK McEDWARD
Global Mission Series Editor
GlobalMissionCenters.org
WINNING HEARTS

INTRODUCTION

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we believe that our mission is to win hearts for Christ. When we read about the 144,000 and the great, vast multitude that John saw in his visions in Revelation 7 and 14, we are reminded that our Great Commission is to make disciples of every nation, kindred, tongue and people. But when it comes down to doing the work, we find that making disciples is not as easy as it sounds. The people we work among have behaviors and beliefs that are deeply rooted in worldviews and assumptions that are at odds with Christianity. This causes either strong resistance to Christian beliefs or an often syncretic adoption of Christian practice.

So what is the solution? How do we inspire interest in Christianity in our non-Christian friends and neighbors? What does it take for someone to want to become a disciple of Christ? The key is found in *Ministry of Healing* p. 143:

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”

Jesus employed a number of activities that built people’s trust in Him and His Father before He invited them to become disciples. This volume is a collection of papers presented at the 2015 annual conference hosted by the Global Mission Center for East Asian Religions which focused on the “how” of winning confidence as Jesus did, but in a modern Asian context. Part I focuses on the principles of leading Buddhists to faith in God. Pastor Greg Whitsett shares papers about measuring success in mission as well as the importance of personal encounters with God in the pre-discipleship process. Rick McEdward writes about Christ’s mission and how it applies to us today. Felix Cortez shares insights from Paul’s ministry, and Scott Griswold shares insights from Jesus’ ministry. Gary Krause shares practical ideas for ministry in the form of Life Hope Centers, and Amy Whitsett discusses the importance of ministering to people’s needs in ways that empower.
Part II is a presentation of case studies. Daniëlle Koning shares insights gained while studying the worldview of Thai culture. She offers a list of questions that can be used by other practitioners to dig into the depths of the worldview of the people they are working among. Doug Venn then shares lessons learned from a familiar Old Testament story and how he applied them to medical ministry in Bangkok and other urban settings. Gavin Johns and Htwe Lay share case studies from Myanmar, while Grace Lee focuses on ministry among certain outcast populations in China and Japan. The last four chapters present case studies from Thailand.

It is the prayer of the editors that this volume helps inspire the reader with ideas of how he or she can be more intentional in developing interested and willing disciples of Christ. Winning trust is just the first step, but it is a crucial first step in developing interest and beginning the process of grounding new believers in a correct understanding and application of the Gospel in their lives.

May God bless you, the reader, as you continue to develop and hone your ministry to effectively reach the people you are laboring among.

AMY WHITSETT
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Bangkok, Thailand
December 2015
PART ONE

PRINCIPLES OF LEADING BUDDHISTS TO FAITH IN GOD
CHAPTER 1
FINDING SUCCESS IN MISSION

Gregory P. Whitsett

CHALLENGE: WHERE DO I BEGIN?

I would like to share a story with you—a parable, really. Pastor Joe was a young pastor who was enjoying his first assignment in a predominately Buddhist town. His small congregation of 32 members was a mix of ages and backgrounds who pretty much all grew up Christian except for a couple of single, middle-aged women and the group’s patriarchs—a man and his wife in their seventies, who had become Christian while studying at the Adventist college. While they all had friends and neighbors who were Buddhist, aside from the two single women, no one had close family members who were Buddhists.

When Pastor Joe suggested at a board meeting that they plan a week-long evangelistic series for their neighbors and friends, the church members eyed each other uncomfortably. As Pastor Joe explained his sermon topics and proposed the dates, no one opposed the plan because they all knew it was important to do evangelism. But they also weren’t too excited about the plan. Years of experience had taught them just how hard it was to bring a Buddhist to faith in Christ. First, it was hard to get anyone to accept their invitation to come to the church, and those who came often didn’t seem very interested. It is true that some were baptized over the years, but other than the two single women, all had left or moved away. Pastor Joe noticed their lack of enthusiasm but felt a couple of good sermons on the importance of letting our light shine and the soon return of Jesus would revive them and get them motivated.

Pastor Joe had done his homework and knew that it wouldn’t be easy to do evangelism with Buddhists. Certainly he couldn’t focus on the time prophecies and the mark of the beast. He had also learned that it would be best to speak about the major stories of the Bible and avoid a lot of texts that skipped around in the Scriptures. So he decided to pick six stories that would teach the key points of salvation. The first weekend he would preach about the Creation, the fall of Adam and Eve, and the promise of the Messiah. The second weekend he would present the birth of Jesus, His life ministry of miracles and teachings, the crucifixion, and finally the resurrection and
the promise of the return of Christ. Pastor Joe selected a memory text that everyone would recite at the beginning and end of every evening—John 3:16. Last, he ordered a banner with a picture of the face of Jesus and the words “Jesus Loves You” emblazoned across it in bright red letters.

The members seemed to gain interest in the plans that were made, and before long the first evening arrived. They didn’t get a lot of visitors but were happy for the eight visitors who came. Pastor Joe introduced himself to each of them and learned that only three were Buddhist—a young church member’s friend from school and a middle-aged couple, named Tui and Nok, who were friends of another church member.

After the obligatory hymn singing and a word of prayer, Pastor Joe stood up and introduced the theme with these words: “Many people may wonder who Jesus is and why we Christians worship Him and what He did that was so important. This weekend and next I look forward to teaching you about Him. It is my hope that each of you will go home and tell your friends and family about these meetings so that they too can come. There is a passage in the Bible that is perhaps the most famous of all Bible texts. It’s found in the Gospel of John, chapter 3 and verse 16. It says, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ ”

Later that evening as Tui and Nok were headed to bed, Tui asked no one in particular, “What is it that Christians find so good about Jesus? It just makes no sense. It’s pretty sad, really, that they would put all their hope in somebody who died and went to heaven. Don’t Christians know that they can only depend on themselves? Certainly the idea of living forever in heaven sounds nice, but eventually we all have to be reborn. That’s even true of the best people who feel like they could live in heaven forever.”

“Well, don’t be so hard on them, husband,” his wife answered. Even we Thai are known to pray for blessing from Ganesh or Indra. I suppose there are many gods we don’t know about. After all, this Jesus is supposed to be quite a miracle worker of illnesses and bad spirits. We don’t have to become Christian, but it couldn’t hurt to learn how to get Jesus’ help in our lives.”

Over the course of the two weekends, Tui and Nok attended the meetings—mostly out of friendship with their Christian neighbors. The most uncomfortable part of the meetings was on the second Saturday, when the pastor appealed for those who wanted to confess their sin and receive Jesus’ forgiveness and gift of life, to raise their hand. Tui and Nok saw everyone raising their hands, so they did too. After the service, Pastor Joe came and talked with them and explained to them just how excited he was that they wanted to give their life to Jesus. They smiled and accepted his prayer for them and quickly went home.

Pastor Joe was overjoyed when Tui and Nok raised their hands to accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness and eternal life. The next morning during his prayer time, he decided that he would go and visit them shortly after lunch to discuss any questions they
might have before the last meeting that evening about the second coming. He wanted to make sure they understood everything so far.

Tui and Nok warmly welcomed Pastor Joe. The usual friendly greetings were made, and Nok offered Pastor Joe a glass of Pepsi cola, which he quickly refused, asking for water instead. Then the pastor got down to business. “So tell me,” he began, “do you have any questions about what I have been presenting the last two weekends?” After their warm comments and words of thanks, Tui ventured,

“Well, this Bible verse you quote every evening, I’m a little confused by it.”

“Well, how can I help?” offered Pastor Joe warmly.

“Well, it’s just that first you say that the Christian God loves the world, and that just seems crazy to me because He’s apparently so good. Everyone knows that the gods were once humans with great merit before going to heaven, and the more we worship or do good things in their name, the longer they will be stuck there. It will take a long time before the Christian God will ever be able to be reborn if that keeps happening.”

Before Pastor Joe could respond, Tui continued. “Another thing that puzzles me is that this God loves the world. Now I admit there are good things in this world, but anyone with wisdom knows that these types of cravings and desires are a sign of ignorance and the very source of suffering. So while you say your God didn’t create suffering, the truth is that He seems to have been affected by this world and also experiences suffering like us. And certainly the fact that He offers His Son as a blood sacrifice is disturbing. The only people I know who do these sacrifices are the uneducated mountain tribes in order to make peace with the spirits. Was God trying to make peace with the spirit named Satan?”

Pastor Joe couldn’t get a word in as Tui seemed to be on a roll. “So then we must believe in Jesus so that we can go to heaven for an eternity of bliss—but we all know that eventually we will have to be reborn here on earth because heaven isn’t permanent like Nirvana.”

Tui finally paused, allowing the preacher the opportunity to respond. However, young Pastor Joe realized that Tui’s questions were more of a statement than a question, and Pastor Joe was just as lost in knowing how to respond. So Pastor Joe explained that Christianity was different from Buddhism and that Buddhists had to work hard at being good, but Christians were forgiven for their sins and were given Christ’s merit—this is grace and the help God offers to everyone. Even as Pastor Joe was speaking, he could tell that his conviction wasn’t helping answer Tui’s questions. Finally, he prayed, and after a pleasant goodbye, he slowly headed home, discouraged as he realized his new converts were indeed still fully Buddhist.

CULTURE: WHY IT MATTERS

We can all sympathize with Pastor Joe even if we’ve never had a conversation quite like his. What most of us have experienced are times when we’ve tried to explain the good news about Jesus to a Buddhist friend only to find they are totally unimpressed.
I had the experience in 2003 when one of my students, a monk, asked me to explain Christmas to him. As I tried to summarize the story for him—knowing this was all just trivia and fact-finding for him—he snickered and grinned as I shared the plan of redemption and what Christians believe about Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection—all in our behalf.

The longer I live in Buddhist Asia, the more I have come to learn that having success in reaching Buddhists for Christ is not solved by working harder to meet more people, hand out more tracts, give more Bible studies, and conduct more evangelistic seminars. I have learned that success in reaching Buddhists is not solved by researching more about Buddhist teachings and debating Buddhists over the better doctrines of Christianity and matching the Anointed One (Christ) against the Enlightened One (Buddha). And certainly it cannot be solved by mastering the art of crafting Bible stories tailored for my Buddhist friends.

Instead, I have learned that reaching Buddhists requires humility, taking on the role of a learner and having patience as God guides us to more effective means of sharing His love with Buddhists.

In the parable above, it is clear that Pastor Joe and Tui are on very different wavelengths. Even with all his prayers and good intentions, Pastor Joe is not going to be able to convince Tui that Christianity is better than Buddhism. Why? Let me share a couple of reasons.

I. WORLDVIEW DIFFERENCES PREVENT BUDDHISTS FROM APPRECIATING CHRISTIANITY.

Much has been written by Christian missiologists regarding the differences between the beliefs, values, and worldviews of Buddhism and Christianity, and space does not allow me to give a thorough overview of this very serious challenge to Christian mission. Instead I will simply give an analogy as to how the Christian worldview clashes with Buddhists.

How many people enjoy wearing a t-shirt or ball cap with the name and logo of their favorite golf team emblazoned across it? Of course, none, because, unlike most popular sports, golf is not a team sport. In a similar way, Buddhism is a religion of the individual. While many Asian cultures are social in nature, Buddhism teaches that the individual alone is responsible for one’s karma. Just as no one but the golfer can hit the ball, Buddhism teaches that only the individual can address vipāka, the results of one’s own karma, and only the individual can determine the journey that will lead him or her ever closer to or farther from nirvana.

Unlike most other popular sports, in golf the lowest score wins. The goal is to complete the 18-hole course with as few strokes as possible. Similarly, Buddhists believe that they will experience a repeated cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. When a golfer is playing his game, he will probably tell you that he is not focused on the last hole. Rather, he is focused on the current hole he is playing. His focus is on
getting the ball into the hole using as few strokes as possible—and that takes all of his concentration. In Buddhism, while the ultimate goal is nirvana, very few Buddhists actually keep that goal in mind. While they know there is a “final hole” up ahead, they direct their energies to their current life, knowing that the end will eventually come. But to get there requires focus and concentration on the present.

To keep his score low, the golfer is blessed to have an array of tools at his disposal, most of which come in the form of golf clubs that he carries in a golf bag. The golf clubs vary in weight and size—some thick and heavy, others thin and light. Each club is designed to serve a different purpose, and a good golfer knows how and when to use each one to his advantage. Buddhists also have an array of tools that come in the form of rituals, amulets, sacred sites, sutras, and so forth. Each have their purpose and can help a Buddhist improve their lot in life and to offset the ill results of karma. In addition, a golfer can hire a caddy to offer advice and a trainer to improve their skill. Likewise, a Buddhist will revere Buddha and monks who have shown expertise in the game and can give them help through their power or advice.

Golf isn’t without its challenges, however. Every good golf course has obstacles and conditions that must be accounted for. Golfers face sand traps, water hazards, challenging slopes on the greens, stands of trees, and even varying weather conditions. More experienced golfers are able to skillfully compensate for each of these and manage to return a good score. The less skilled often find themselves swinging clouds of sand into the air as they attempt to get their ball from the sand back to the turf. Similarly, there are obstacles in the Buddhist life. Bad things happen to everyone and are vipāka—the result of one’s karma—that create misfortune. Also, Buddhists see the spirits and wild beasts as simply fulfilling their lot in life and not in a sinister plot to cause them trouble. Buddhism teaches that one must simply accept what has happened as fact and move on. Just as a golfer uses a specific club to drive his ball out of a sand trap, a Buddhist can use rituals and ceremonies to help him “get out of the sand trap” and get the ball back on the green. There is no value in getting angry or upset at these things, Buddhists believe. Suffering just is; so accept it, deal with it, and move on.

Christianity, on the other hand, is better compared to a football (or soccer) match. Football is a contest between two opposing teams each trying to outscore the other during the ninety-minute game. The members of the team work together, with each player filling a specific role. It’s a fast-paced, intense ninety minutes of running, passing, ball-stealing, and scoring as the battle for control of the ball moves back and forth across the field. There are two tactics used—offense and defense—and the players are skilled at both. On a good team, players know how to use each other’s skills to the team’s advantage.

The parallel with Christianity should be apparent. In Christianity there are two teams: God’s team and Satan’s team, who are engaged in a great controversy where only one team can win. Like football, Christianity is set in a definite linear time frame, as Christians believe that there will come a time when God will resolve the sin issue and
restore creation to its pre-sin state, ending this present state of suffering and sorrow. With only one life to live (Christians believe), every person has important choices to make—which team one will play on, how skilled one will become, and how closely one will listen to and follow the team Captain. The similarities go on. But suffice it to say, Christianity and Buddhism are worlds apart in their cultural themes and worldview.

2. EVANGELISM METHODOLOGY OF GOSPEL WORKERS IS NOT ADEQUATE FOR BUDDHIST FIELDS.

When the gospel worker approaches a Buddhist with Bible studies, evangelistic preaching, or Christian literature, he prays that he will find success in impressing the Buddhist with the beauty of the gospel of grace and forgiveness through Jesus’ death and shed blood. He eloquently paints vivid pictures of the end of time and Christ’s return with man’s reward. However, more often than not, his labor is in vain. Why? Because it would be like bringing a football training video to a golf club with the hope that the golfers would find it relevant to their game. The golfers may show kindness and friendliness to the footballer and patiently sit through the training video—some may even take notes. But in reality, there is little in the football training video that can be applied to the game of golf. Alas, when Christians follow their good motives but fail to make the good news of Jesus Christ relevant by presenting it in the language and lifestyle of the Buddhist worldview, they find that their efforts yield little fruit.

The leading edge of mission to Buddhists in Asia belongs to pastors, Bible workers, and Global Mission pioneers who set the pace and tone for building God’s kingdom. Sadly, these workers are often ill-equipped due to either a lack of training or the training and resources are designed for other, non-Buddhist audiences. This lack of expertise further drives gospel workers away from evangelism and more toward the inward-facing aspects of ministry, such as preaching, directing board meetings, and caring for church members’ needs.

Because “golfers” so rarely decide to switch sports and become “footballers,” gospel workers find more success and fulfillment in recruiting footballers from other teams (Christians of other denominations) and adding them to their rosters. Of course, we celebrate the fact that there is unique truth that is given to our church for these last days, but success in these lines only seems to pacify our lack of success with Buddhists and results in an inadequate measure of progress.

THE CULTURE TREE

What are worldviews, and what makes them so challenging to work with? Before we can answer this, we must first understand culture. When we think about culture, we usually think of dress, food, language, mannerisms, etc. We know that Lao people eat sticky rice and papaya salad, Burmese men traditionally wear longyis or sarongs, and Cambodians speak Khmer; yet and they all are Buddhist. If we take the time to look at culture closely, we will find that even the way information is processed can be different.
Logic and common sense are not universally the same. We call all of this “culture,” but there is more to culture than just these “visible” things. In fact, these are simply the behaviors and forms of a culture. I like to use the analogy of a tree—a culture tree. The behaviors and forms that we often refer to as culture are represented by the leaves and branches. They are the things we see first and what we use to identify a culture by, just as we do a tree. When we identify a tree we typically look at the top or crown of the tree and observe its shape, leaves, fruit, and flowers. Indeed, from a distance we can easily spot a banana tree, coconut palm, or a mango tree. Likewise, we usually identify a culture by its characteristic forms and behaviors.

But what supports the leaves and branches of a tree? A trunk, of course! In cultural terms the trunk is made up of beliefs and values. They provide support and structure for the behaviors and forms. Beliefs are what we believe to be right and wrong, true and false, things that we know to work and those that don’t. Values reflect the priority we place on these beliefs. Although our beliefs may remain constant, the value we place on them may vary a little as we re-prioritize based on the context of various situations. It is important to note that sometimes we don’t make decisions based on our desired or ideal values. Instead, we make decisions based on our actual beliefs and values. For example, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church we have a mission statement, a vision statement, and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. But we find that while these are extremely important to us as individuals, how we actually experience them and live them out in our lives differs from person to person. Even more interesting, we may compromise our own beliefs because of other things that seem to conflict and hold all our values in tension. So while we may be able to make a neat little list of our values, it is not uncommon to find that some may just be desired or ideal values. However, if we watch our behaviors—or have someone else watch and tell us what they see—we will better be able to identify our actual values.

So we have the branches and leaves and we have the trunk. But what really holds the tree upright are the roots. And just as roots are usually below the surface of the ground and are not visible, in culture there are “roots” that are invisible. Let me give you an example. Have you thought about gravity today? If you are like me, we don’t tend to think about it. As soon as we wake up in the morning, we live our lives with the assumption that gravity is still in effect. When we get out of bed, we don’t grip the side of the bed as we put our feet to the floor, hoping that we won’t float away. We don’t try to fly down the stairway but instead are careful as we take each individual
step, because we know all too well what gravity does when we miscalculate! The trust we have in gravity is an example of our “roots.”

In cultural terms these roots are our worldview and assumptions. Assumptions include beliefs about the supernatural world, what we do when we experience crisis, and so on. I have found that as I study other worldviews and beliefs I begin to get a window into my own assumptions and worldview. And like we discovered about values, I find that sometimes my worldview and assumptions may not match up with my behaviors. For example, when my son had an accident, my first thought was to assess his injuries and determine whether he needed medical care. And when we discovered that he was indeed badly injured, my immediate reaction was to begin making a plan to get him to the hospital. My son, on the other hand, as he was crouching in pain on the ground, asked for prayer! I will tell you that it warmed my heart as a father. And I agreed that we should pray. So I paused my planning and took a few moments to pray. But when we said “amen” I still knew that we needed to get to the hospital as soon as possible. Why? Because my worldview tells me that, yes, God can answer prayers and perform miracles. But it also tells me that that usually does not happen, so I must first take care of myself. Is it possible that I live this out in many other ways—that I actually depend on myself more than I should?

ANALYZING WORLDVIEW

Let’s consider a real-life example. There is a spirit house located at a three-way intersection a couple of blocks away from the Thailand Mission in Bangkok. The corner is dangerous because the perpendicular road emerges between two high walls making it very difficult to see oncoming traffic. This particular spirit house is really quite attractive and well taken care of. It has a clean white paint job with bright orange trim work. The dozens of bottles of red Fanta set on the table in front of the spirit house are regularly replaced which indicates the degree of devotion its owner has. If you were to come at the right time, you would also notice that there are regular visits by the owner to offer his prayers and offerings. Some passersby honk their horn or wai (bow to) the spirit house.

The design and the activity are all based on the belief that a spirit in that location—perhaps the spirit of one who died in a violent accident—has power to harm or to help passersby. By demonstrating respect to it, travelers believe that they prevent angering the spirit, which could in turn cause them to have a traffic accident. In fact, the local people believe the spirit house is a road safety device.

Behind these beliefs is the Thai assumption that spirits are sentient beings just like human beings but in a different life form. How do they “know” this? From the
experience of collective generations that have learned that spirits are indeed real and can harass and harm a passerby. There are anecdotes of spirits that began to haunt a place along the road after a fatal accident.

But a European with a secular scientific worldview will see something totally different. She will observe the aesthetics of the shrine and the quaintness of the devotion. For her, it is all just a silly superstition and potentially a traffic hazard because it could distract a passing driver who may wish to \textit{wai} and take his hands off the steering wheel.

What does a Seventh-day Adventist see? Because of his great controversy worldview, he doesn’t see a shrine to a spirit that could harm him, nor does he see it as a silly superstition. The Adventist sees this shrine as a place where one of Satan’s demons is harassing travelers and deceiving the residents about the true nature of death. Also he will see this as a tool of Satan to twist the understanding of people and make it hard for them to appreciate the gospel if and when they hear it preached.

If a Thai person wanted to convert a secular European or a Seventh-day Adventist to his opinion, he would have a real challenge. Why? Because these beliefs are grounded in a worldview of life experience that isn’t easily changed. So how do world views change?

\textbf{CHANGE: CAN WORLDVIEWS CHANGE?}

Worldviews don’t change because we want them to! Worldviews are shaped by life experiences. When things happen in life that challenge our old assumptions, worldviews are modified to accommodate the new information. Many gospel workers think that their words, shaped into well-crafted Bible narratives, will make the difference, or that a better set of proofs or arguments in behalf of Christ will convert them. But these attempts result in limited success.

For worldviews to change, there needs to be a new experience that challenges old assumptions. When Christ came to this earth, He followed this model Himself. First, He was born and lived in Nazareth, known for its sinfulness, and yet He remained pure. And as He began His ministry, He was in the habit of coming close to the people. Second, Jesus compared and contrasted the words of Scripture with the beliefs and assumptions of the Jewish nation and noted where there were vast differences between the messianic prophecies and the commonly held aspirations that the Messiah would be primarily a political savior rather than a spiritual one. Then Jesus opened their eyes to a new reality in the combined ministry of casting out demons, opening blind eyes, raising the dead back to life, touching the unclean, forgiving sinners, rejecting the traditions of the religious establishment, and proclaiming good news. Finally, all were brought to a crisis at Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Here, all were forced to choose to either accept or reject the evidences of Jesus’ Messiahship that threatened their worldview.

Likewise, if we hope to be successful in making disciples of Buddhists today—a people who do not accept the authority of Christians or Christian Scriptures—we will
need to directly address their worldview assumptions. Seventh-day Adventist gospel workers will do this in the following ways:

1. live faithful Christian lives among Buddhists—allowing them to observe the Christian lifestyle in their context;
2. study and compare the biblical worldview with those of our Buddhist friends in order to identify bridges and barriers to Buddhists understanding the good news;
3. cooperate with God to introduce evidences of God’s existence and care for their welfare that gives credibility and authority to Christ; and
4. pray for the outpouring of God’s spirit to powerfully demonstrate the good news in such a way that each will either have to accept or reject the claims of Christ on their lives.

Scripture records that the power in Christianity is not merely in the fact that it is truth but that it transforms lives that otherwise could not:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, NKJV).

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, NKJV).

CHRIST: ONLY HIS METHOD WILL SUCCEED

*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143 is now an often-quoted and well-known passage of inspiration. Let’s take a moment to meditate upon these words.

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me” (White 1905).

Several things stand out in this passage.

1. **CHRIST’S METHOD ALONE GIVES TRUE SUCCESS.**
   
   In other words, there are *many* methods available to the gospel worker from which she can choose, but all of these other options will only give a *false* success. More important is the point that they may appear successful and may result in baptisms, but their success is not genuine. Beware of using man’s methods to achieve God’s mission! The good news is that we have a description of the method Jesus used.

2. **HE MINGLED WITH MEN AS ONE DESIRING THEIR GOOD.**
   
   This isn’t an activity of working the crowds to hand out tracts or manipulating conversations to insert God whenever possible. Rather, Christ’s mingling was an investment of time spent with people. It required being born as a baby in the home of a Jewish father (Joseph) and a Levite mother (Mary). It meant growing up as a child, doing chores,
learning a trade, and walking the dusty roads from village to village. As Jesus’ fame spread, it meant less personal time, later nights, and earlier mornings. In essence, Jesus’ form of mingling was genuine and included learning from those He had come to save.

As part of this learning, it is important to recognize that Christ-likeness in cross-cultural mission assumes that the gospel worker will invest significant study into the needs and nature of the people to whom he has been called. Ellen White writes,

In order to lead souls to Jesus there must be a knowledge of human nature and a study of the human mind. Much careful thought and fervent prayer are required to know how to approach men and women upon the great subject of truth (White 1885:67).

How is this done? As you befriend people, observe their routines and special events. Take note of the themes of their conversation. Identify how they use their money and time—especially for relaxation, toys, and fun. Who is important to them other than their family? Why? What are the necessities for life and why? How are important decisions made? Are they made by a group or individually? What types of decisions involve extended family members? The community? What is the apparent goal or purpose of their life? What is considered success in life? What about failure in life? What enemies or obstacles hinder success in their life? What is the “theme” of life, and how do they “play” the game of life? What are their perceptions of Christianity?

3. HE SHOWED SYMPATHY FOR THEM.

What is this sympathy that Jesus expressed? Sympathy is of Greek origin, from sympatheo. Sym- is a prefix that can be translated “with,” “join,” or “together.” Patheo is the root word and means “to feel,” “have passion,” or “to suffer.” We could literally say that to show sympathy is to join together in other people’s suffering. Jesus participated with people in their joys and sorrows. Paul exhorted the Romans, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (12:15, NKJV).

4. HE MINISTERED TO THEIR NEEDS.

Today we have glamorized the word minister—we see it as someone who heads a department of the government or as a reference to ordained clergy. But the verb to minister in the New Testament is translated from the word diakoneo, from which we derive the word deacon. This is someone who serves others—in a word, a servant.

There are basically three types of servants. We will leave off the description of slaves, because we know that Jesus came willingly to serve and was not forced into His earthly mission to save us from our sins. The first and most common type of servant is a hired hand or employee. These types of servants willingly work for agreed-upon wages. Second are indentured servants who are obligated because of debt or a promise that must be fulfilled. Then the third is the loved one who serves the needs of family or friend because they are invested in the relationship. Perhaps the model servant in this
case would be a mother who serves the needs of her child—nursing him, changing his diapers, bathing him, and raising him to adulthood.

Of these three types of servanthood, which type best demonstrates Christ’s service to us? Clearly the family member who sacrificially cares for the needs of those dependent on him or her. This is the type of ministry we are to carry out in reaching Buddhists for Christ. We don’t do it because we are paid to do the ministry. We don’t do it because we are merely indebted to Christ for His saving our souls. We minister to others because His love has transformed us and we are sharing His love for them through tangible acts of service. Again, our focus in ministry should be genuine concern and friendship rather than creating a program of charity.

5. *HE WON THEIR CONFIDENCE.*

Through mingling, personal sympathy, and ministry, Jesus won the trust of those He associated with. This isn’t a fourth activity or item on Christ’s agenda but rather the fruit of labor.

6. *BADE THEM FOLLOW HIM.*

Jesus didn’t expect life-changing decisions with people dropping their nets and selling their property to follow Him without first demonstrating the good news in tangible ways. Once He saw that they trusted Him, Jesus called them to commitment. It is important to point out, however, that as gospel workers we cannot simply call Buddhists to follow us, because we are not calling them to a social club but rather to Christ. Therefore, we cannot go from winning Buddhists’ confidence in us to asking them to give their lives to Jesus. Something else must happen in order for Christ to win their confidence.

**CYCLE FOR MAKING DISCIPLES OF BUDDHISTS**

Too often we have measured mission success simply in terms of baptisms or the establishment of churches. I use the word *simply,* but experience shows that there’s nothing simple about leading a Buddhist to baptism nor raising up a church of former Buddhists. In fact, I believe that it is our obsession with these two results—the baptism and church plant—that actually complicates the central work of making disciples of Buddhists.

Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus gave His followers this mandate:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20, NKJV).
In the heart of this commission we find four verb words: *go*, *make disciples*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*. Of these, only one word appears as a command in the Greek—“make disciples.” The other three are present participles (which in English require the -ing ending) that serve as modifiers to the command to make disciples. These present participles:

- “As you are going.” This phrase is modifying the command to make disciples by showing time (when?) or manner (how?). What’s interesting to note is that the word *go* can also be used idiomatically in reference to *live*. So a possible translation might be, “as you are going through life . . .” or “as you live your life, make disciples.”
- “By baptizing . . . teaching.” These two participles show how the discipleship process is to be done—through a process of baptizing for the remission of sins and through teaching them all that Jesus taught.

What we learn from this passage is that discipleship is the heart of the gospel commission, and if this is true, should we be making this our focus? We do, you say? If that is true, why are we not tracking and measuring discipleship like we do the number of baptisms, the number of Bible studies and evangelistic seminars, and the number of pastors, Global Mission pioneers, teachers, and missionaries that we send? In fact, we measure everything but discipleship itself, giving us a shadow of an idea of our discipleship but never really measuring discipleship itself.

My wife, Amy, and I have spent time thinking about making disciples in the Buddhist context and have developed a “Cycle for Making Disciples of Buddhists.”

There are five stages in the discipleship cycle. Stage one is “winning confidence” and is Christ’s method for reaching people. If we are going to be successful with Buddhists, we must start here. The indicator that we have accomplished the goal of this stage of discipleship is that the Buddhist will say, “I feel I can be open with you” or, if they don’t say it, they do it—talking about private worries and personal faults that require deep trust.

The next phase of making disciples of Buddhists is seeking God’s blessing in their life in such a way that they come to know that Jesus is real. The goal is that they ask, “Why does your God love me?” This opens the door to share about Christ in relevant terms.
The third phase is sharing the good news about Christ in relevant terms—both about how God is changing you and how He wants to bless them. How you share this gospel presentation will depend largely on what you know about the culture and the person sitting across from you. It is not a Bible study! But rather, it is a personal testimony shared either in one sitting or over many, where you communicate the need of having Christ and what He can do if we decide to follow Him. This stage ends when the Buddhist asks how they can follow Jesus and offer a prayer of surrender to Him.

The fourth discipleship phase is all about sharing your life with the Buddhist in such a way that you model how they are to follow Jesus. This will include both modeling the fruits of the Spirit and studying the Scriptures. When a sin is committed, the discipler confesses and demonstrates how to resolve sin and conflict that could threaten the unity of God’s family. And as Bible doctrines are discovered, they are applied in relevant ways. This stage ends with the disciple being baptized and asking, “How can I make disciples of others?”

And finally, the cycle begins again with the new Christian disciple focusing on building trusting relationships in their community and leading his or her friends and family through the discipleship cycle.

Because of this discipleship focus, it is important that the discipler focus on building relationships with larger networks of people within their community. This ensures that some degree of trust is being built with as many in the community as possible and helps to reduce the risk of the new disciple being totally cut off from their people.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that gospel workers face significant challenges when trying to use traditional methods borrowed from other societies. While translated Bible studies, sermons, and books—even the inspired Word—are important tools for making disciples of Buddhists, in the early stages, these do not have the designed effect they might in traditionally Christian settings. Instead, a gospel worker seeking to make disciples of Buddhists will need to adapt his methodology and begin with the humility of a learner and the heart of a servant. We can benefit from the words Ellen White penned to pioneer missionaries in Africa: “Too many of the methods and habits and fashions have been transported from America to Africa, and the result is not favourable” (White 1977:97).

In Gospel Workers, page 468, she wrote,

The worker in foreign fields will come in contact with all classes of people and all varieties of minds, and he will find that different methods of labor are required to meet the needs of the people. A sense of his own inefficiency will drive him to God and to the Bible for light and strength and knowledge.
The methods and means by which we reach certain ends are not always the same. The missionary must use reason and judgment. Experience will indicate the wisest choice to follow under existing circumstances. *It is often the case that the customs and climate of a country make a condition of things that would not be tolerated in another country* (White 1915, emphasis supplied).

As we adapt our methods of labor to make disciples of Buddhists, we can be certain of God’s interest and help. Let us commit to cooperating closely with Him in this important work.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 2
HOSTING PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

Gregory P. Whitsett

The theme of this book is “Hosting Personal Encounters with God.” I don’t know what that means to you, because there are many theories and ideas related to experiencing God and knowing who He is. In fact, there are many ways to encounter God because He comes to us as individuals, not on His terms but on ours. It is amazing how God accommodates us even though we don’t deserve it! It just speaks of His incredible love for us. As we explore the topic of personal encounters in this chapter, we must be sure we think of them in the context of God’s great love.

As I have spent time in ministry among Buddhists, I have recognized that, due to their assumptions of what is real and not real in the world, and due to the beliefs that are rooted in those assumptions, it is quite difficult to share the gospel with a Buddhist. Even John 3:16 is confusing to a Buddhist. So I began to question where to begin. And as I took time to listen to people’s stories, I began to see a pattern develop. What I found as we develop friendships and win trust is that people need to encounter God directly in order for them to see Him in their lives. Otherwise they will only see us.

I used to struggle with Paul’s direction to the Christians to “model” Him. Why Him? He was a human just like me. But what I see now is that the missionary task that we must start with for a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Shinto or a secularist or any other non-Christian is to host a meeting between them and their Savior, where they come to understand that God is real. Because once they know that God is real, then they will want to learn more about Him. Until then, everything I share is simply trivia.

Let me put it this way. If a monk were to knock on your door and wanted to share his beliefs with you, would you be interested? I personally do not want to know how to practice the monk’s faith because I am fully committed to Christ. I would see the information as trivia, not as fact, and wouldn’t even be tempted to trade my beliefs for his. Yet this is what we do with Buddhists. We try hard to convince them that our beliefs are better, are right. But we must realize that until God shows up, there is no power in our witness, there is nothing that will draw them for more than a cultural
lesson in Christianity. So somehow our task must be to host an encounter between God and our Buddhist (or other non-Christian) friends.

But how do we do that? After doing some research and field study, I have developed a discipleship cycle for making Buddhists into Christ-followers. And hosting a personal encounter is a key part of the cycle.

**DISCIPLESHIP CYCLE**

**MISSION 1 – WIN CONFIDENCE**

The first task mentioned in Jesus’ method is to mingle, sympathize, and minister with the goal of winning confidence. This means developing genuine friendships. But why is friendship important? Because we have a gospel that is introducing them to Christ and a relationship with Him. They are to learn to “abide” in Christ, which is relationship. God is love, which is about relationship. And if Buddhists are not engaged in a friendly relationship with you or me, then they are not going to understand the gospel, because the gospel is about restored relationships—both with each other and with our Creator. But they first need to experience it with us. It is not something that they will get through a sermon, because sermons only give information. Sermons are not a relationship.

Once we have established a trusting relationship, we’ve completed the first step. But we must make sure that our relationship with Christ is obvious. God’s presence must be so real and life-changing that our Buddhist friends have no question that we are fully committed to following God.

**MISSION 2 – PERSONAL ENCOUNTER**

We’ve all read stories in the Bible where people, even Israel’s own kings, entreat a prophet of God, “Pray to your God for me.” At first glance it seems like a reasonable and proper request. But if you look at the pronouns you will find something very profound. Why do they ask the prophet to pray to “his” God? Why didn’t they say pray to ”our” God, or even just “pray to God”? It was simply because they didn’t have the relationship with God that the prophets did. It wasn’t that the kings were less important to God or that the prayers of the prophets were better received by God than the prayers of the kings. No! It was that the kings didn’t have a relationship with God. So the prophets would step in to create a bridge between the king and God. They worked to connect them.

This is exactly what we are to do with our Buddhist friends—we are to stand in the gap and be a bridge between them and God. We need to use our relationships and daily interactions to host an encounter with God. Where are they hurting? Where do they need a God-sized answer for their problems? Use those opportunities to pray for and with them. Give God an invitation to work in their lives so they know He is real and that He knows them. The ultimate goal is that when God begins to work in their lives, they are able to recognize that it is Him and begin to ask, “Why does your God care about me?”
MISSION 3 – GOSPEL PRESENTATION

After our Buddhist friends have encountered God, they will be open and ready to hear a gospel presentation. But this is not the gospel according to Matthew or Mark or Luke. It is the gospel according to me. The gospel according to you. And it must be a current story. How is God changing you now? Growing you now? Molding you now? We have not yet been changed from glory into glory—we are being changed. It’s an active, present process.

Sanctification is the process of a lifetime. Our job as Christians is to give a testimony that is consistently in the present. The goal is for our Buddhist friends to see the changes in our lives and want to know how to follow Jesus and experience change themselves. But notice the wording: they should not be asking “how to be like Jesus,” they should be asking ”how to follow Jesus.” So often as a church we like to give each other labels. Either this person is a Christian or is not a Christian, is an interest or is not an interest. This person is preparing for baptism or is not. That person is baptized or is not baptized. This person is a member, is not a member, is a backslidden member or is a former member. The problem is that these labels reflect a static state and do not reflect the reality that really we should be seeing one another on a continuum: either you and I are today following His leading in our lives or we are not. Either we are moving toward God or we are moving away from Him. That’s really what we need to know.

I hope and pray that we are each following and growing toward God and not away. And we should be open enough about our own personal growth process that our friends ask, “How can I also follow?” I want my friends to be able to follow me as I follow Jesus. I want to live my life in such a way that they can imitate me as I am following. And that is what Paul was saying: “I am following. I have not arrived at the destination. So imitate me. Come be a follower with me.”

MISSION 4 AND 5 – BECOMING A DISCIPLE, WINNING CONFIDENCE

Once our friends choose to join us in our journey, then we can start opening the Scriptures and helping them experience the truths that we have. And then the circle becomes complete as they choose to become committed followers of Christ and begin winning the confidence of their friends and families.

PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

We’ve talked about winning confidence, but I want to focus a little more on personal encounters. In my studies and research I have come across terms such as “truth encounters,” ”power encounters,” and “allegiance encounters.” Truth encounters are experiences in which a certain scripture strikes one as truth. For example, someone might read the Sabbath commandment and realize, “Wow! The Sabbath is the seventh day. I’ve been worshipping on Sunday, and that’s the wrong day! I need to make a change.” They have experienced truth and recognize it as coming from God. The allegiance encounter is a Mount Carmel–type experience in which one is faced with
a “choose you this day whom you will serve” decision. It is an encounter of deciding whom you will stand for and often consists of a showdown between God and another god or even the devil himself. In contrast, a power encounter is one in which God works with power in one’s life. Perhaps God sends a dream, provides a healing, or gives release from demonic oppression or possession. In Asia, we see this kind of encounter a lot. It is a very tangible encounter with God.

But I don’t like the term power encounter. Why? Because I have a phobia of anything that looks sensational. And I have a fear of being led astray by my emotions. Truth is not proven by emotion. I have Pentecostal friends, and I feel that there is major distortion of truth in their experience. Yes, God can work powerfully, but we cannot limit or control how He works. While I understand the intent of identifying and labeling each type of encounter, they put the focus on how God is working. However, I prefer instead to use a different term that puts the focus on the relationship—personal encounter. I like this because it shows that God is making Himself known to someone in a very personal way.

I have seen Buddhists who have had encounters with God that were not a big show of His power. Sometimes the encounter is simply an infilling of peace when peace cannot be found. It may be an answer to a question that comes in the form of a dream. It may be joy in the face of troubles and difficulties. The point is that there is an encounter that is unique and individual, and as long as they recognize that God is the source of the experience, it can be just as powerful an encounter as a big, powerful manifestation of God’s authority.

**LIVING BY FAITH**

So what does hosting personal encounters require of me? When we look at the cross, we see two lines—one vertical and one horizontal. When I am in Christ, this is my identity and how I live for him. It shows me how I am to be a Christian and what it requires of me.

First, the arrow pointing to the right tells me that being a Christian requires humility. I must be humble enough to be a learner. Jesus had to go through the process of learning how to be a human being as He grew from an infant into an adult. He had to learn truth by studying Scripture. He had to learn how to share the true message of what the Messiah was to be. And He had to help shift the assumptions of what people were thinking to a new reality.

Second, the arrow downward shows that it often requires being inconvenienced. Christ was inconvenienced in coming to earth. Even though He was divine, God designed that Jesus should model what it is like not to depend on a divine nature. So He had to go through the learning process as a human, disconnected from the divinity of His nature. He was inconvenienced.
Third, the arrow pointing left indicates the need to sympathize with people. Sympathy means to suffer with, or to join in suffering. We may not have all the answers or the ability to heal the suffering, but we can come alongside and give comfort. When we are motivated by a spirit of brotherly love, our friends will feel it and our relationships will deepen.

The fourth thing being a Christian requires is tapping into the actuating power of the Holy Spirit through prayer. Without this, the other three things we do will be hollow and become nothing but forms. If we don’t have our hand reaching upward, firmly grasping the heavenly hand, we have no power. We need prayer if we are going to be effective in witnessing because we must witness by faith. We must live by faith, which means we must witness by faith. If we don’t have faith, then we are practicing a witness by works. So much of our evangelism and witness are works-oriented activities. But we must witness by faith.

I want to explain why and how this fits with the personal encounter. If we don’t understand this, then we are wasting our time. And once we understand, we have to keep learning it because it is so unnatural to us.

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White writes, “Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel.” Joshua had the assurance and promise, so all he had to do was do it. Isn’t that how God works? When He calls us to a task, He equips and enables us, right? But look at what Joshua does:

He put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone. He did all that human energy could do, and then he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm (White 1890:509).

Now we’re getting into faith and works. Do you see the parallel? My effort equals my power. But tapping into God’s power equals faith. That’s the secret! You can’t separate the two. Don’t preach a gospel that is only focusing on one. If you do, you have an out-of-balance gospel, and you don’t have the secret of success. But this is what we need. Ellen White says,

The prayer of the contrite heart unlocks the treasure house of supplies and lays hold of omnipotent power. This kind of prayer enables the suppliant to understand what it means to lay hold of the strength of God and to make peace with Him (White 1896).

This kind of prayer causes us to have an influence over those with whom we associate. People of every religion or no religion want influence. As gospel workers, whether paid or not, we want to have influence in the lives of the people we are
with. But on what condition can we have that influence? Through the prayers of a contrite heart.

We must recognize the central role of prayer. As we pray, there are four things that we must pray for if we are going to host personal encounters between Buddhists and God.

First, we must pray for success. This is very basic but very essential. Yet it is so general. How do I know when I have done it? How do I know if I have prayed enough? How do I know if my prayers are heard and if I am working in alignment with my prayers? One way that I have found that helps me with this is to keep a prayer journal. When I write down my specific prayer requests and the thoughts and impressions God gives me as I pray, I find I stay more focused. It also helps me be able to track answers to my prayers. And I pray until either there is a clear answer or the burden is lifted from me. It is something that you have to experience to understand.

Second, we must pray for a deepening of relationships with Buddhists. There are three levels of friendship: casual, regular, and close. Casual friendships are those that take place in public spaces. These relationships are with people at school, in the office, those you see at the market or sit next to on the bus. Conversation tends to focus on superficial and neutral things such as the weather, sharing basic family information, complimenting someone on their clothing, etc. Anyone can join in these types of conversations, and typically no one will be offended by them either. And as you see each other more frequently and begin to talk together more, the relationship progresses to what I like to call regular or average relationships. You have conversations that take place in public spaces but may also happen in the public areas of private spaces such as the living room or at the dining table. You may add these friends to social media and call or text one another on occasion. Discussions tend to be a little more personal and include things such as likes and dislikes, talk about others (including gossip), politics, current events, and other such “safe” topics. But as the relationship deepens it becomes more intimate and personal. You can enter more private places in a close friend’s home and can even talk while you wash dishes together! You may be able to look in the closets and can see the clutter and dirt. In the same way you can have conversations about more personal and intimate things such as what hurts our heart, our faults, and our bad habits. These are the friends you call first when you want to tell someone some news—whether good or bad—because you know they will celebrate or sympathize with you.

You should be seeing that developing friendships to win trust takes time. So here is an exercise for you to do. Make a list of ten Buddhist people you know. Then grade each friendship according to whether they are casual, regular, or close friends. If you don’t know someone’s name you can even list them by characteristic (example: tofu lady, old man on the bus, etc.). Some of us may struggle to make a list of ten. If that is the case, then we need to pray the prayer that Jabez prayed in 2 Chronicles 4:9 and 10. We must pray for God to enlarge our territory for His sake!

When you have your list of ten, begin praying. What should you pray for? Pray that God will lead you into deeper relationships with your Buddhist friends. Pray that
God will help you continue to build trust so your relationship will deepen. Because once we have enough trust to have a close relationship, our Buddhist friends will be more open to new ideas that they haven’t considered before and will be in a position for a personal encounter with God.

The third thing we must pray for is for guidance to reach Buddhists. We may not know how to reach them, but God does. So the best thing we can do is connect with Him to receive the wisdom we need to reach our friends. Then we become the experts because He is the expert! Every case is different, so we must seek His guidance. John 16:12 and 13 says that Jesus was not able to tell His disciples everything. So He promised to send the Holy Spirit to "guide them into all truth." Sometimes, because we have God’s word in the Bible, we forget that we still need the word of God in our ear. But Isaiah 30:21 promises that we will hear a voice behind us guiding us into the right path. We just need to listen and train ourselves to hear and recognize His voice.

Something I have come to believe is that all too often we don’t expect God to speak. But I have learned about prayer from the life of a missionary in India, Mary Geegh. She became a great prayer warrior and shared a pattern for prayer that is a very powerful tool if you want to see God work in your life.

The first step is to confess our problem to God. Sometimes when we have conflict with someone, we only see them as the problem. But we must confess the part we are responsible for—even if it is only 1 percent!

The next step is to be quiet and listen. Do you hear God’s voice? What impressions and thoughts are coming to your mind?

As you hear them, the third step is to write them down in a notebook. Why? Because writing them down makes them real and puts us in a position where we must do something about them.

Now a word of warning. We should not take all our thoughts and impressions as messages from God. We are still to follow the counsel in 1 John 4:1, where we are told to test the spirits. Our own thoughts can interfere, and even worse, the devil can give us incorrect ideas. But when we are sure that what we are hearing is coming from God, then we must choose to obey. King David warns in Psalm 95:8 not to harden our hearts to God’s commands as the rebellious Israelites did in the wilderness. This is serious! We must be able to discern God’s voice, and then we must obey it—or it is rebellion! Finally, as we learn to hear God’s voice and follow His leading, we will begin to see a change in our lives. And as God performs this miracle in us, we tell others of how He is working in us. My testimony should be about my relationship with Jesus and how He is changing me today, this week, right now.

If we are going to reach Buddhists, we must pray for success. We must pray that our relationships deepen. And we must pray for God’s guidance.

Finally, we must pray for God to touch our Buddhist friends’ hearts because God’s ministry is different from ours. Our ministry is to care for people. God’s ministry is to heal. Our ministry is to pray for people. God’s is to give them dreams and cast out
demons. Our ministry is to share our testimony. God’s is to forgive and restore and change. Our ministry is to plant gospel seeds. God’s ministry is to convert the heart.

The task of our ministry is to “sponsor” God’s ministry. I don’t understand why, but for some reason God needs you and me to pray for others. He is all powerful—He knows the heart—but for some reason He needs us to give Him permission to work in another person’s life. The goal is to host a meeting between Buddhists and God, one in which they are led to a belief that God is real, that God knows them, and that He cares about them. Personal encounters are unique and are life changing.

Until people know that God is real, they will not respond with a desire for Bible study. And if we ignore the need for a personal encounter, what we study with them will only be trivia to them. Christianity is so different from their Buddhist worldview that it will be confusing and unappealing. The Bible itself says that the things in Scripture are foolishness to those who don’t have faith because spiritual things are spiritually discerned. And until our Buddhist friends acknowledge and accept the reality of God’s presence in their lives, they cannot and will not appreciate the things we try to share with them.

Our job is to mingle, sympathize, and minister. Our job is to host a meeting between our Buddhist friends and God. And our job is to model a lifestyle of abiding in Christ—an ongoing relationship with Him. This abiding in Christ is critical. Other missionaries and gospel workers from other denominations have noticed that Buddhists need personal encounters with the power of God to convince them that God is real. But they are also recognizing that these encounters are not enough to make them disciples of Christ. But we know the secret—a daily experience of coming to Him in humility and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in one’s life through the power of the Still, Small Voice. We have the package! We have what we need to make disciples of Buddhists. But we also must work with intelligence and God’s grace and power.

Revelation 14:4, 5 says that the 144,000 are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. That includes into the mission field. But we are not to go blind without a shepherd. We are to be guided by the Shepherd, through hearing His voice by faith and knowing where to walk.

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I remember distinctly the dream of becoming a missionary while I was in college. My desire for mission service was planted by godly teachers, who sowed a passion to share Christ with others. God watered those seeds, and after we got married, my wife and I planned and prayed for the right timing to become missionaries. We thought it would be wise to wait for the time when our children would not be too young. I figured we would go sometime after my ordination into the ministry.

Finally, in 2001, we received a call to serve God in Sri Lanka. At the time it did not take much time for me to make a decision, but for my dear wife it was life altering. There were many things to consider and pray about. As we worked through the decision to go, God brought several small miracles to provide us the encouragement to step forward.

Our preparation for mission was well under way when two major events happened. First, a rebel organization in Sri Lanka bombed the international airport, killing nineteen people, destroying several aircraft, and for a time disabling the only port of entry in and out of Sri Lanka. Second, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks took place, changing the shape of American history. It was a tumultuous time, when we wondered what was happening in the world.

As we prepared for mission service, we knew our lives were about to take a dramatic turn. Our dreams of sharing the gospel with Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims were soon to become a reality. I imagined learning the language, telling people stories of Jesus, and inviting people to follow Him. Our hearts were burning with anticipation leading up to our departure.

Upon our arrival in Sri Lanka, the airport tarmac was still littered with the shells of bombed-out airplanes from the recent rebel attack. At 3:30 a.m. we drove along the streets to our new home, passing Buddha statues on every corner where people lit lamps and offered sacrifices. We noticed Bo trees, held in sacred honor, that had prayer flags tied around them. Our driver told us to be careful and under no circumstances
to leave the door to our home unlocked. During the first few months, we had such a feeling of chaos, change, and confusion about everything we were experiencing.

Each morning I woke up before dawn to the chanting of the Pirith Potha, the “Book of Protection,” from the Buddhist temple just down the dusty road from our home. Devotees, even at this early hour, were up praying, offering sacrifices, and chanting the Dhammapada. Buddhist and Hindu festivals were frequent, bringing a new pace to life in our new home.

It was then that I began to really wonder, what is it that Jesus has called me here for? What is the mission of Christ for me in Sri Lanka? With all I see around me, how will Jesus live out His mission in me? If our time in Sri Lanka was to be of any benefit at all, I wanted Christ to be the Lord of our mission. I was literally pleading with God for answers for how to live and how to go about His work.

So here I want to share with you some key aspects to the mission of Christ in the real world. In order to do that, I want to spend some time digging deeper in the beginning of the New Testament, in the book of Matthew. So for a few moments, let’s look at His mission as it is recorded in Scripture.

THE LINEAGE OF CHRIST

Matthew chapter 1 gives us a special glimpse into the mind of the Jews of the first century. Lineage was important. It gave you a place in society, a family to belong to, and an ancestral land given to you by God when the land was divided by Moses.

The lineage given in Matthew 1 is fascinating for several reasons.

1. IT ENCAPSULATED ALL OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL.

From the calling of Abraham until the birth of Christ, the genealogy given in Matthew 1 feels like a who’s who of the history of the nation. Patriarchs are included, the lineage of David is included, and several kings are included. It covers the three key epochs of Israel’s history up to that point: patriarchs, monarchy, and exile.

2. BOTH COVENANTS ARE INCLUDED.

The Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants are included in this passage. By including the Exile, Israel’s unfaithfulness to both of these covenants is also included. This unique feature of Christ’s lineage in Matthew 1 is fascinating in that it brings the two covenants into one family line, making this lineage special. By reiterating the credentials of the person the story is about, it brings a focus to the story Matthew is presenting from the very start.

3. THERE ARE SOME INTERESTING NUMBERS IN THE STORY.

While issues regarding math are strongly suspect in doing interpretation, there is mention here of the fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from
David to the Exile, and fourteen from the Exile to Christ. It is included here with a point not to be missed—Christ is coming as the seventh seven in this story, the perfect fit as the Messiah, and the capstone of Israel’s history.

4. THERE ARE IDIOSYNCRASIES IN THE MATTHEW LINEAGE.

There are four women included in this lineage besides Mary: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. All of these women are known to the readers from the Old Testament. This list includes two prostitutes, one Moabitess, and one likely a Hittite, and all of them knew more than one man. It is reasonable to ask why these women are included. Could it be that the author mentions these women to support Mary, who was pregnant while still betrothed to Joseph? Could it be that the inclusion of non-Israelites can support the universalization of the Covenant toward those not of Jewish descent? Could it be that the lineage of Christ could include those with a fallen past who have become attached to Christ?

The lineage mentioned by Matthew is Joseph’s family, who, in practical terms, had little to do with the birth of Christ, except as he served as an escort and husband to Mary. Joseph’s lineage, it could be claimed, is not the lineage of Christ at all.

LINEAGE IN THE MEANING OF CHRIST

In the Matthew lineage, the author is calling out that Christ in bodily form takes onto Himself, at birth, the entire history of Israel—its failures and accomplishments, its identity and separation from God. Christ, step by step, walks over Israel’s history but does so without falling. Jesus becomes the “prophet like unto Moses” and the new lawgiver in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus survives the murderous intentions of a king at birth and is sheltered in Egypt. Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, just as Moses had been given new life in the River Nile. Jesus survives forty days in the wilderness as Israel survived forty years there. Jesus embodies each part of the sanctuary service, illustrating that the panorama of salvation pictured in the tabernacle and temple are also embodied in the great controversy seen in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Jesus’ name is the Greek form of Joshua, which in its essence means “deliverer” or “salvation.”

The history of Israel is seen as being fulfilled in Christ in the following ways (Paulien 1990):

• Jesus becomes the new David with the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem.
• Jesus becomes the new Solomon, with wisdom, parables, and proverbs.
• Jesus becomes the new Elijah and Elisha with healing, miracles, and confronting leaders.
• Jesus becomes the Old Testament Jacob, with twelve disciples replacing the twelve patriarchs.
• Jesus takes the place of the Old Testament prophets with His woes to the Pharisees.

Jesus relives the history of Israel. The loving God of the covenant is included here, the years of slavery and God’s redemption, the failures in the wilderness, the establishment
of the sacrificial system, the giving of the law, the lostness of the era of the judges, the
glory of the kingdom under David and Solomon, the dark ages of Israel’s history with
evil kings and a divided kingdom. “He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the
ways of his father and committing the same sin his father had caused Israel to commit,”
seemed like a repeated theme of the era. Even the quiet era of the intertestamental
time, during which there was a conspicuous lack of prophets as spokesmen for God,
is included in Matthew’s lineage.

THE MESSIAH

Suddenly, as if bursting on the scene of the Roman-occupied territories, is the baby
born to Mary, a girl engaged to be married. Joseph’s righteous thought of breaking the
engagement quietly so as not to cause her public disgrace was rebuked by an angel of
God. Through this story we get the sight of the first two individuals, in Joseph and
Mary, who begin to catch a glimpse of the mystery of the Incarnation. “‘She will give
birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people
from their sins’” (Matthew 1:21).*

His name is Jesus. With words so profound yet so mysterious, the announcement
is made: “‘And they will call him Immanuel (which means, “God with us”)’” (Matthew 1:23b).

The mystery of the incarnation cannot be underestimated. While each of the four
gospels provides us a special view of the penultimate act in history, the perspective that
each of them provides is unique, as if the four authors are trying to describe the beauty
beneath the oceans, the lush jungles of the tropics with their flora and fauna, and the
majestic glacial peaks of the Andean mountains—all at once. Each one gives us beauty,
delicacy, artistry, and grandeur in their pictures of Christ’s mission.

At the time of Christ’s birth there was a tremendous sense of expectancy.
Messianic groups had formed to proclaim the time of arrival. The knowledge of
Daniel’s prophecy was not lost, affirming the arrival time of the new king. Prophecy
was expected to be fulfilled; a deliverer would come and free Israel from the Romans.
Jesus came at a time when the Jews anticipated a political liberator. But first-century
Jews did not get what they expected.

What they actually saw was a picture of God so different from anything they
had imagined that, due to this radical change, they did not recognize the Messiah
when He came.

THE INCARNATION AND MISSION

I want to bring focus to five essential characteristics of the Incarnation that provide
for us a radical foundation for mission. These five aspects of the Incarnation are not
meant to represent a complete picture, for that would ruin the sense of mystery that
necessarily surrounds divinity in human flesh.
1. **GOD CAME DOWN.**

When I was in college, a professor presented to us the idea that God came in flesh was a heresy. But in my reading of the Scriptures, there is no other way to read it. God condescended to be with us, He became a human being. In so doing, Jesus presents a different picture of God, a God who is interested in us, a God whose love is so intent on being with His creation that He longs to be with us.

Prior to the Fall at the beginning of human history, God had fellowshipped personally with His creation. After the Fall, the direct interaction of God with humanity was seen at key moments. God interacted through providence and revelation but rarely face to face. The sanctuary was provided as a picture of God’s love and the plan of salvation, but this was an inadequate substitute. For the bulk of human history, until the appearance of Christ, God had desired fellowship with people. In the Incarnation we see part of the motive of God in the words, “God With Us.”

John 1 gives us the idea that God came in human flesh in Jesus Christ and became “the word,” “logos.” As God spoke the world into existence through Jesus, now God’s word became alive in Jesus.

2. **HE MADE HIMSELF NOTHING.**

Philippians 2 is one of the key texts for understanding the Incarnation. Verses 6 and 7 read, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” God subjected Himself not only to be human but also to be born in poverty, to take on the role of a servant. He made himself nothing for us. In the words of Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus came by surprise in part because the expectation was ripe that He would come as a conqueror. But instead He came as a servant. This significant departure from the type of messiah that was anticipated marked Jesus’ ministry for rejection by many.

3. **HE IDENTIFIED WITH US.**

Jesus lived an everyday life as a person and lived it with every limitation we have today. He experienced grief and joy, knew hunger and sleeplessness, experienced friendship and rejection. Christ had to get dressed, take baths, and deal with cuts and bruises as we do today. It is likely that Palestine had mosquitos, flies, and roaches. Jesus had to deal with the everyday realities of life.

Jesus met people where they were. He practiced the discipline of giving messages based on the hearer’s readiness to receive rather than on giving everything in statements of propositional truth. Jesus wanted His message to have the best chance of reception, so He spoke out of everyday experience and used language that was common to the people around Him.
4. **HE CAME AS A BABY.**

Jesus came into humanity as a learner, not an expert. Christ was the ultimate person and the divine-human combination. If ever there was a rationale for someone to present himself as having all of life’s pieces in proper order, Jesus could have done it. But Jesus chose to come as an infant and experience childhood, and grow into adulthood. He did not have to be a learner but carefully humbled Himself from the standpoint of heaven, in order to be relevant to a world that was not ready to receive Him.

5. **HE TOOK ON THE CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE HE WAS TRYING TO REACH.**

Jesus was born in a Jewish home, and He went through Jewish rites of passage. In growing up He learned the ways of life and practiced the culture of His Jewish ancestry. He extended Himself to learn an earthly culture in order to reveal God’s love to those whom God had chosen to receive the revelation of God in the flesh.

6. **HE TOUCHED THEM IN THEIR NEEDS AND MET THEIR PHYSICAL NEEDS BEFORE THEIR SPIRITUAL ONES.**

An incarnational presence would not be complete without meeting the real needs of people. Jesus understood their hunger and thirst. He ministered to their diseases and at the same time was not contaminated by them. In Matthew 8 and 9 Jesus heals over and over again. He touches, casts out demons, and performs miracles. Jesus displayed compassion for people at the level of their physical pain.

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit (White 1905:143–4).

7. **WHEN HE SPOKE, HE TALKED IN WAYS THEY COULD UNDERSTAND.**

Jesus told stories, parables, and proverbs. He related to people in ways of familiarity. He told agricultural stories that were familiar to those of the first century. He told stories about shepherds, householders, and bosses. Each of the stories Jesus told communicated important truth but did it in ways people could grasp.
8. HE CAME TO GIVE HIS LIFE FOR THOSE TO WHOM HE WAS MINISTERING.

Jesus did not stop at being born in an uncomfortable situation or providing the daily needs and miracles for people who were sometimes ungrateful. He gave the ultimate gift by giving His life for those He came to serve. Ultimately that means He came to save us, but Jesus saved us with His death.

HIS MISSION AND OURS

With a great passion for humanity, Jesus gave it all up. Consider what Jesus lost in coming to this earth. Think about the heavenly courts, the comforts and peace of dwelling above this earth. The angels in chorus, the beauty and unruined splendor, the throne of God in all majesty were all part of His routine. He was protected from privations, disease, and consequences of fallen life here on earth. He had perfect communion with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He enjoyed the service of millions of angels should any need arise in His heavenly ministry.

Couldn't Christ, the Son of God, have enacted this phase of the plan of salvation from heaven? Perhaps, but He did not. He chose to be born as a baby, to a poor family, under questionable circumstances in regards to the marriage of His parents. He chose to be born in the non-sterile environment of an animal barn with hay, straw, dung, and probably flies. The sights, sounds, and smells of real life were all around Him. How uncomfortable an entrance this must have been for the King of the universe.

Raised in a family, He learned the language of the people. He worked in the carpenter’s shop, perhaps even subject to hitting His thumb with the hammer. Jesus lived a normal boyhood life with the hustle and bustle of the village play of boys in the neighborhood.

As an adult He had no job, He never married, and He was homeless. He wandered with His followers from place to place taking handouts and staying sometimes all night outside in the starlit countryside of Palestine.

Yet all these disadvantages could not tame His love for us. He literally gave up everything in order to save us. Jesus relinquished Himself to a criminal’s death on a device of Roman torture for a two-fold purpose: (1) to reveal on a grand scale His love for us; and (2) to consummate the plan of salvation that had already been in process for thousands of years.

Jesus’ mission was selfless, submitted, and serving. He suffered as a human, He was tempted as a human, and He lived without sin or compromise.

What would it be like today if we had two thousand missionaries who went completely with the attitude of Christ? Missionaries who were not looking for a specific call from the church, but in their commitment to Christ and His church were willing to go without security of church employment? How would the effectiveness of our mission change if we took on the mystery of incarnation by immersing ourselves into cultures as learners; identifying with the people, giving up position and power
and wealth; living in the culture in practical yet godly ways; and longing for fellowship with the people we have come to serve?

What impact would it make if we so identified with the people around us that we became participants of the culture, rather than pulling away to people like ourselves or finding escape into our own cultural lifestyle that has more abundance and wealth than most of earth’s history has known?

Mission is not about externals. It is about the heart. We often focus on the surface issues, but the heart remains corrupt. Yet when we speak in people’s language and culture and present in such a way that people get the message, we find that we have a chance to not just change the way people dress on Sabbath, or how they act in front of you—but we have a chance to grab the heart—and, as Jesus said, out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaketh. That is, what is on the inside overflows to the life. But we have put things in the wrong order—we aim to fix the externals. By doing this we make a big deal out of what kind of musical instruments, or clothes, or language people use, instead of extending the hand of love and service and fellowship to people whom God loves.

Is it possible that a group of people like us can change the world? Is it possible today? How far are you willing to go with the gospel?

**AN EXAMPLE OF INCARNATIONAL MISSION**

Let me share a brief story with you. Tim and Wendy are close friends of mine who have lived in Cambodia for the past eighteen years. When they had saved up enough money, they quit their good-paying, secure jobs within the church organization and purchased nineteen hectares of land not far from the northern city of Siem Reap, Cambodia. They built a small, Cambodian-style wooden home, where they began to raise their family. The area they settled in was important for rice production. So Tim began by planting rice.

God blessed their decision to purchase the property. What was not obvious at the time of purchase was that this dry piece of land matched the exact footprint of the water table. So while all of the area residents have struggled with digging wells and hitting dry spots, Tim and Wendy’s *Wat Preah Yesu* (literally, “Jesus Pagoda”) has always had abundant water supply.

Three primary commitments drove the beginnings of *Wat Preah Yesu*. First, Tim and Wendy committed to totally living like the people around them. Second, they determined to never ask for money but instead to pray for God to supply their needs and the needs of the ministry they started. They would only make people aware of God’s blessing in their ministry and leave the rest to God. Their ministry was totally focused on helping Cambodians come to faith in Christ and become powerful witnesses for Him.

Tim and Wendy started off with a small health clinic. They also saw a great need for a discipleship-based training center for the nation of Cambodia, where the church was growing following the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of people from
refugee camps in Thailand. At the collapse of the Pol Plot regime, many who had become Christians as refugees were now returning to their country.

As the church grew in numbers, Tim and Wendy saw a great need for giving a stronger biblical and ministry foundation to the new Adventists. So they started providing six-month discipleship training programs. During this time of their ministry, the spiritually oppressed repeatedly found relief by the power of God. Tim tells stories of how, over and over again, demonized men and women would find their way, somehow, to Wat Preah Yesu. Some of those who were delivered from evil became faithful Christian witnesses for God’s glory.

The local health authorities eventually closed the small medical clinic, so Tim and Wendy turned their focus to starting a school where children of the village could be educated and grow in the grace of Christ. Over the years this ministry developed into a beautiful school where more than three hundred young people are being trained as disciples. The school has day students who come each day, but it also has dorms where youth can stay as needed for schooling.

A few years ago Tim and Wendy felt a strong burden for the Cambodian children who were orphaned because of the spread of AIDS. In prayer they sought God’s help, which He supplied abundantly. They started off with one children’s home, operated completely like a very large family, with a mother and father who did their own cooking, budgeting, and taking care of the children. The first home filled up within the first few months. As a result of the tremendous need, Wat Preah Yesu has added more homes each year. As of this year, there are nine children’s homes opened, with as many as sixteen children in each home.

In 2010, Wat Preah Yesu added one more dimension to sharing Christ with Cambodia by opening a television and radio production studio. The productions are all in the local language, with the aim to share the good news with Cambodia while training young people to produce family, health, and gospel materials for their country.

Tim and Wendy have given all that the Lord has provided to the Cambodia Adventist Mission and have kept nothing for themselves as they continue to minister for God in Cambodia. In fact, they are living in the same traditional wooden Cambodian home they built when they first started their ministry.

So what is Christ’s mission in the real world?
Hebrews 2:14–17 says,

> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.
If we are called to be like Christ, we are called to be in culture, with people, and serving faithfully.

Notes
* All Scripture quotations are taken from the NIV unless otherwise marked.

REFERENCES
CHAPTER 4
THE MISSION-CHARITY DILEMMA:
FRESH PERSPECTIVES FROM PAUL’S PRACTICE
Felix H. Cortez

On April 17, 2014, Jacques Doukhan read the paper, “The Tension of the Seventh-day Adventist Identity: An Existential and Eschatological Perspective” to inaugurate the Spring Symposium of the Adventist Theological Society. Doukhan argued that our name, “Seventh-day Adventist,” not only describes “the components of our faith” but “carries also a tension that makes in fact the essence of our identity.” Thus, the “Seventh-day” part of our name roots us in Creation. It forces us to value and embrace concrete, earthly existence and to care for our planet and our bodies and to work for social justice. It defines us as “human, real, and present in this world” (Doukhan 2014:1).

Thus, Adventists promote health and education and run a large network of hospitals and schools around the world. We have also created and run the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), which seeks to relieve human need around the globe, and a strong advocacy for religious liberty not only for us but for all. These are not public relations strategies or tactics to impress others, win their favor, or to gain access for the gospel. They are simply an inherent part of our theology. They are an essential part of who we are.

The “Adventist” part of our name, on the other hand, separates us from this world—and other religions—by insisting that salvation does not occur in the encounter with the divine in the sentimental or existential realm in the present, or in the personal, subjective moment of translation at death, but requires the creation of a new world, a new body, and a new community in the future. It defines us as “holy and different in this world, . . . [and] as witnesses to the other city.”

Thus, we believe in a heavenly sanctuary and in the resurrection of the dead and a creation of a new world. We have a high view of Scripture and reject the historical-critical methods of interpretation that deny Scripture’s power to predict the future. We preach about Daniel and Revelation and try to evangelize the world before the end.
Similarly, George R. Knight noted the tension that exists between mission and academic vision in Adventist education in a paper read at a 2007 meeting of educational leaders and church administrators (Knight 2008:20-28). He argued that Adventist colleges were instituted in order to train missionaries. Nevertheless, Adventist education has struggled from the very beginning and throughout its history to find a balance between, on the one hand, the academic ideal of teaching the sciences and the liberal arts to prepare professionals recognized by society and secular institutions and, on the other hand, the teaching of the Bible and religion to prepare missionaries to advance God’s cause. He also noted that most non-Adventist Christian colleges and universities that were created with similar missional purposes later succumbed to the pressure and solved the tension by distancing themselves from their churches (Butchaell 1998).

Knight also argued later that the church experiences the same tension in the form of a polarity between the church’s apocalyptic vision and its social mission (Knight 2008: Apocalyptic Vision). Thus a sector of the church focuses on preaching the beasts of Daniel and Revelation and the final events while another focuses on preaching a gospel of love and relieving the needs of those around them. He also notes that in its current situation, Adventism is distancing itself dangerously from its apocalyptic vision, trying to remain relevant to society around it by ministering to its needs. He argued that this could have the same damaging effect that it had in mainline Christian religions who gave up their distinctive message and, ironically, lost their relevance (Knight 2008: Apocalyptic Vision; Reeves 1996; Roof and McKinney 1987; Finke and Stark 1992; Kelley 1972).

Doukhan and Knight study Adventism from different perspectives and use different language to describe its tensions, but they arrive at the same conclusion. In their view, Adventism should not seek to solve the tension between an orientation toward the future and the world to come and an orientation to the present world and its needs. This may be uncomfortable or counterintuitive; yet, Adventists should not try to create a synthesis out of these elements or forge a compromise. Synthesis would be unacceptable because it would imply the destruction of the essential characteristics of both elements in order to create a third element that is different—just as the synthesis of highly flammable hydrogen and toxic oxygen produces water, which is neither flammable nor toxic.

A compromise would not be an option either, because it would limit and restrain both elements through the political demand of making concessions. Synthesis destroys the uniqueness of the elements, and compromise suppresses them. Following this logic, we may suggest that Doukhan would even oppose finding a balance between these two elements, because this would imply the neutralization of their forces.

In Doukhan’s view, Seventh-day Adventists should focus both on this world and the solution to its problems and on the world to come and the proclamation of its glories. The uniqueness and force of these two tendencies should not be destroyed through a process of synthesis, restrained through negotiation, or neutralized in the search for a balance. In the words of Doukhan: “The two dimensions have to be carried together and totally, because they are both categories of revelation.” Thus, “the
Seventh-day Adventist Church should not be defined to the right or to the left or even to the center; it should only be defined in tension, [as its name indicates] as ‘Seventh-day Adventist’ ” (Doukhan 2014:11).

Is this possible? Can Seventh-day Adventists be focused at the same time on this world and on the world to come? Do not the constraints of time and money demand negotiation and the search for balance? I want to suggest here that a fresh look at Paul’s mission practices will provide important insights into how we can live this tension in our mission.¹

Paul is an interesting example because there has been a longstanding perception that he was not really interested in the poor. It is commonly suggested that Paul did not care much for the poor because he was expecting the imminent coming of Jesus. This is what L. J. Hoppe and Peter Davids argue:

Paul’s attitude toward the poor was probably colored by his expectations regarding the imminent return of Christ. The apostle’s belief that Christ’s return was near made dealing with socioeconomic problems at any great length unnecessary (Hoppe 2004:158).

When Paul discusses wealth and charity . . ., [he] lacks the sharp note of prophetic denunciation [that characterizes other figures of the Jesus movement]. . . . This may be due to the fact that . . . [his] imminent eschatology made social issues less important (Davids 2005:355–84).

Another suggestion has been that Paul only raised a collection for the poor in Jerusalem for political reasons (Galatians 2:10). Thus he considered the participation of believers in this collection as voluntary and, therefore, not essential to the gospel. Loader argues, for example, that Paul’s real concern was neglect of the community’s members, “not the needs of the poor in general,” and that Paul’s collection for the poor in Jerusalem was driven primarily by “theological political reasons” rather than a genuine concern to meet the needs of the poor as a result of the gospel of the Jesus-followers. In Loader’s estimate, “Paul gives no indication that addressing human poverty . . . was central to the gospel message” (B. Longenecker 2010:5).

This assessment of Paul’s practice raises some questions for us as Adventists. Does the imminence of Jesus’ return make the work for the poor unnecessary or irrelevant? Do we engage in social work for political reasons? That is to say, is our charity work a public relations strategy? Is our purpose in doing charity simply to gain a favorable view from the public around us, thus obtaining favorable access for our message? Probably the issue is summarized in the following question: Is addressing human need essential to the Adventist understanding of the gospel or ancillary to it?

In a fresh analysis of Paul’s relationship to the poor, as evidenced in his epistles, Bruce W. Longenecker has suggested that addressing human need was in fact essential
to Paul’s understanding of the gospel. He suggests that Paul always promoted doing good to all, not only to fellow Christians, and that addressing human need was an evidence of true religion. I will follow his work here.

APPEALS TO CARE FOR THE POOR IN PAULINE LITERATURE

First, there are evidences that Paul’s collection for the poor in Jerusalem was not the only such offering or effort in his ministry.

For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others (2 Corinthians 9:12, 13, emphasis mine).

The first thing to note here is the fact that for Paul, the Corinthians’ generous contribution was an external evidence, a concretization, of their “confession of the gospel of Christ.” Thus, he considered “supplying the needs” an essential expression of the gospel. A second element worth noting is that the last phrase of the verse suggests that the Corinthians had contributed not only for this offering but also to others.

Galatians 6:10 is another important verse in this regard: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (emphasis mine).

There are four aspects that are important to note in this passage. First, this passage climaxes Paul’s theological argument in the letter. It represents the ultimate outcome of his reflections. Paul uses frequently the transitional particles “so then” (ἄρα οὖν) to signal the conclusion or main point of a discussion (cf. Romans 5:18; 7:3, 25; 8:12; 9:16, 18; 14:12, 19; Ephesians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Secondly, the expression “let us do good” (ἐργαζῶμεθα τὸ ἀγαθὸν) was virtually a “technical terminology in the ancient world for bestowing material benefits on others” (B. Longenecker 2010:142). Paul is not referring here to a spiritual service for others but to a material one. Third, the expression ὡς καιρὸν ἔχωμεν, whether indicative or subjunctive, may be understood eschatologically (as long as we have time) or existentially (whenever we have time) (R. Longenecker 1998:282). The language in verses 6–9 of sowing and reaping on the one hand and corruption and eternal life on the other, suggests that the author is intending the phrase in an eschatological sense: as long as we have time, let us do good to all. Thus, doing “good” to the one who teaches would be a sowing that would result in the eschatological harvest of eternal life in the one who is taught (v. 6). Finally, the author explicitly states that we should do “good” to all. This is an expression of the gospel. Paul has argued throughout the letter that redemption
in Christ is for “all” regardless of national, ethnic, sexual, cultural, social, and even some religious distinctions (Galatians 2:16; 3:8, 22, 26–28). Therefore, since the gospel does not show partiality, its expression in good works should not show partiality but be extended to all (R. Longenecker 1998: 283).

Similar exhortations to philanthropy are found toward the end of most of the Pauline letters. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul exhorts the readers to “help the weak.” The weak probably refers to those who are “economically vulnerable,” which was the result in many cases of physical infirmities (B. Longenecker 2010:143–4). In Romans 12:13, Paul exhorts believers to “contribute to the needs of the saints.” The word needs refers to material needs, as the exhortation to hospitality suggests. In 2 Thessalonians 3:11–15, Paul argues that even the abuse of the generosity of believers should not be used as an excuse for discontinuing acts of benevolence. Similarly, Paul exhorts the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17, 18 to be “rich in good works” and Christians in general to “devote themselves to good works” (Titus 3:14). Finally, in Acts 20:35, as he speaks to the elders in Ephesus, he says that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” So, Paul normally includes an appeal to do “good” at the end of his letters.

GALATIANS 2:10 AND THE CENTRALITY OF CARING FOR THE POOR IN THE GOSPEL

Probably the most important passage regarding Paul’s views on charity is his response to the request of the apostles in Jerusalem, whom he calls “pillars,” in Galatians 2:9, 10. The passage reads in the following way:

And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

In his analysis of this passage, Bruce W. Longenecker has shown that four important aspects of this passage have been misread. First, it is thought that the request to “remember the poor” had no real significance but was an additional request unrelated to the main points of the debate (Betz 1979:101; Hurtado 1979:51; R. Longenecker 1998:59). Second, that the expression poor refers specifically to believers in Jerusalem (cf. Romans 15:26) (Goulder 1999:333; Martyn 1997:207; Horsley 2009:144; Longenecker 1998:60). Third, Paul fulfills the request by raising a collection for the poor that is attested in the Corinthian correspondence and in Romans. Finally, it is from this request that Paul begins to take care of the poor in his own communities. In summary, it is considered that the request in Galatians 2:10 to “remember the poor” was not central to the gospel that Paul is careful to defend but an additional petition that Paul is willing to fulfill because it was politically expedient.

In my view, Bruce W. Longenecker lays a strong challenge to this reading.
"THE POOR" DOES NOT REFER ONLY TO THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

It is not necessarily the case that Galatians 2:10 consists in a request of financial help for believers in Jerusalem. It is true that the expression *poor* in early Judaism did not refer only to persons in precarious financial situations but also carried nuances of humility, obedience, and piety. Qumran covenanters often referred to themselves as “the community of the poor” (1QH 5.1, 21; 18.14; 1QM 14.7; 1QpHab 12.3, 6, 10; see also *Pss. Sol*. 5:2, 13), and a branch of Jewish Christians would later call themselves Ebionites (דונייבא), which literally means “poor ones.” Ephrem the Syrian (AD 306–373), Jerome (AD 345–420), and John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) understood this passage as referring to financial help to believers in Judea or Jerusalem (see analysis in B. Longenecker 2010:169–70). Nevertheless, this understanding evident in the fourth and fifth centuries was not attested in previous references to Galatians 2:10 in early Christian literature. Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 5.3; AD c. 155–c. 225) does not see allusions here to a specific group in a specific location but a practice benefiting the poor in general as God did in His laws in the Old Testament. Similarly, Origen (*Comm. Matthew* 16.8.165–180; c. AD 185–c. 254) cites Galatians 2:10 as referring to caring for the poor in general; and Athanasius (AD c. 296–373) refers to it as a general admonition to Christians in general (*H. Ar*. 61.1.3)(B. Longenecker 2010:169–70). Furthermore, the claim that the Ebionites represented the line of a group or the group of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that called themselves “the poor” has been effectively contested by Leander E. Keck and Richard Bauckham (Keck 1965:100–129; Keck 1996:54–78; Bauckham 2003:162–81). The Ebionites were, in fact, followers of a heretic named Ebion, who later claimed to be the inheritors of Jesus’ earliest movement (B. Longenecker 2010:170–73).

THE REQUEST WAS THAT HE CONTINUE TO TAKE CARE OF THE POOR

It is most unlikely that Paul began to take care of the poor as a result of the request of the “pillars” of Jerusalem. The Greek construction of the passage suggests that the request made to Paul was in the context that they continued to remember the poor, acknowledging Paul’s previous actions of care for them. The verb remember is in the present tense, which in this case probably carries a constative sense and should be translated “that we should continue to remember the poor” (B. Longenecker 2010:190–91, emphasis mine). Note that Luke mentions how Barnabas had already sold a field to help those in need (Acts 4:36, 37). The multiple exhortations to care for the needs of others in Paul’s letters suggests that taking care of the poor was an essential part of his ministry. It is also possible that the request of the “pillars” was in the visit in which Paul and Barnabas brought relief to Jerusalem during the famine in the time of Claudius (Acts 11:26–30; Dunn 1993:113; see also Downs 2006:50–70).

Our understanding of the meaning of the verb remember is intimately connected to our understanding of the last clause of 2:10: “which I was also eager [ὁσπούδασα]
to do.” The verb σπούδαζω may be used to refer to a manner of action (“to act diligently”) or to a disposition (“to be eager to”) (see B. Longenecker 2010:191–95). Thus Galatians 2:10 could mean that Paul was—or became—a eager to help the poor (disposition) or that he had been diligently doing it. The syntax allows both translations. The context suggests, however, that the meaning intended is the last one: Paul had already been diligently remembering the poor; otherwise, it could be said that the “pillars” had “added” the “remembrance of the poor” to Paul’s understanding of the gospel. Paul is adamant that they added “nothing” to his gospel (v. 6; Dunn 1993:113).9

**TAKING CARE OF THE POOR WAS AN ESSENTIAL RESPONSE OF FAITH**

The request to “remember the poor” was not a final, unrelated request to Paul but intimately connected to the argument about the gospel.

Galatians 2:6–10 is a single, very complex sentence. It seems clear, however, that verse 10 completes the thought begun in verse 6: “for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me . . . only that we should remember the poor” (NKJV). In this sense, verses 7–9 are parenthetical statements that explain the main idea that the leaders of Jerusalem added nothing to Paul’s gospel and mission. The emphasis made in verses 7–9—that Peter should go to the circumcised and Paul to the Gentiles—explains the concern that the “pillars” of Jerusalem had. Why this concern?

Provision for the poor was essential to the identity of Judaism and Christianity (B. Longenecker 2010:108–34). As Dunn asserts, “Almsgiving was widely understood within Judaism as a central and crucial expression of covenant righteousness” (Dan. 4:27; Sir. 3:30; 29:12; 40:24; Tob. 4:10; 12:9; 14:11; Dunn 1993:112). Indeed, it is possible in some cases to consider almsgiving and righteousness as synonymous (Kittel and Gerhard 1984 2:196). Thus, it seems that the insistence of the Jerusalem “pillars” on this point was necessary as a defense of the integrity of the gospel. Thus, Dunn suggests:

What the “pillars” asked for was that an obligation characteristically understood as a primary expression of Jewish covenant piety should be given high priority by Paul and Barnabas. And if they were indeed being treated as responsible for the Gentiles (see on 2:9), that would also imply that Paul and Barnabas should ensure that their Gentile converts shared the same concern (Dunn 1993:113).

Concern for and help to the poor, however, was not important for the Greco-Roman world (B. Longenecker 2010:60–107). Gillian Clark has asserted that “no Roman cult groups, not even those that were primarily mutual groups, . . . looked after strangers and people in need. . . . Provision for the poor was not an ethical priority in Roman culture” (Clark 2004:23–24).
Thus, concern for the poor was an essential evidence of the authenticity of the conversion of the Gentiles. It should have been difficult to dispute that their generosity was fulfilling the vision of Isaiah 58:

If you extend your soul to the hungry  
And satisfy the afflicted soul,  
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,  
And your darkness shall be as the noonday.  
The Lord will guide you continually,  
And satisfy your soul in drought,  
And strengthen your bones;  
You shall be like a watered garden,  
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail (vv. 10, 11, NKJV).

It is not strange, then, that the first Gentile convert, Cornelius, had been praised among Jews for giving “alms” to the people (Acts 10:2) and the offering that Paul would bring to Jerusalem (Acts 21:19, 20) would also call forth expressions of praise among Jews. Caring for the poor was important for both Christian and non-Christian Jews as a solid evidence of genuine acceptance of the gospel by the Gentiles.

CONCLUSION

We conclude, then, that it is most likely that Paul considered caring for the poor as being essential to the experience of the gospel. There was not in his mind a dilemma regarding the relationship between social relief and mission. Emphasis on one aspect did not detract from the other. Paul could conceive that emphasizing both was possible because he did not consider them as separate issues but one.

As Doukhan and Knight suggest, we are not to solve the dilemma between mission and charity. Instead we need to focus on both. The Christian faith is defined by several dilemmas that do not have a solution. The most important example of them is Jesus Christ. He is both 100 percent God and 100 percent human. The incarnation is not the result of a process of synthesis, compromise, or balance. Jesus is both totally. This unresolved tension in the identity of Jesus Christ is transmitted to the church, which is the body of Christ, and to Scriptures that bear witness about Him. The church is both in this world but not of this world (John 17). It experiences affliction in this world (John 16) but is already seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2). Scripture is 100 percent of divine origin but is expressed 100 percent in history and human language. Adventist interpretation should not try to ameliorate this tension but faithfully reflect it.

Jesus’ ministry was also a perfect expression of this dilemma. He healed, taught, and did good but also preached the kingdom of God. There was no compromise in His purposes. Every healing action of Jesus was both a full expression of His
interest in this world and an uncompromised expression of the power and hope of the kingdom of heaven.

Likewise, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, came preaching, “‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 3:2). Then he explained, “‘Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise’” (Luke 3:11). Both Jesus and John the Baptist show that the hope in the kingdom of heaven is uncompromising in its concern for the world here and now.

Thus, if we follow the example of Jesus and John the Baptist, an identity of tension means that everything we preach and proclaim about the coming world should have an impact on our audience toward a better way of life, better education, better health, better family and human relations, and better quality of life here and now. In this sense, every disconnection between our theology and our care for the world around us should be considered a betrayal of the essence of the gospel. On the other hand, every act of relief of human need, of care for social suffering, of interest in enhancing the quality of life around us, should be just a part of our interest in their ultimate well-being and in the restoration of their relationship with the Creator of the universe. In this sense, any disconnection between our care for human need and an interest in restoring the ruptured relationships with the Creator of the world would be considered a betrayal of the essence of love. The church should not be either a social welfare agency or a theological education program but a transformational force that begins in theology and culminates in life.

In the same way, when it comes to Christian life, we do not believe in a compromise between faith and works but in a life that is fully committed to faith, dependent on grace, and entirely and unapologetically expressed in works. This is a tension, we believe, that should never be solved.

Notes
1. The solution is not to devote 50 percent of our time and resources to both areas but to commit to a ministry that is 100-percent oriented to the world to come but acts 100 percent in the present world.

2. All Scripture quotations are taken from ESV unless otherwise indicated.

3. Scholars have problems accepting the normal reading for this phrase because there is apparently no other reference to collections for the poor in the Pauline letters. For example, Ralph P. Martin comments that the expression “and for all others” (καὶ εἰς πάντας) “should strictly mean that the Gentile congregations raised money gifts for other churches and worthy causes other than the needs of the people at Jerusalem. But we have no knowledge of these actions. So we must take the phrase to be a general one in praise of the generous spirit that moves the

4. Paul adds in 6:11–18 a summary of the argument in his own hand to end the dictation, as he often did. See Dunn 1993:334. He did the same in 1 Corinthians 16:21–24; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; and probably also in Romans 16:17–20; Colossians 4:18).

5. He quotes the full analysis of this expression from Bruce W. Winter’s *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 11–40.

6. The variant ἔχομεν is also very well supported.

7. Paul uses the term *weak* in a context that suggests economic vulnerability (1 Corinthians 1:26–29; 8:9, passim; 9:22 [cf. vv. 12, 15–18]).

8. If we take the aorist as an ingressive aorist; Wallace, 558–9.

9. He considers that Paul’s encounter with the leaders of Jerusalem occurred on the occasion of the visit registered in Acts 11:27–30, where he and Barnabas delivered financial relief sent from Antioch.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 5
LIFE HOPE CENTERS: SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST URBAN CENTERS OF INFLUENCE
Gary Krause

WHOLISTIC CONNECTION POINTS
In the 1940s, Swiss engineer Georges de Mestral and his dog returned from a hunting trip in the mountains. As he removed burrs from the dog’s fur and his own clothes, Mestral decided to investigate further what made the burrs stick. Studying them under a microscope, he saw dozens of “hooks”—perfectly suited to connect to the “loops” on fur, socks, and hair.

After further research and development, Mestral invented a hook-and-loop fastener that most people know as Velcro, which became a multi-million-dollar business. Mestral reportedly once told his executives, “If any of your employees ask for a two-week holiday to go hunting, say yes.”

Velcro takes the simple principle of hooks and loops and transforms it into an extremely efficient fastening system. It mimics this natural method, connecting thousands of hooks and loops together to create a strong and useful attachment.

WHOLISTIC CONNECTIONS
Too often our evangelistic outreach focuses on one “hook and loop” connection, and we don’t spend much time studying the “hooks” and “loops” in the lives of the people to whom we’re ministering. We’re often strong on preaching but short on connecting. We invest money but not much time. We tell people “the truth” without first demonstrating it. We aim at people’s heads and neglect their hearts. And we often rely on a few expert evangelists without utilizing our lay members properly.

Velcro connects its hooks and loops in a fascinating array of different angles and approaches. Christ’s mission was a Velcro mission—connecting with people in many different ways, naturally bonding people to Himself. The Jesus Method—as outlined by Ellen White—builds strong, multi-level connections between people and God.
through a series of spiritual “hooks” and “loops”:

1. mingling
2. showing sympathy
3. ministering to needs
4. winning confidence
5. bidding people to follow Jesus.

These bonds aren’t just cerebral. They’re not just an intellectual nod and assent to a series of propositions about truth. These are life-changing connections that bind people’s hearts, minds, and souls to Jesus.

They’re at the heart of what Ellen White calls urban “centers of influence”—small wholistic ministry centers that connect the church with the community and provide opportunities to practice the Jesus Method and lead people to Jesus (White 1904:76).

Of course, with the power of free choice, people can always reject the invitation of Jesus. And our wholistic ministry to people through Centers of Influence should not depend on them accepting Him. Even if they never become church members, we still follow Jesus’ example of compassionate care.

Centers of Influence, which the Office of Adventist Mission calls Life Hope Centers, should resist “institutionalizing” their activities—becoming just another inward-looking club. Where possible, they will become involved in and support existing community activities, invite the community to participate in projects they initiate, and keep the focus outward and on interaction—not merely on attracting people into the Center. Life Hope Centers are not a destination in themselves. They are springboards for putting the Jesus Method into practice.

When people encounter a Seventh-day Adventist Center of Influence, we want them to experience people who:

- mingle with, accept, and befriend them—just as they are, without judgment or criticism
- show love and sympathy
- care for their needs
- prove trustworthy
- model the love of Jesus

We want them to experience programs and services that are:

- based on thorough and sound scientific research
- backed by reputable and respected organizations (for example, Loma Linda University and LLU Medical Center, the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (ICPA), Andrews University, Sanitarium Health Food Company, Florida Hospital, Sydney Adventist Hospital, and so on)
- delivered to them irrespective of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or religion


- incorporating wholistic principles—including the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions.

The way people experience these things will vary according to location. A Life Hope Center in downtown Tokyo will differ from one in the center of Lagos or Bangkok. But again, the Jesus Method will be at the foundation of every Center.

“OWNERSHIP” AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Office of Adventist Mission will:

- promote and publicize Life Hope Centers
- help provide seed money where possible to help centers get started
- provide a smorgasbord of branded resources and curricula from which centers can draw to initiate and run programs in urban communities.

Divisions—through their unions, conferences, missions, and churches—will take responsibility for the operation of Life Hope Centers within their territories. It is expected that each level of church organization will contribute toward the funding of these centers.

Life Hope Centers will have a goal of becoming self-sustaining financially and, where possible, will be linked to a revenue-generating enterprise such as a medical or dental clinic or a community thrift store. There may be some parts of the world where a center will never become self-sustaining. If so, this ongoing expense should be built into the regular operating budget of the local mission, conference, or union responsible for running the center.

As much as possible, trained local church members and Global Mission pioneers will run Life Hope Centers. In some cases, volunteers from other territories (e.g. One Year in Mission volunteers, Adventist Volunteer Services volunteers) can help run centers, but the core staffing should be from a pool of local church members committed to long-term, on-the-ground, wholistic mission in their local community.

Life Hope Centers provide a practical opportunity for lay people to be involved in practical community service. They may never stand up and preach an evangelistic series, but they can use the gifts and talents God has given them to play their part in implementing the Jesus Method in their community.

It is vital that Life Hope Centers focus on ministering to existing needs in the community, not providing services and information for things we just think people need. This means researching, listening to, and understanding the neighborhood.

Putting the Jesus Method into practice could include things such as:

1. running games and activities for neighborhood children
2. holding practical seminars on how to manage finances and balance household budgets
3. organizing teams of church members and other interested people to help
clean community parks
4. teaching English as a second language
5. operating a thrift store
6. running a vegetarian restaurant
7. holding seminars on weight control, nutrition, simple health remedies, stress management, etc.
8. providing counseling services
9. holding ongoing programs for people battling various addictions and dependencies.

Life Hope Centers will closely partner with church departments, institutions, services, and lay organizations—which provide a rich pool of resources, trained personnel, and existing community service networks. They will also find ways to connect with existing non-church public programs and community service enterprises in their neighborhoods.

We encourage existing churches, where possible, to transform themselves into Life Hope Centers. But often the internal church culture is hard to change. And even physically entering traditional church structures can prove too much of a barrier—cultural, historical, social—to secular and postmodern urban-dwellers.

**BIDDING PEOPLE TO FOLLOW JESUS**

The final goal of Life Hope Centers is to lead people to baptism, full discipleship, and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In following the Jesus Method, these centers will sow seeds that lead to spiritual connection.

Some may be tempted to dismiss Centers of Influence as merely promoting a “social gospel”—as if this is something to be disparaged. But the truth is that the gospel as modeled by Jesus certainly has a large social component. As Ellen White says, “Workers should strive to place themselves where they will come in direct contact with those needing help” (White 1904:76). As we minister to people as Jesus did, we naturally draw them to Him.

The step of leading people to Jesus is not some sort of afterthought or an artificial and arbitrary step to “close the sale” after luring people with the other steps. It’s a natural result of following the Jesus Method.

As we mingle, sympathize, care, and win confidence, spiritual matters seamlessly become part of the Life Hope Center experience and conversation. People working in these centers should be prepared, trained, and supported in building on this interest and to start small groups for Bible study and prayer—places where people can discuss spiritual things and learn the truth about salvation through Jesus Christ.

With careful planning, prayer, and strong leadership, these groups can form the basis of new urban church plants.

In some cases, “interests” from Life Hope Centers may be baptized and join existing Adventist churches in the area. However, in urban areas we should not be
surprised that even when there are existing Adventist churches in the vicinity, many of the new believers will find it difficult to join them. The cultural leap into the four walls of these churches may be too much. In such cases we should remember the apostle James’s advice to the Jerusalem Council: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19, NIV).

The new church plants can be cared for—through prayer, resources, support staff, and many other ways—by existing Adventist churches that will act as “mother” churches to these fledgling groups.

In most cases, these church plants will never have their own church building. If we are serious about mission in the cities, we must realize we are planting new congregations, not new buildings. The sheer cost of urban property makes purchasing buildings prohibitive in most cases.

Some groups may meet at the Center, in people’s homes, in a room in a public space such as a library, or in some rented facility. The church planting movement we read about in the book of Acts was urban, grew rapidly, and had no church buildings.

As these groups grow, they will divide and multiply into more groups. Under the blessing of God, they can become part of an urban church planting movement that grows without walls.

STARTING AND FUNDING LIFE HOPE CENTERS

Divisions are invited to submit proposals to the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission for help in establishing Life Hope Centers in their territories. These proposals will be taken to the Mission Board Strategy and Funding Committee for consideration and approval.

As a general rule, Adventist Mission funding assistance will not be used for purchasing buildings but rather for help with personnel, program, and project resources, and perhaps some seed money for rental costs to help get the project started.

A successful Center of Influence proposal for funding assistance will clearly outline a strategy to:

1. serve the local urban community
2. put the Jesus Method into practice
3. engage lay people in service
4. plant new groups of Seventh-day Adventist believers
5. maintain long-term sustainability.

Church members often feel frustrated with lack of opportunities to serve in ministry. But we need to encourage them to get involved in ways that suit their gifts and interests. A church businessperson may never preach an evangelistic sermon, but she might be willing to run a few seminars on managing finances. Young people can run games and activities for community kids a couple of hours a week to give their parents a break. If church members feel surrounded by methods, plans, and initiatives
that don’t seem effective, they should be encouraged to work with small groups to develop their own. We need to create a large space for a comprehensive range of urban ministry opportunities.


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CHAPTER 6

HELP THAT DOESN’T HURT

Amy Whitsett

have always been bothered by poverty. The fact that some are blessed with over-
abundance while far more don’t have enough to meet their basic needs has never
seemed fair to me. When my family of four joined Adventist Frontier Missions
and moved to the mission field for the first time in 2002, we moved from the land
of plenty to a land where a significant portion of the population lived a hand-to-
mouth existence. More than that, we moved from a country where there are numerous
government and social programs set up to assist those in abject poverty and where one
can simply donate to an organization and trust that “experts” would solve the problem
for me. Arriving in Asia, we were exposed to desperate need, and there were no clear
assistance programs to which these folks could appeal for help. Each time I passed a
beggar on the street, I struggled. What was my duty to them? I was better off financially
and could easily hand them some money. Being a Christian, I felt compelled to show
compassion and help where help was so obviously needed. I wanted to give without
reserve, and it bothered me that I hesitated. But just as much as I wanted to freely and
liberally help, I also did not want to feed an addiction or perpetuate dysfunction—the
underlying cause of much of the homelessness and hopelessness I was seeing. What
was I to do as a fellow human being? And what was my Christian obligation to these
people we had come to serve?

My experience at church was even more difficult. Almost every Sabbath, at least
one church member would approach me asking me to “pray” for one need or another.
Although it was just a Christian begging, I struggled even more because they were
pulling God into the picture and had incorrect assumptions about what Jesus was all
about—it seemed they had a prosperity gospel in mind. I wanted to be generous for
God’s sake, for His reputation. But was His voice beckoning through their needs? Was
He wanting me to be the one to help them so they would realize His goodness and
learn to depend on Him? And then there was the other problem. With so many needs
on every hand, it was obvious that we would never be able to help in every situation.
So we made it a habit of helping a few people here and there. We even set aside some of our monthly income as a “needy” fund so we could give liberally but still stay within our own means—something that self-supporting missionaries experience too.

I remember one day my kindness was taken advantage of. I’m sure it wasn’t the first time that it had happened, but it was the first time I had been aware of it. I was at the park with our two young sons when a teenage beggar boy approached me. “Money for food,” he requested. How could I not help a kid? I reached into my bag and pulled out the equivalent of fifty US cents, more than enough to get a decent meal if that was really what he needed. “This is for food—not beer!” I emphasized as I handed it to him.

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, pressing his hands together in the customary thank-you gesture. I felt good, and I naively imagined that I had lightened his load for a day and perhaps even planted a seed of God’s love that might someday miraculously sprout and grow. But my warm fuzzy feeling ended abruptly as I watched him hand over the money—my money—to a nearby vendor for a bottle of the local brew. I was angry. I was disappointed. But most of all, I was hurt. My well-meaning gesture was used to feed an ugly addiction. I had helped, and it had hurt both of us.

I wish I could say that I am now a seasoned missionary who has finally figured out how to help in ways that don’t feed the problem; that I’ve found the formula to ensuring that my giving solves problems rather than perpetuating them. But while I can’t say that I’ve found solutions, I have read two excellent books that have given me some principles to guide me as I face these situations.

The first book I’ve found helpful is titled, *When Helping Hurts*. In this popular book, authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert deal with poverty as a community problem. The book begins by addressing the issue of how we define poverty. Surprisingly, they show that how we define poverty is not necessarily how the poor themselves define it. While we often pinpoint a lack of finances as the root problem in poverty, the book points out that the poor see it differently. They identify poverty as a symptom of other issues that leave them feeling un-empowered and unable to change their own circumstances. When well-meaning Christians give material help to the poor, they inadvertently feed into the cycle of dependency on the help of others in which they have no power over their own situation. By giving material gifts, we unwittingly substantiate the fact that the poor do not have what they need to help themselves and reinforce the fact that the poor need us, the rich, in order to survive.

However, because the poor label un-empowerment as the problem, the authors suggest that poverty is more of a social and spiritual phenomenon than the material one we often assume it to be. The book argues that the real root cause of poverty is broken relationships—broken relationships with each other, with society, and ultimately with God. Therefore, the problem of poverty is best addressed through healing relationships. The authors state, “The goal is not to produce houses or other material goods, but to pursue a process of walking with the materially poor so that they are better stewards of their lives and communities, including their own material needs” (Corbett and Fikkert 2009:119).
The authors outline three categories of poverty alleviation: relief, rehabilitation, and development. **Relief** is urgent and temporary aid given in response to an emergency to ease immediate suffering and to divert crisis. This is often the easiest form of help to offer since the needs are so obvious, the time period is limited, and donors are quick to fund such efforts. This tends to be the type of help most often given—and perhaps most often misused. The authors suggest that the majority of situations in which relief is given, what is truly needed is rehabilitation or development.

**Rehabilitation** picks up where relief ends. It is the type of help that is given to bring life back to equilibrium, both by addressing the underlying issues that caused the crisis and by restoring basic services such as education and health care. It is a more involved kind of assistance and is often the focus of the work of aid organizations.

**Development**, the third type of help, is focused on empowering the poor themselves to establish a process of change. This is best done through what others have termed “ABCD” or Asset Based Community Development. This kind of assistance works alongside the poor within the community and coaches them through a process in which they identify their actual needs and learn to leverage the assets they already have within their community in order to create change and transformation.

I appreciate this new perspective. Not only has it confirmed the fact that simply handing out cash to people feeds the problem of disempowerment without addressing the real need it has also helped me realize that in my giving I often inadvertently begin to think of those I am helping as less human and less worthy than I. My helping puts me in the position of a patron looking out for the needs of the “underlings” below me. But that is not Christ’s perspective. We are all equal in God’s eyes. Instead, I need to see the poor as my brothers and sisters, my peers, who have also been blessed with a brain and cognitive power just as I have. The only difference between us may be that I have had different opportunities to exercise and develop that gift. I now see that the best role I can play in poverty alleviation is to come alongside the poor as a fellow child of God and coach them through the ABCD process with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I can support them by giving them an opportunity to exercise their own cognitive power to solve their own problems.

This is great on a community level. But how do I deal with poverty and need on an individual level? The second book, *Kitchen Table Counseling*, I found built on the ideas of empowering people to help themselves but with an individual, one-on-one focus. Muriel Cook and Shelly Cook Volkhardt, a mother-daughter duo, write of their own experiences and share principles they have learned from years of ministry counselling women. While the focus is on counseling women with emotional and relational problems rather than physical ones, the principles identified are powerful and universal. Cook defines kitchen table counseling (KTC) as a process that includes five specific steps or principles we should follow as we counsel and help those in need.
**PRINCIPLE 1: WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL HELP.**

This was a game-changing insight for me because I realized that I didn’t have to have the answers but rather that I only needed to point them to the Source of the answers! While we may be the hands and mouth that God chooses to use, we are merely a conduit for God’s blessing in others’ lives. In order to be used by God, we must be sure that we daily connect with Him—that we are listening for and recognizing God’s voice as we go through our day. And as we help, we must be absolutely clear with those we are helping that the help we have to offer is to connect them with the Source of all help. We take none of the glory.

**PRINCIPLE 2: WHEN POSSIBLE, WE SHOULD TRY TO MEET THE FELT NEEDS OF THE INDIVIDUAL WITH WHOM WE ARE WORKING.**

Often those coming to us for help are functioning in a crisis mode because of a specific need. They may be sick, hungry, or need clothes for their children. They may need temporary help to catch the drips when their roof leaks. Often, physical need can overwhelm them to the point that they are unable to process through the underlying issue. However, as noted in *When Helping Hurts*, we must be careful of the kind of help we give as well as be sure that we are giving real help and not giving so much as to create a dependency on us. And as we help, we need to emphasize that God has blessed us and that we are simply sharing His blessing with them. They must not ever feel that the aid we are giving is from us. Remember the first principle: *God* is the source of all help! This help parallels “relief” help presented in *When Helping Hurts*. Once the immediate physical need is met, we can begin helping to explore the underlying issues.

**PRINCIPLE 3: WE SHOULD NOT BE THE ONES TO CREATE CHANGE.**

Instead, we must work with the Holy Spirit’s direction to lead those we are working with to identify their true need. What are they really feeling? What is causing them to feel that way? What would cause them to feel empowered to make a change in their own life? When the individual we are working with has been able to identify what the underlying need is, we can move on to the next step.

**PRINCIPLE 4: BELIEVE IN GOD’S GOODNESS FOR THEM UNTIL THEY ARE ABLE TO BELIEVE FOR THEMSELVES.**

How? Continually remind them that God is interested in them personally and that He wants and is able to help them. Pray for them. Pray *with* them. Claim Bible promises on their behalf. And teach them to do the same.

**PRINCIPLE 5: ALLOW THE HEALING AND RESTORATION TO COME FROM GOD.**

This last principle is perhaps the hardest for me. Why? Because I like to see things happen fast. The faster God works, the more awesome the miracle in my estimation.
But God doesn’t always work as fast as I would like, and sometimes it is easy to feel that God isn’t working at all. However, we should never assume to give even one word of counsel if we are not sure that it is from God. Rather, we are simply to take the poor and suffering to Jesus in prayer and allow God space to work in their lives—allow them to have a personal encounter with Him, at the time He sees is best.

A number of years ago I had just this experience of helping someone recognize God’s work in their lives, and it had a profound impact on both me and the woman I was encouraging. Our neighbor, Dao,* a trained elementary school teacher, could not work because no one was willing to volunteer to babysit her several-month-old baby. As a result, she and her husband were living in her mother’s house while Dao’s husband worked as a day laborer to support the two of them, their baby, and Dao’s mother and mentally handicapped brother. Often overwhelmed with the weight of responsibility, Dao’s husband would disappear for days at a time, leaving Dao with no money to buy powdered infant milk formula for the baby or food for the family. During these times, Dao would come to our house and tell me of her woes and problems. She would cry on my shoulder as I hugged her, trying to soothe some of her heartache. I wanted to help. But I knew that outright financially sponsoring her family wasn’t the answer. Not knowing what to do, I would just listen and tell her that I would pray for the problems she shared with me during our visits. She knew and respected the fact that we were Christian, as did her mother, a practicing spirit medium. When I could, I would give her some rice, a small bag of vegetables, a couple of eggs, or a hand of bananas just to encourage her and let her know that we cared.

Then one day she came to my kitchen sobbing. She had recently discovered that she was pregnant. Her son was only ten months old, and now she had another one on the way. When her husband found out, he had become angry and left. He had been gone for several days, and now she was desperate. Not knowing what else to do, she brought her baby to me and asked us to raise him for her. She had already farmed out one child to another family before we moved into the home next to hers. She had told me often of the pain she felt being separated from him—not knowing where he was or how he was doing. Now, as she asked me to take her second son, I could imagine the tremendous burden she must be bearing to offer to give away another child. Praying for wisdom, I hugged her as her tears once again soaked my shoulder. What do you say? How do you heal the pain? I didn’t know. So I just listened.

When her sobs subsided, I told her that, while we could raise her son, it wouldn’t solve her problem. She needed a bigger and better solution than I could provide. So I prayed a simple prayer for her and promised to continue to pray for her. I also told her that she was welcome to come visit any time. While I couldn’t provide physical support, I hoped to be an emotional support and help her see where her true Help would come from.

Time passed, and eventually Dao had her baby. I had the privilege of driving her and her husband to the hospital when she went into labor and was one of the first to see her new baby boy when he was born.
And then the Buddhist New Year came. We were busy packing to move to another mission post, so we had skipped out of the three-day celebration of city-wide water fights as are common at this festival in a number of Southeast Asian countries. On the last day of the festival, Dao came to our door and asked to perform a special ceremony typically done with parents, grandparents, and other especially significant people in one’s life, such as a teacher or mentor. We were honored and humbled at her request and received her blessing as she poured water on our shoulder. When it came my turn to bless her, I was thinking about what words I should use to bless her. Dao’s life was still a mess—her husband had been gone for a number of weeks and was living with a girlfriend. Dao was now beginning the divorce process. She still had no work and no possibilities of work in the future.

She desperately needed help, but I didn’t know how to help. I only hoped that I could say something meaningful and yet not trite. So I asked for wisdom, and God answered my prayer, prompting me to say a simple blessing: “May the God who lives in heaven bless you with peace and contentment. May He give you happiness in your heart. And may God show Himself to you so that you come to know that He loves you as His daughter.”

I felt a bit awkward, I admit. But she accepted the blessing, gathered her things, and returned home. The next day, we left on a trip to visit fellow laborers in a nearby country. We weren’t surprised when Dao met us at our gate when we arrived home a week later. But we were shocked to see her smiling and almost giddy with excitement. As I got out of the car to unlock and open the gate, her story started bubbling out. “Your God is real! Your God is real!” she kept repeating. “I know He is real because He answered the blessing you prayed for me!” In the week that we had been gone, she had received a phone call from a school offering her a full-time job with daycare benefits for her children. Miraculously, the school was less than a kilometer from home, so she could easily commute on her bicycle. “I know your God is real,” she repeated. “He gave me a job!” We rejoiced with her and thanked God for His graciousness to her. But she continued, “That’s not all! Your God brought my husband home—he asked for forgiveness and asked me to accept him back! My husband is home, and he wants to be a family again!”

By now I was nearly in tears! What more could God have done to show her His love? Sadly, we moved from the country a few short weeks later, and I didn’t have the privilege of taking her to the next step in her spiritual experience with God. But I visited her a couple of years later, taking a church member with me—one whom God had touched in a very personal way and whose life had been transformed as a result. As Dao began to tell us of her troubles and trials, my friend interrupted her. “You need to meet Jesus,” she said. “He changed my life, and He wants to change yours too.”

Dao smiled. “I know that He is the true God, and I believe in Him. I just can’t openly follow Him right now because my mother won’t allow it.”

I was thrilled! Not only had God touched Dao in a personal way, but the personal experience was still very real in her life! I wish I could say that she has studied the
Bible with someone and is now a practicing Christian, but that hasn't happened yet. I continue to pray that God will bring someone into her life who will lead her to that next step. But until then, God is still very real to her.

Why is it that we don't experience more stories like Dao's? Could it be that we limit ourselves and prevent them from happening? Why is it that we desire to be like Jesus and help the poor, the sick, and the lame around us—and yet we bumble around, making excuses and blaming our failure to help on a lack of money, or resources, or doctors, or hospitals, or schools?

I believe that we set ourselves up for failure before we even begin. How? In order to “do evangelism” we think that we need to have a rented building to bring people to. We need to have Bibles and hymnals, tithe envelopes, a piano or guitar, and if we’re really “blessed,” someone who can play one of them! The Mission sends a paid pastor to do the evangelistic work of the church, and then we request funds from the Mission, which in turn requests funds from the Division—just so we can put a sign up on our newly rented building and call it a church. We provide everything—all with good intentions—without realizing that we are creating dependence on the church structure rather than on God. We unknowingly propagate the false idea that the church is here to serve and provide for us without realizing that we are the church. We take away the opportunity for God to prove Himself to us and to empower us to minister in real and effective ways in our communities. We lose the opportunity to create a healthy and well-founded dependence on God. Instead, we are like the children of Israel, looking around us and thinking that we need our own king—our own rich patron or organization to give us money so we can do mission. And we fail to understand that all we need is God, that He desperately wants to be our king, our patron.

We need to stop believing that helping others requires huge, expensive programs. We need to stop believing the lie that if we don’t take care of the problem ourselves, we’re not helping. Instead, we need to humbly recognize that often our best attempts to help in these ways only creates unhealthy dependency—dependency on money, dependency on time, dependency on people and limited human means. We must stop taking on the role of the Savior and recognize that we cannot save people from their needs, from their addictions, or from their dysfunction, no matter how hard we try or how much money we spend. Instead, what we are asked to do is to model what it means to depend on Christ and to serve as conduits for God’s blessing in their lives.

My husband recently was traveling in Myanmar and relayed a story to me about a Global Mission Pioneer who is doing this very thing. A young divorced Adventist mother of two young children was needing financial help to repair the tin roof on her one-room house. The pioneer, though of very limited means himself, had enough money to help her but told her, “If I give you the money you need for your roof, you will learn to depend on me instead of God. Instead, let’s pray that God will solve your problem.” A short time later, she received a brand new roof—courtesy of the
government. My husband met her too, and she beamed, “After God repaired my roof, I have confidence that He is looking out for me and won’t let anything happen to me without a special plan already in place for my family.”

That’s the kind of dependence we need to create! Dependence on God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills—the God who has the resources and means to solve every problem. A God who is keenly interested in personally encountering those who don’t know Him, and demonstrating His love and care in incredibly personal and meaningful ways. A God who wants to use us as His hands and mouths to bless others and restore broken relationships with Him.

May God bless us as we allow Him to change our perspective of poverty and willingly offer ourselves in His service to others.

Notes
* To protect her privacy, I am using a pseudonym.

REFERENCES
CHAPTER 7
SOWING THE DOCTRINES AS JESUS DID
Scott Griswold

Church planters and evangelists long for a great harvest from their efforts. Many look to the Bible as their handbook for success. One biblical day of great achievement was the day of Pentecost. What led to a baptism of three thousand individuals? We typically give the obvious answer that it was the Holy Spirit. But was it merely a mighty Spirit-filled message by Peter that led to the many conversions, or had there been seed sowing before this mighty harvest?

Ellen White writes,

The disciples were astonished and overjoyed at the greatness of the harvest of souls. They did not regard this wonderful ingathering as the result of their own efforts; they realized that they were entering into other men’s labors. Ever since the fall of Adam, Christ had been committing to chosen servants the seed of His word, to be sown in human hearts. During His life on this earth He had sown the seed of truth and had watered it with His blood. The conversions that took place on the Day of Pentecost were the result of this sowing, the harvest of Christ’s work, revealing the power of His teaching (White 1911:44).

This paper examines the way that Jesus sowed seeds of truth and applies it to the sowing of biblical doctrines among Buddhists.

JESUS’ VARIOUS METHODS OF SOWING
While Jesus spent significant time teaching and preaching, much of His communication was through His character and actions. During a time when there was much debate about what to do and not do on the Sabbath, the Scriptures do not record a single sermon by Jesus about Sabbath observance. Instead, He spent His Sabbaths healing the sick and setting captives free. Surely Sabbath became very meaningful to those He helped. A few simple words were inserted among those actions. His very
countenance expressed peace and restfulness even in the midst of conflict, inviting the people to find rest in the Creator.

Though the Jewish community was highly concerned about kosher foods, Jesus did not teach much about health. However, He demonstrated that God cares deeply about freeing them from pain and sickness through His miracles of healing. He led them to healthier lifestyles by inspiring and empowering sinners to break free from their bad habits and encouraging them to “sin no more.”

The great controversy between God and Satan was not a subject that Jesus discussed much. Instead He demonstrated the war, rescuing those who were bound by evil spirits. He fought the victory over Satan and temptation both in the wilderness and moment by moment. This battle was so vigorously fought that it was only won through His excruciating death and triumphant resurrection.

Jesus taught some essentials about the state of the dead by comparing it to sleep and through parables that illustrated the reality of heaven and the future judgment of hell. However, there is no record of a sermon in which He went into detail on these matters. Rather, Jesus demonstrated the truth of the resurrection by actually raising the dead and comforting those who mourned.

Jesus does not even give a full explanatory sermon about salvation. Instead of spelling out all the details, He forgave sins and helped people receive God’s power in their lives. Jesus challenged and empowered Peter to a life of faithfulness; He saved a woman caught in adultery; He forgave rough soldiers, murderous thieves, and shrewd religious leaders while dying for their sins.

Even the truths about the judgment and the heavenly sanctuary were not so much taught as lived by Jesus. He died like an innocent lamb, rose again, and ascended to be anointed as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Since then He has added His intercession to every prayer offered in faith. He is now actively judging, moving in people’s hearts to cleanse them from sin, and preparing a people for His coming.

These examples clearly show that Jesus sowed the seeds of truth not only through His teachings but through His character and actions.

This emphasis should not downplay the importance and power of His words. When He spoke, it was with such authority that the people were astonished (Matthew 7:28, 29). Jesus Himself said that only the people who built on His teachings would survive (Matthew 7:24, 27). However, contrary to the practice of many theologians both of His time and since, most of His teachings included storytelling. The Bible says, “And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them” (Mark 4:33, 34, NKJV).

Finally, in all of His sowing of truth, Jesus relied upon His Father through prayer (Mark 1:35; 6:46; 9:29).

Jesus’ years of seed sowing resulted in an incredible harvest at Pentecost. We can seek similar effectiveness by applying the same four principles to our ministry, namely (1) character, (2) actions, (3) storytelling or testimonies, and (4) intercession. These areas
match Jesus’ statement that the Holy Spirit is the great necessity for taking the gospel to every corner of the world (Acts 1:8). The Bible emphasizes the following areas that directly correspond to the four principles listed above: (1) fruits of the Spirit, 2) gifts of the Spirit, (3) tongues of the Spirit, and (4) aid of the Holy Spirit in our prayers. The following pages will examine these aspects in light of specific biblical doctrines.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Buddhists do not have a specific doctrine of belief in God. Some are atheistic in their beliefs, rejecting all forms of gods and spiritual beings. Others are quite polytheistic, believing in many gods and spirits, similar to their Hindu forerunners. Many teach that the Buddha considered the knowledge of God as the unknowable thing and that the emphasis should be placed instead on following the path of truth.

In this context, when Christians merely make declarations about the existence of God, they often fall unheeded and unbelieved. However, research has shown clearly that the greatest majority of Buddhists come to believe in God through two means: the character of friends or family, and personal encounters with the power and love of God.2

1. SOW SEEDS OF BELIEF IN GOD THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER

It is therefore effective to sow seeds of belief in God through the character of the Christian witness. The following list presents examples in which God’s follower can show His character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Things They See in Christians Are</th>
<th>the Things They Learn About God</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concern for their problems</td>
<td>God has compassion for those who suffered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>God has power and answers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>God is longsuffering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>God’s Word is true</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping promises</td>
<td>God’s promises can be trusted</td>
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<td>Forgiveness of enemies</td>
<td>God forgives sin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joy in the face of trials</td>
<td>God is good even though suffering exists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rejection of sin yet a life of joy</td>
<td>God’s law leads to joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection and care</td>
<td>God is a good protector and provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty of friends</td>
<td>God is faithful and never forsakes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. SOW SEEDS OF BELIEF IN GOD THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS

Think about your Buddhist friend’s needs. They may include:

- Health problems
- Worries, fears, or stress
• Unmet hopes and dreams
• Habits they can’t break
• Financial problems
• Family conflict
• Harmful spiritual practices or harassment
• Grief

As a Christian reaches out to care for the needs of a Buddhist, that individual can much more easily believe that God also cares about her and has answers for her problems.

3. SOW SEEDS OF BELIEF IN GOD THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS

Your prayers give God the opportunity to reveal both His power and His love to Buddhists. One way to become more effective in prayer is by writing the names of friends in a notebook. You can ask if there is anything you can pray for and write it down. Find promises from the Bible and write them beside the needs. Pray for your friend daily by yourself or with your family. Invite other Christians to pray with you at church or prayer meeting or in a small group at home. Expect God to reveal Himself remarkably through this intercession. Ask your Buddhist friend if you can pray with her and teach her to pray as well.

4. SOW SEEDS OF BELIEF IN GOD THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

People are changed by stories. Your most effective witnessing words are connected to what God has done for you. Look at the list of human needs above. Think of a testimony of your own, or a story you have heard, that shows how God solves problems similar to what your friend has.

THE DOCTRINE OF EVIL SPIRITS

Though the Buddha taught people to avoid magic, superstition, and involvement with spirits, many times Buddhist people know more about such things than about Buddhist teaching. There is often a great fear of spirits, and much is done to seek protection from these things.

The Bible has clear teachings regarding the origin of these evil spirits, showing that they are not humans who have died but are angels created by God who later rebelled against Him. The Scriptures show that appearing spirits are a deception by the evil spirits, since all who die sleep in the grave until Jesus returns. These are truths that need to be communicated effectively to Buddhist people.

1. SOW SEEDS ABOUT EVIL SPIRITS THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER

To be effective, it is essential that the Christian be free from the power of evil spirits. This may be taken for granted; however, many times Christians still have not fully renounced and turned from various connections with past cultural practices and may turn to them in times of need. God desires each of His children to fully rely on
His power and be free from evil spirits entirely through Jesus’ death at the cross (see Colossians 2:15; Revelation 12:11).

Each Christian, with his or her family, should examine their past and present practices in light of God’s word about spiritualistic practices, turning from such things as:3

- Offering incense, money, food, etc., to spirits, angels, ancestors, or gods
- Trying to know the future through fortune-tellers, horoscopes, etc.
- Seeking blessings or healing through powers outside of God
- Using amulets, tattoos, martial arts, or other forms of spiritual protection
- Placing a curse or spell on someone
- Engaging in meditation that empties the mind or seeks to contact spirits
- Listening to a spirit speak through a medium or a séance4
- Playing games that have to do with spirits, magic, or seeking power
- Watching movies or reading stories related to spirits or magic

2. SOW SEEDS ABOUT EVIL SPIRITS THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS

For many Buddhists, the funeral is an extremely important time for controlling the potentially harmful influence of the spirit of the person who has died. Since a Christian cannot actively participate in the merit-making and spirit-related parts of the Buddhist ceremonies, other compassionate actions are important in order to express our love. You might help to fix food for the family or provide a place for relatives to stay. You can frequently visit the family at the temple. Visiting the family after the funeral is over will especially help them through their time of mourning.

You can also deliberately plan your Christian funerals in a way that teaches the truth about humans and spirits. Emphasize the hope of meeting again through faith in Jesus’ death and by the resurrection at Jesus’ coming. Pray that no evil spirits will bother anyone, pretending to be this person’s spirit. Show love and kindness with joy to anyone attending.

3. SOW SEEDS ABOUT EVIL SPIRITS THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS

Pray for the evil spirits to go away when someone is possessed. Power over evil spirits is clearly a gift God has given to all of His followers (Mark 16:17). We should humbly but confidently be ready to pray for those who are possessed. Others are not possessed but are harassed by spirits that cause them to hear strange noises, see strange things, or have unusual pain or illness. God can also make this stop, and we should readily offer to pray for people who are having troubles.

Other people have difficulty sleeping or are afraid to go to certain places or live in a home because of fear of spirits. We can pray for them and teach them how to pray.

4. SOW SEEDS ABOUT EVIL SPIRITS THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

Tell stories of how God has delivered people from the power of evil spirits. Tell how people were helped who got rid of various connections to evil spirits. In this context, share
stories from the Bible about Jesus casting out evil spirits. Tell also the great controversy story between God and Satan, showing how Satan and the evil spirits have deliberately tried to turn people away from the knowledge and worship of the true God by leading people to various lies about spirits, idols, reincarnation, and so forth.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Many Buddhists are concerned about what will happen to them at death. They have been taught the reality of karma and the reality of reward and punishment for every deed. Some temples have very visual depictions of hell, showing the exact tortures for specific sins. Even if a person has been careful to live morally, there is the uncertainty of what consequences might yet come to them from wrongdoing in a previous life. These beliefs and feelings create a fertile soil for sowing the seeds of salvation.

1. SOW SEEDS ABOUT SALVATION THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER

One of the ways for a Buddhist to begin understanding salvation is by knowing a Christian who is experiencing it. When a person turns from sin and receives forgiveness, his heart no longer condemns him. This creates a confidence in the face of death that is observable and attractive (1 John 3:21). A Buddhist may see this in a Christian who is terminally ill but not afraid to die. Or they may notice the peace and lack of fear of a Christian friend while on a boat during a frightening storm.

The transformation of a self-centered sinner into a compassionate Christian is another powerful evidence of salvation. Jesus died not only to forgive sins but also to make new creations (2 Corinthians 5:14–21). We must make sure we are walking in the righteousness and the victory so freely provided.

2. SOW SEEDS ABOUT SALVATION THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS

This is the simple outgrowth of the transformation of the heart.

3. SOW SEEDS ABOUT SALVATION THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS

Whenever a Buddhist friend is struggling with fears about death or the difficulty to change his heart or actions, a Christian has the privilege of praying toward salvation. Buddhists can experience God’s grace and power in small ways long before they are asked to surrender their life to Jesus and receive His gift of eternal life. They can be taught to pray for God to forgive their sins and give them power.

4. SOW SEEDS ABOUT SALVATION THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

Your own testimony of what God has done for you is the most powerful thing you can verbally share. Secondarily are the stories of others who have been converted. Seek to match the needs of your Buddhist friends to real-life stories of how God has changed lives. The more they hear these stories, especially in the context of people
who are similar to them, the easier it will be for them to believe it can be true for them as well.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SABBATH

Buddhists have their “moon days” or their “days of the monk,” in which certain people devote themselves to the precepts of Buddhism. They value times and places of quietude and rest. They recognize the need to turn from materialism to seek things that last. In that context, there are many attractive similarities regarding the seventh-day Sabbath.

1. SOW SEEDS ABOUT THE SABBATH THROUGH CHARACTER

To share adequately with your Buddhist friends about the Sabbath, you must experience true rest in Christ. It is not enough to stop work and worldly activities on Saturday. You must learn to cease from sin and self through a reliance on the creative and saving power of Jesus. Only His re-creation of your heart can make you holy enough to keep the Sabbath holy. As you move away from stress and self-efforts toward salvation, your Buddhist friends will see a peace and joy that is attractive.

2. SOW SEEDS ABOUT THE SABBATH THROUGH ACTIONS

Activities in nature are attractive to many Buddhists, who have been taught to learn lessons through observation. Take a friend with you for a Sabbath afternoon nature outing. If you don’t live in the countryside, you can visit a zoo or a park. You can even do this with a nature book or a video. Look for moral lessons from the things you see, asking such questions as the following:

- What good morals can I learn from nature about how people should or should not act and live?
- What does nature teach me about sin, suffering, and how those things have affected the world?
- At the right time, talk about the necessity of there being a Designer and Teacher behind what you have seen in nature and learned about morality. You can then ask the question about what you have seen:
- What does nature teach me about the God who made the world?

Activities of compassion will be attractive to Buddhist friends. Take them with you to visit the lonely and the sick on Sabbath. Take some fruit, sing a song, tell a story, do anything kind that will bring cheer. As your Buddhist friend helps you care for other people, he will experience joy.

As you care for the sick, you may tell stories about Jesus’ healing and then pray for the ill person. Your Buddhist friend will learn about the Creator God in the context of someone with real need. He will learn through an actual demonstration what Jesus meant when He asked, “ ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?’ ” (Mark 3:4).
The Sabbath is God’s gift to the entire family. The fourth commandment specifically urges that every member be included (Exodus 20:8–11). You may wish to invite entire families to join you in the above activities so that whole families can be drawn closer to their heavenly Father and to each other.

Sabbath is also a day that God made for taking care of the poor. He wants not only the rich but the hard-working poor to have a weekly vacation. That is why He specifically commanded that the manservant and maidservant not work—and why He emphasized Israel’s history of enslavement (Deuteronomy 5:12–15).

You might find a poor person and offer them a one-time experience of Sabbath rest. You might offer to take care of a single mother’s children on a Saturday so that she can have a rest. If it’s acceptable with her, take her children to church, followed by a nature activity in the afternoon. Your friend may have many errands she wants to do, but encourage her to also take some quiet time for reading. Give her something good to read that will help her know the God who can be like a Father to her and her children.

You could find a poor and tired peddler on a Friday. Ask him how much he sells each day. Tell him about the God who likes people to rest on Sabbath and then offer to buy one day’s worth of his goods so he can take off the next day and rest. Tell him what you do on the rest day. He may even be interested in joining you at church or during a nature activity.

You might offer to take over for someone who is a caregiver for an elderly, bedridden parent. Watch over the parent, and encourage the son or daughter to relax or get something done that he or she never is able to get to.

3. SOW SEEDS ABOUT THE SABBATH THROUGH PRAYERS

The Sabbath is also a day for worshipping God. You can invite your Buddhist friends to experience this at church, in nature, or in your home. Ask them what needs they have and pray for them specifically. Let them join you for quiet meditation and prayer on this day, and they will experience rest.

4. SOW SEEDS ABOUT THE SABBATH THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

Talk about how your health, your stress, and your family relationships have been helped by keeping the Sabbath. Tell stories of how God has provided for people who have chosen to not work on Saturday. Invite them to try it and see how God blesses them.

THE DOCTRINE OF FINAL EVENTS

Many Buddhists believe in a day of final judgment and destruction for the world. Some believe in the coming of a final messiah. Much teaching emphasizes the temporary, passing nature of all earthly things. In this context there is much about the doctrine of final events that can speak to Buddhists.
1. SOW SEEDS ABOUT FINAL EVENTS THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER

Your character will show what you truly believe about the soon coming of Jesus. What do you spend your money on? How do you spend your time? Does what you do draw you closer to God? If you knew Jesus was coming tomorrow, what would you do differently today? What about your body temple? Are you choosing to live healthfully so you have health, strength, and the mental capacity to face the challenges of the last days of earth's history?

2. SOW SEEDS ABOUT FINAL EVENTS THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS

The message of final events includes Jesus’ return to rescue those who trust Him, to bring an end to suffering, and to repay people for their actions—right and wrong. You can help Buddhists know about this truth by your present actions of justice and mercy. You can be involved in rescuing children who are caught in slavery or prostitution. You can give them shelter and love and teach them life skills. You can help the poor be free from poverty by helping them gain an education, a job, or just some food. You might support a young pregnant girl not have an abortion and provide her with love, shelter, and a home for her child. You might work to reestablish justice in a corrupt system. These things will point Buddhists to the reality of what Christ is about to do.

3. SOW SEEDS ABOUT FINAL EVENTS THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS

Our doctrine of final events includes Jesus’ last work of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary. We can point to this through the earnestness of our prayers. This can happen anywhere, showing Buddhists that there is no need for an altar or shrine for their prayers.

We can also turn our churches or backyards into places of prayer, beautified with some flowers and a mat, but simple so that the emphasis stays on God and not the environment.

4. SOW SEEDS ABOUT FINAL EVENTS THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

Since you cannot testify about the actual events of the final days yet, you can share the freedom you have found in living a life totally devoted to God. As Buddhist friends see your purposeful living and simple joys, they will be drawn toward what they already know a Buddhist should be doing but perhaps have not yet experienced.

THE DOCTRINE OF HEALTHFUL LIVING

Buddhism forbids alcohol use as one of its top five precepts. It encourages vegetarianism through its belief that all of life is sacred. The emphasis on reward and punishment for good and bad deeds can easily be applied to a holistic health emphasis. In this context there is much possibility for sowing truth about healthful living.
1. SOW SEEDS ABOUT HEALTHFUL LIVING THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER

A Buddhist will first look at you to see if you are experiencing good health. So seek to improve your own health by following God’s biblical plan. Each of us has a selfish appetite that likes what tastes and feels good. But as we overcome these tendencies through Christ’s power and gain a healthier lifestyle, Buddhists will notice and want the same.

2. SOW SEEDS ABOUT HEALTHFUL LIVING THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS

People find it difficult to make changes on their own. Your Buddhist friends will appreciate you helping them do healthful activities by doing activities together. Invite them to exercise with you. Go for a walk, swim, play badminton, or join a fitness center together. You might grow a garden together. In these settings you will have time to become closer friends. In the garden you can talk about the many spiritual lessons you can discover in planting, weeding, and harvesting.

Invite Buddhist friends to your home to learn how to cook healthfully. Demonstrate how to do it and then let them try until they grow in confidence that they too can make delicious food that is healthy. You can also teach them in their homes and thus have opportunities to help their family members value the same things.

You might even enjoy promoting a health contest at work. You could have people keep track of how much water they drink, placing the results on a chart. You could have a “Save the Chickens” contest and see how long you can all go without eating chicken (or some other meat or fish), keeping track of how many animals you saved.

Ask your Buddhist friend if anyone in her family has diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, etc. Then talk together about what natural remedies and healthy habits can help their family member. Plan together how to help that individual make changes.

Invite your Buddhist friend to visit a sick person with you. Help the sick individual by using a natural remedy and teaching them principles of healthful living. As your friend watches you care for the sick, he will be drawn to want to be healthier too.

You might start a youth club that does good deeds in the community and rejects the use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.

3. SOW SEEDS ABOUT HEALTHFUL LIVING THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS

The more your Buddhist friends learn about health and are motivated to change, the greater will be your opportunities to pray for them to make those difficult changes. They will see answers to their prayers. At other times you will be able to pray for miraculous healings and see God do great wonders. God will use your prayers to demonstrate His care for their health.

4. SOW SEEDS ABOUT HEALTHFUL LIVING THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

Tell your Buddhist friends testimonies of how God healed someone through prayer, a natural remedy, or by following the Bible’s counsel on health. Tell them how God helped various people make difficult changes, like quitting smoking, drinking, or eating meat.
Tell them that these people learned about healthful living from the ancient scriptures called the Bible, and show them specific texts about healthful food (e.g., Genesis 1), unclean foods (Leviticus and Deuteronomy), dangers of eating too much sugar (Proverbs 25:16, 27), having a joyful heart, drinking alcohol, forgiving others, etc.

THE DOCTRINE OF STEWARDSHIP

Buddhists believe they can make merit through good actions, and they have plenty of opportunities to contribute to the temple, schools, and community. Buddhists are familiar with a life emphasis of giving. This also is a fertile field through which truths can be shared.

1. SOW SEEDS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER

You can live a lifestyle that Buddhists appreciate. Try to avoid wasting your money on unnecessary things. You can give your tithe each time you make some money and give money, possessions, and time generously to help others. Demonstrate peace by praying about your financial difficulties, living peacefully, and trusting your heavenly Father. Be content with what you have, and praise God for every blessing, even if it is small.

Remember that even if your friends do not see you do these things, you will gain personal experiences with the power and love of God that you will be able to later share with them.

2. SOW SEEDS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP THROUGH ACTIONS

Invite your Buddhist friends to give their money to help a poor person, to build a school, or anything that you think they will enjoy helping with. Invite them to go with you to help somebody, taking food to the sick, repairing a widow’s house, volunteering to teach someone to read, etc.

Help your Buddhist friends to make a budget that includes how much they should spend, save, and give each month. Show them the Bible’s counsel about finances in relation to each of these areas. Invite them to make an experiment of tithing and see what God will do for them.

3. SOW SEEDS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS

As you learn about your Buddhist friends’ financial worries and hopes, ask if you can pray for them. Pray for God to bless their businesses and jobs. Make a point of praying for them when they start a new job or business venture.

Invite your Buddhist friends to pray and show them how. Since many financial problems come from people’s mistakes such as greediness or foolishness in spending, learn their weaknesses. Then pray for them and teach them how to change through God’s power.

4. SOW SEEDS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP THROUGH YOUR TESTIMONIES

Tell them stories about people who have experienced God’s miraculous providence as a result of their generosity or tithing. Tell them stories of people who helped others
and the joy it brought to both sides. Share with them Bible stories of how God provided for people as they trusted Him.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT SOFTENS THE SOIL AND MAKES THE SEEDS GROW**

There are other biblical truths that can be applied in the same way. However, any of the above ideas for sowing truth can become mere methods if there is not a solid reliance upon the power of God. When the practical methods become channels through which the Holy Spirit flows, He creates a dynamic experience with truth. He alone can convict, convert, and bring maturity.

Jesus made the clear connection between His ministry and the Holy Spirit in Luke 4:18, 19:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Every aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry was a direct result of His being filled with the Spirit. It must be the same for us.

A review of Acts 2 shows a similar ministry when the Holy Spirit filled the disciples. The Holy Spirit empowered the church to be the truth, transforming the disciples’ hearts. They had favor with all the people because of their Christ-like characters. They had a unified, loving relationship among them as they daily ate together and enjoyed fellowship, prayer, praise, and service to others. The Holy Spirit empowered the church to live the truth, giving spiritual gifts that resulted in healing the sick, casting out spirits, and sharing generously. The Holy Spirit empowered the church to speak the truth, preaching with dynamic testimonies and stories. His tongues of fire made the message of the cross incredibly powerful.

Clearly the Holy Spirit is the answer for a finished work. We need the Holy Spirit’s power in greater fullness. Let us seek for that power by praying this to be our ongoing and growing experience. Let us take up the challenge to integrate Jesus’ methods of sowing truth into every one of our lives, churches, and institutions. God will send the latter rain to bring such a work to a beautiful harvest.

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**Notes**

1. Scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

2. For example, see Khamsay Phetchareun (June 2005), *Presenting the Gospel Message in Thailand*, dissertation, Andrews University; Surachet Insom (November 2008), *A Comparative Study between the Teaching and Compassion Model of Jesus with Buddhists*

3. See also Deuteronomy 4:19; Revelation 21:8.

4. See Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Leviticus 20:6, 27.

5. Start with the health principles found in NEWSTART: healthful eating (Nutrition), Exercise, drinking clean Water, enjoying time in the Sunshine, resisting drugs and alcohol (Temperance), enjoying fresh Air, getting adequate Rest, and choosing to put your Trust in God.

REFERENCES

CHAPTER 8
CURRENT MISSION CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES IN BUDDHIST CONTEXTS

Gregory P. Whitsett

INTRODUCTION

Presenting the gospel in the Buddhist world has not been an easy task. There remain millions of Buddhists who have little to no witness of the gospel of Christ. In a highly motivating video series produced for Adventist Mission titled “I Want This City,” Jon Wood shadows Doug Venn, who, at that time, was director of the Hope for Bangkok mission initiative. In one episode, Achariya (Koi) Saephan is shown interviewing visitors in Bangkok’s famous Lumpini Park, asking if they know anything about Jesus Christ. Shockingly, a street vendor, a police officer, and a couple of university students admit they don’t. How can it be that Buddhists living in one of Asia’s greatest cities have no awareness of Christ?

This paper takes a look at the beginnings of both Protestant and Seventh-day Adventist mission in Buddhist lands and studies current membership statistics. It suggests key challenges that are negatively impacting successful Adventist mission and then appeals for increased understanding, resources, coordination, and prayer to reach these children of God.

THE BEGINNINGS OF PROTESTANT AND ADVENTIST MISSION TO BUDDHISTS

Modern Christian mission was one of the fruits of the First and Second Great Awakenings of the European and North American Protestant church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Perhaps the pivotal moment came in August 1806, when five students at Williams College in Massachusetts, USA, met in a grove to pray for world missions. These five had been inspired by the reports of William Carey’s labors in India and wanted to consider what they could do to support the gospel going into all lands. Within six years they had formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission.
The wave of Protestant Christian mission to the Buddhist world began in the early 1800s with Robert Morrison of Britain and Adoniram Judson of America. With the help of Wikipedia, especially its article titled, “Timeline of Christian Missions,” and with the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, we can patch together a helpful, if incomplete, picture of the beginnings of Protestant and Adventist mission to the Buddhist world. See Table 1 below.

The list of dates and activities in Table 1 fails to reflect the difficulties these missionaries experienced. Much of this initial missionary engagement was in the form of itinerant preaching and the distribution of literature—activities that met with very meager results. For example, Karl Gützlaff of Germany was the first Protestant missionary to Thailand. He stayed but briefly and had no conversions to show for his labors. In 1831, American Congregational missionaries arrived, and after 18 years of missionary labor they also withdrew, leaving behind no converts. They were followed by American Presbyterian missionaries in 1840, who labored 14 years before their first harvest. Altogether it took 32 years of labor—nearly an entire generation of work—before the first Thai disciples were baptized.

### Table 1: Commonly Recognized Beginning Points in Protestant and SDA Mission in Buddhist Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>PROTESTANT MISSIONS</th>
<th>SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAMBODIA</td>
<td>1911, Christian &amp; Missionary Alliance sent first Protestant missionaries to Cambodia</td>
<td>1937, Robert Bentz arrived to open a school and maternity clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINA</td>
<td>1807, Robert Morrison arrived as first Protestant missionary in China</td>
<td>1888, Abram LaRue began work in Hong Kong and then mainland China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAPAN</td>
<td>1837, first translation of the Bible into Japanese (done in Singapore); 1859, John Liggins, first Protestant missionary arrived in Japan</td>
<td>1889, Abram LaRue visits Japan from China with tracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOREA</td>
<td>1832, Karl Gützlaff distributes Chinese Bibles in Korea; 1865, first Protestant missionaries (Robert Jermain Thomas) move to Korea</td>
<td>1904, Son Heung Cho, a Korean baptized in Japan, returned to Korea with truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAOS</td>
<td>1902, Plymouth Brethren Christian Missions in Many Lands (CMML) enter Laos</td>
<td>1957, Richard Hall with N. M. Lansri and A. Pangan worked in northern Laos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONGOLIA</td>
<td>1870, first Protestant missionaries (James Gilmour) to Mongolia</td>
<td>1926, first missionaries from Russia attempt literature work from China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seventh-day Adventist missionary work entered Buddhist lands in 1888. Abram LaRue, a 65-year-old shepherd and woodcutter, submitted his application for foreign service to the General Conference but was rejected for his age and the lack of means to support him. Undeterred, LaRue negotiated his passage on a ship going to Hong Kong whose captain took him on as a worker. Upon arrival in Asia, LaRue became the Adventist Church’s first self-supporting missionary. He used literature evangelism as his means of livelihood and for spreading the gospel. A year later, Elder Stephen Haskell conducted an official round-the-world missionary tour, which included Buddhist lands, in 1889 and 1890.

Graph 1 (on following page) shows the interval of time between the first entry of Protestant missionaries into each Buddhist country and the first Seventh-day Adventist entrance. While this shows that Adventists first arrived in Buddhists lands about two generations, or eighty years, after Protestant missionaries, one must remember that the Adventist Church wasn’t founded until 1863 and didn’t send out its first missionary—John Nevins Andrews—until 1874, nine years later. The church sent its first missionaries to Buddhist countries 25 years after its founding, which demonstrates the great mission spirit of our church’s pioneers, who were limited in members and means but not limited in their dedication and sacrifice for God’s cause.
MISSION RESULTS IN BUDDHIST COUNTRIES

But simply looking at the activity and outputs of sending missionaries who carry out missionary activity in Buddhist countries does not mean that there has been missionary success. For that we need to look for the outcomes of people expressing faith in Christ, which, at this point, we quantify through the membership records and the rate of Christian expansion.

The Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life published a report titled, *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population* (Pew Research Center 2011). The report shows that from 1910 to 2010, there was major Christian growth in many parts of the world—fruit of the European and American Great Awakenings of the nineteenth century. Specifically, the Christian population increased in each world region, with the most remarkable growth happening in South America and sub-Saharan Africa, where the Christian population increased from 9 percent in 1910 to 62 percent one hundred years later. By comparison, Christians made up 3 percent of the Asia-Pacific population in 1910. One hundred years later that number had increased to just 7 percent. The only region with a lower percentage of Christians in 2010 was the Middle East/North Africa region, where Christianity makes up a mere 4 percent of the population.

Table 2 (below) summarizes data I gleaned from *The World Factbook* and the 2014 Statistical Report from the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Annual Council. In these selected Buddhist countries, there is a current estimated total population of 1.85 billion people. The total Christian population, which includes both Catholic and Protestant denominations, represents 5.49 percent of the total, of which 750,000 (or 0.04 percent) are Seventh-day Adventist. That amounts to one
Seventh-day Adventist for every 2,463 people, compared to the worldwide average of one Adventist for every 392 people. While we are thankful for the fruit born from the evangelistic efforts of our church, we should be sobered by these numbers.

Table 2: Population of Christians and SDAs by Country (The World Factbook 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>BUDDHISTS</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ALL CHRISTIANS</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>SDAs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BHUTAN</td>
<td>733,643</td>
<td>616,260</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>12,255</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMBODIA</td>
<td>15,458,332</td>
<td>14,979,124</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>61,833</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>6,164</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINA</td>
<td>1,355,692,576</td>
<td>246,736,049</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>69,140,321</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>419,378</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAPAN</td>
<td>127,103,388</td>
<td>90,751,819</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>2,542,068</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>12,255</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOREA</td>
<td>49,039,986</td>
<td>11,867,677</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15,496,636</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>236,345</td>
<td>0.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAOS</td>
<td>6,803,699</td>
<td>4,558,478</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>102,055</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2,139</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONGOLIA</td>
<td>2,953,190</td>
<td>1,565,191</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>64,970</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1,986</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYANMAR</td>
<td>55,746,253</td>
<td>49,614,165</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>2,229,850</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>28,082</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAL</td>
<td>30,986,975</td>
<td>2,788,828</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>433,818</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>8,859</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGAPORE</td>
<td>5,567,301</td>
<td>1,887,315</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>1,007,681</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>2,916</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRI LANKA</td>
<td>21,866,445</td>
<td>15,109,713</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>1,355,720</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>2,757</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAIWAN</td>
<td>23,359,928</td>
<td>21,724,733</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1,051,197</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6,077</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAILAND</td>
<td>67,741,401</td>
<td>63,405,951</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>812,897</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>14,936</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIETNAM (Pew Res. Cen. 2010)</td>
<td>93,421,835</td>
<td>15,321,181</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7,660,590</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>11,314</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,856,474,952</td>
<td>540,926,484</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>101,971,892</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>753,845</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These statistics are sobering, yet they don’t show an accurate picture of Buddhist missionary work specifically. While these countries listed are dominant Buddhist lands, they include significant populations of animist, Muslim, Hindu, and atheist people groups. To accurately assess our effectiveness in making disciples for Christ among Buddhist Asians, we must look at other factors.

**BUDDHIST PEOPLE GROUPS**

W. Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, and Donald McGavran, founder of Fuller Theological Seminary’s School of World Mission, have been credited with focusing Protestant Christianity’s attention on ethnic populations or people groups rather than nations as defined by political boundaries. Their motivation was the mission cause of reaching all tribes and languages with the gospel. Emphasis was placed on such Bible texts as the gospel commission of Matthew 28:18–20—“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (v. 19, NKJV)—and its Greek phrase, “panta ta ethne,” which refers to a cultural people or ethnicity.
In March 1982, an interdenominational consortium of mission leaders gathered in Chicago, Illinois, USA, sponsored by the Lausanne Strategy Working Group. During the two-day meeting, the term *people group* was defined as “a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combinations of these” (Joshua Project: “What Is a People Group?”). Looking at people groups from the perspective of missions, they defined people groups as “the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”

With this adjusted focus on people groups, Christian mission became absorbed in identifying the world’s people groups, determining their evangelization status, and sending missionaries into each of these groups to complete the gospel commission. With the approach of the new millennium in the year 2000, there was a great emphasis on completing the gospel commission, targeting what was called “unreached people groups” or those with “no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize [their own] people group.”

Today, the U.S. Center for World Mission makes the information regarding the world’s people groups available through Joshua Project, where there are extensive data and cultural profiles on 9,756 people groups in the world today. Of these, Joshua Project identifies 270 Buddhist people groups in the world, totaling more than 380 million people. The question we need to ask now is, “How is Christian mission fairing amongst these Buddhist people groups?”

In *Peoples of the Buddhist World*, Paul Hattaway spotlights 238 major Buddhist ethnolinguistic groups. Hattaway summarizes the data in the introduction to his book according to the three schools of Buddhism. He identifies 23 ethnolinguistic groups in the Mahāyāna (mah-HAH-YAH-nah) school. These groups are primarily found in China and East Asia and number 1.7 billion people. In this school he reports a much lower percentage of the population as being professed Buddhists. Inversely, these Buddhist groups have the highest number of Christians, with a combined population of 6.9 percent—the same percentage for all of the Asia-Pacific population reported in Pew Research Center’s 2011 report mentioned above (Hattaway 2004: xx-xxv). Remember, this is the second-lowest population of Christians for all world regions. In contrast, people groups in the other two schools of Buddhism show a strikingly lower Christian population. The Theravāda (teh-rah-VAH-dah ) school of South and Southeast Asia consists of 86 groups with a total population of 153 million people. The Vajrayāna (vahj-rah-YAH-nah) or Tibetan school consists of 129 groups in the Himalayas and steppes of China and Mongolia and is relatively small, with only 23 million people. Only 0.8 percent of these people are Christian. These statistics make it quite clear that Buddhist people are not highly responsive to Christian evangelism. See Table 3 below.
I have tried to determine Seventh-day Adventist populations in each Buddhist people group and could find information only from the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD), which completed a research project in 2011 titled “Unreached Peoples Identified.” The SSD Office for Adventist Mission contracted with Global Frontiers International to conduct this survey and to create maps identifying and categorizing the status of Adventist mission in each people group. The results have been a success in terms of raising awareness of the needs and motivating decisions to invest greater resources in reaching the unreached people groups.

As I reviewed the data, however, I found a number of problems with the accuracy of the numbers. First, I noticed that the SDA populations were rounded, and in some cases they were rounded to the nearest fifty, hundred, or thousand people. For example, the Myanmar Union Mission reported 500 Burmese, 14,000 Karen, and 4,000 Chin Adventists. Also I found that some groups are misidentified. For example, the Thailand Mission reported 4,700 ethnic Burmese Adventists in Thailand, when in reality this population is made up primarily of Karen refugees along the Thailand-Myanmar border. The reason for these mistakes is largely due to the way the research was conducted. It appears that much of the data was supplied by estimation rather than through a direct survey of the members.

If we assume that the ratio of Adventists to all Christians in the Buddhist people groups is the same as the ratio of Adventists to all Christians in each Asian country listed above, we could try to “guestimate” the Adventist population in each of the three schools. Perhaps, then, our numbers look something like this:

- 854,000 Adventists in Mahāyāna Buddhist people groups
- 8,900 Adventists in Theravāda Buddhist people groups
- 1,355 Adventists in Vajrayāna Buddhist people groups.

Information that we can’t estimate is how many of the predominately Buddhist people groups have an indigenous and growing body of believers and at what rate they are growing. Also, we have no data on what percentage of these members grew up in Christian homes and what percentage has converted from Buddhism. Because we have so many unknowns, it is hard to determine our effectiveness as a church in making disciples for Christ among Buddhists. Instead we rely on personal and
anecdotal information to evaluate our progress. If we are indeed involved in a mission that is offering sinners redemption and eternal life in the earth made new, it would seem that better assessment methods would be worth the investment.

CRITICAL MISSION CHALLENGES

So far we have emphasized several factors that must be kept in mind if we are going to successfully make disciples in Buddhist contexts. The assumption here is that no matter what field we are working in, we need the in-filling and purifying presence of the Holy Spirit to make us fit vessels for proclaiming God’s mercy and coming judgment.

1. WORLDVIEW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADVENTISTS AND BUDDHISTS.

As we have already discussed, Adventists have a theme of conflict, deception, and rebellion as the origin of sin and suffering. Adventists also accept the Scriptures inspired by God as the authoritative truth that aids sinners in connecting with their Savior—the only source of salvation and hope for a pain-free eternal life in the new earth.

On the other hand, Buddhists have a theme of suffering caused by constant change or impermanence, desires or clinging, and the illusion of individuality or self. Paradoxically, the solution to this problem lies within one’s self and the disciplines of ethical living, proper understandings, and meditation, which eventually result in the attainment of enlightenment and passage to nirvāṇa (Pali; nibbāna), a condition where the three fires of greed (or craving), hatred, and delusion cease. Furthermore, while a lay disciple takes refuge in Buddha, the dharma (the teachings attributed to Buddha), and the sangha (the community of religious mendicants), he is to trust his own experience and senses, which logically point to the right path. In fact, the Kesaputti Sutta in the Pali Canon records a time when Buddha instructed the Kalamas to sort through the myriad voices of sectarian ascetics by testing their teachings through the logic established by their experience in life. By doing so, they could avoid deceptive teachings from supposedly good people.

As I mentioned in the opening presentation regarding “Achieving Success in Mission in Buddhist Contexts,” the differences between the Adventist and Buddhist worldviews can be compared to the differences between the sports of football and golf. Christianity, like football, focuses on a showdown between two teams—good and evil—and requires close relationship with the Captain and team of players as well as a thorough understanding the Scriptures. Buddhism, however, is like golf and focuses on self and the development of skills and competencies identified through one’s experience as being essential to “win.” With Buddhism there is no opposing force to blame for humanity’s predicament and neither is there an external foe.

This being the case, when Adventists focus primarily on the study of Scripture as a narrative of the great controversy, it is all rather foreign to Buddhists. They instinctively filter this new information through their life experience and may find some degree of “truth” in the storyline, but generally see that it is at odds with what they “know”
about life and their needs. In essence, it is like a football coach going to a country club
to teach golfers how to play football—the relevance is missing.

2. ADVENTIST MINISTERIAL TRAINING NOT SUFFICIENTLY TUNED TO
BUDDHIST FIELDS.

Ministerial students in our colleges across Asia are receiving excellent training in
the areas of biblical studies, theology, and church ministry, but there is insufficient
training in practical methods for making disciples for Christ of Buddhists. Much of
the training is focused on apologetics, evangelistic preaching, and Bible study, often
with issues and arguments arising more from evangelism done in Christian cultural
contexts than the local Buddhist context. Perhaps this is because the church has
strongly focused on giving biblical support to our doctrines that other Christians
question. Certainly this is a necessary training as well.

Looking at the list of course titles offered in undergraduate Adventist colleges,
one can see that few classes emphasize missiology. The curriculum in Western Bible
colleges traditionally has not focused on missiology, since missiology is seen as a
ministry specialization for those headed overseas. It appears that Adventist colleges in
Asia have largely followed Western curricula and subsequently aren’t meeting the local
cross-cultural mission challenges of reaching Buddhists adequately.

I would argue that Adventists colleges have miscalculated the needs of their
ministerial students and have assumed their evangelism training and field school
experience is sufficiently addressing the needs of their students. Well known Christian
missiologists Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch co-authored a paper titled, “Finishing the
Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge.” They identify three different contexts for
the gospel commission: evangelism, missions, and frontier missions. Here is a brief
description of each:

- **Evangelism** is the work to reach non-believers (or to revive and reform Christians)
  within the gospel worker’s own culture, where a local, culturally relevant church
  already exists. An example would be an Adventist Sinhala pastor planting a church
  among a predominately Catholic Sinhala community. In this case the Adventist
  pastor and the Adventist Church share the same culture as Sinhala Catholics.

- **Regular missions** is the work to reach non-believers in a different culture
  (either similar or completely different), where a local, culturally relevant church
  already exists. For example, an Adventist Hmong pastor is planting a church
  in an Akha village. In this example, the Hmong have vibrant Adventist
  churches that are relevant to the animist worldview—a worldview shared by
  Akha even though they have a very different culture and language.

- **Frontier missions** is the work to reach non-believers in a different culture
  (either similar or completely different), where a church does not exist or
  where a church may exist but is not culturally relevant. For example, an
  Adventist Karen pastor is planting a church in a Bamar (Burmese) Buddhist
community. In this situation, no predominately Adventist and contextually relevant Bamar church exists even though there are an estimated 50 Bamar who have become Adventist.

Pastoral training typically only focuses on evangelism and doesn’t explore the unique challenges of regular and frontier missions, which would instill young graduates with missiological skills in cross-cultural discipleship and establishing locally defined and biblically faithful communities of faith.

3. BLINDNESS TO CHURCH TRADITION IN ADVENTISM

Making disciples inherently involves modeling how new believers should make decisions and live faithfully as Christians. Through this model, good habits are formed that help to normalize the new lifestyle of the faithful as they come to Christ. However, in this discipleship process, it is very easy to pass along other practices that have no rooting in Scripture. While many of these are certainly harmless, at times they can be in conflict with local cultural ways of doing things and result in newly converted Christians drawing away from their communities as their lives become more and more like Christ and, often, like Western Christians.

Here are a few examples:

- **Physical worship spaces.** Most Adventists don’t think about the arrangement of an Adventist sanctuary. It is assumed that chairs or benches must be set in rows facing the worship leaders, who stand in front of the group to lead the worship. A house church in the first century, however, would more likely be arranged in circles and on the floor.

- **Christian rituals.** Whether praying with our eyes closed, meeting for corporate worship on Sabbath morning for 60 to 90 minutes (with a series of sitting, kneeling, sitting, standing, sitting, standing), the method of deacons taking up offerings, conducting baby dedications in the church rather than at the family’s home, etc., Adventists have developed a system that we rarely deviate from, even when these forms differ from Scripture and the local culture.

4. CENTRALIZATION OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

The “protectors” of Buddhism such as patron-kings, constitutions, government officials, etc., hold the ultimate authority in their faith. It is their role to ensure that the *sangha* remains in proper alignment with their vows of renunciation in order to benefit the faithful laity. In turn, monks exercise their ascribed authority over the lay faithful—giving them aid in terms of merit and spiritual instruction. Only the members of the *sangha* are formally religious, and the common people are benefited by their faithfulness to the precepts of the faith and laws of the *sangha*. In contrast, Seventh-day Adventists recognize a priesthood of all believers with authority resting on the local members—all of whom are formally religious as signified in the rejection of the world through the ordinance of baptism.
Sadly, however, this divine teaching can be difficult for God’s people to faithfully practice. In many Buddhist countries, conference and mission leaders preside over their pastors by teaching, guiding, and making decisions for the local pastors’ ministries while local pastors preside over the church members in the same way. Furthermore, church members see pastors as Christian “experts” who are paid to carry forward the gospel ministry. Local members volunteer their assistance as their busy schedules allow and supply offerings when their limited means afford them to give. It is widely expected that funds from the mission, union, division, and General Conference will offset their meager resources to fund evangelism, rent or build worship spaces, and erect schools.

This accidental centralization of authority and responsibility away from the local body of Christ results in a membership that is dependent, spiritually apathetic, and unable to carry the gospel effectively to Buddhists. Over time, volunteer and paid gospel workers lower their standards and expectations to match this new reality, and, in the end, a general sense of complacency replaces the fervent zeal of new disciples.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

What will Seventh-day Adventists do in response to these very real challenges? I offer several recommendations.

1. AWAKEN THE CHURCH TO THE MISSION CHALLENGE.

Each Seventh-day Adventist is a gospel worker who must take full responsibility for their assigned territory and recognize the sacred trust God has given them to share the gospel with Buddhists in their field. This will require three specific studies: (1) surveying local Buddhist people groups, languages, and religions; (2) surveying church members to identify people groups, languages, and religious histories; and (3) completing cultural studies of Buddhist people groups to identify bridges and barriers for making disciples of them for Christ.

I have taken the time to study the 270 Buddhist people groups as they are found throughout Asia and contracted Global Frontiers International in 2014 to create maps showing their more than six hundred locations across Asia. These maps are available at the Global Mission Center for East Asian Religions website: cear.adventistmission.org. Each field can use these maps and datasets as a starting point to create their mission strategy. In Table 4 below I identify the 22 people groups that number more than one million people. Of these, 13 people groups are indigenous to the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. If our church’s energies and passion are focused on how to establish incarnational churches in these populations, God will surely bless our efforts.

Furthermore, I am working with several fields to conduct surveys to identify the people groups, languages, and religious histories of their members, including their childhood religion and, if they converted to Christianity, what factors were important to their conversion. This type of research requires cooperation with the local secretariats to translate the surveys, distribute them to each church, company, and group, and
then compile that data for analysis. This data then can be used to specifically identify the ethnic makeup of the local field as well as to determine what evangelism methods are proving to be most effective for the church. Success stories can be followed up with private interviews and will aid the world church in providing research-supported trainings. At minimum, this type of research will lead us to better understand the needs for mission and can help motivate our members in mission.

My dream is to develop a Bridges for Ministry guidebook series to cover each of the 22-two major Buddhist people groups, plus one guidebook on Western Buddhism. Each book will be written for local church members to understand the people group’s cultural values, beliefs, and world views and will also identify ministry barriers (cultural opinions and practices that cause misunderstandings or disinterest in Christianity) and ministry bridges (cultural opinions and practices that help in understanding and appreciating the gospel). Obviously, this project is huge and will require resources of prayer, time, and finances. However, it is simple to begin, and with each study completed, we are one step closer to achieving this goal.

Table 4: 22 Buddhist People Groups with a Population >1 Million (Hattaway 2004; JoshuaProject.net)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>PEOPLE GROUP</th>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>CHRISTIAN</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>PEOPLE GROUP</th>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>CHRISTIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>125,039,610</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>7,224,730</td>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78,716,260</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>5,135,820</td>
<td>Thai, Southern</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77,562,040</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>4,221,600</td>
<td>Tai Shan</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31,299,000</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>3,315,820</td>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,758,100</td>
<td>Thai, Central</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>2,296,000</td>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18,623,980</td>
<td>Thai, Isan</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>2,109,400</td>
<td>Arakanese/Rakhine</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14,656,740</td>
<td>Khmer, Central</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1,821,130</td>
<td>Tamang</td>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,083,700</td>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1,489,490</td>
<td>Khampa, Eastern</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,919,880</td>
<td>Chinese, General</td>
<td>NSD/SSD</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>1,468,000</td>
<td>Khmer, Northern</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,676,210</td>
<td>NauBuddh/ Marathi</td>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1,281,140</td>
<td>Tai Leu</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,420,600</td>
<td>Thai, Northern</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1,048,000</td>
<td>Tibetan</td>
<td>NSD/ SUD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. CREATE A CHURCH CULTURE OF HUMILITY AND RESEARCH.

Gospel workers need mentoring and training that prepares them for making disciples of Buddhists and planting contextually viable and relevant churches. Local mission, union, and division leaders need to create an environment that motivates and rewards workers researching the Buddhist cultural contexts, identifying challenges
and opportunities for Adventist mission, and developing new models for biblically contextualized Christian lifestyle and church community. This will require faithfully modeling the learner mindset and supporting these workers with prayers, ministry budgets, and encouragement.

3. REFOCUS FORMAL MINISTERIAL TRAINING PROGRAMS.

Colleges and seminaries should identify and recruit the assistance of church missiologists and workers with expertise in cross-cultural frontier mission work to develop both course curricula in frontier mission work in Buddhist contexts and to gain in-field experience.

4. HELP THAT EMPOWERS LOCAL MEMBERS.

To combat the sense of dependence on foreign funds and “expert” pastors, there needs to be greater focus on an Adventist church that is less formal and more relational. Instead of rushing to establish a public place of worship, church planting must prioritize vibrant relationships and radical discipleship characterized by the reality of a God who can transform lives. Also, rather than a religion primarily focused on belief in the right doctrines, there needs to be a spiritual experience that focuses on living the truth in the local context. And, importantly, the church needs to be defined less by policy books that focus on officers and membership numbers and more by the spiritual maturity and growth of its body. It seems that all of our organization as a church has somehow caused us to lose the forest in the midst of all the trees.

5. COLLABORATE WITH SPECIALISTS LIKE THE GLOBAL MISSION CENTERS.

The Global Mission Center for East Asian Religions (CEAR) exists specifically to raise awareness of the mission challenges of reaching Buddhists and to partner with the local fields and educational institutions in developing new models for making disciples among Buddhists. Furthermore, CEAR is seeking to establish a network of cross-cultural church planters that will offer support to gospel workers on both the personal and professional level and to partner with the local leadership to ensure that functional structures that empower the church planters are present. Finally, this system will offer benefits and rewards to these church planters to encourage them in their faithful ministry to God. These may include:

- access to training materials and conferences
- certification for their professional development as church planters in Buddhist contexts
- first access to tools and resources as they come available
- priority to financial support for their ministry proposals
- social media software developed specifically for gospel workers to support one another.
All of the best plans of God’s church and our most dedicated service, even when founded on the principles of Scripture, are powerless to instill the change that is needed so desperately. Yes, we must work as if this mission depends wholly on our labor, but at the same time we must pray to God with the conviction that only He can animate us with His life-giving power.

Notes
1. It can be difficult to determine the earliest mission engagement date because a lack of success may cause records of gospel workers to be overlooked because of a lack of success. The purpose of this table is to simply identify what is commonly recognized as the earliest mission engagement in each country. The Buddhist country of Bhutan is omitted due to a lack of available information.

2. More recently, Brad and Cathy Jolly under Adventist Frontier Missions helped the Adventist Church re-enter Mongolia in 1990 and have been credited with the beginning date of Adventist work there. But I use the earlier Adventist engagement date, as our purpose in this list is not to identify first fruits but first engagement.

REFERENCES
PART TWO
CASE STUDIES
I write this paper to offer a window on the work I have been enjoying over the past year with my Adventist Frontier Missions team in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

Adventist Frontier Missions is a self-supporting mission organization that supports the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by planting movements in unreached people groups across the 10/40 Window. It is our practice to begin our work with a period of learning as preparation for church planting. And so, as foreigners from three different continents, we began our learning phase of church planting with learning the Thai language, as our communication would be limited without knowing the Thai people’s heart language. But the other component of our learning involves more than just language. Indeed, we needed to understand the culture around us—and the longer we stay in Thailand, the more we see how true this is!

In this paper I will elaborate on our journey into studying Thai culture, focusing on three core questions:

1. Doing research: What did we do to increase our understanding of Thai culture?
2. Outcomes: What are some of our core findings?
3. Evaluation: Was our study of culture important?

DOING RESEARCH: WHAT WE DID TO INCREASE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THAI CULTURE

STEP 1: BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

There is only one basic requirement for doing cultural research: having relationships! We can learn a lot about a culture by reading books or watching documentaries, but we will only get a real, heart-felt, current, and local understanding of cultural issues if we connect ourselves to people. So how do we connect with people? It is not always as easy as it sounds. Let me share a story.
One year ago I moved to Khon Kaen after having spent one year of language study in Bangkok. I was totally new to the city and did not know anybody. How could I start building connections? I did not really know the answer, felt a little discouraged, but knew for sure that staying at home sitting in my room would not help. So, on my first day, I prayed and jumped on my bike to explore my new neighborhood. After biking around for about five minutes, I heard the sound of monks chanting. I was surprised because I did not see a temple anywhere near. Curious, I followed the sound of the chanting until I spotted a little alley. At one of the houses in the alley, someone had set up a big tent and lots of chairs. People in traditional Isaan dress came walking toward the house from different directions with shiny silver bowls. I did not know what the event was about and felt too shy to move really close to the house where it was all happening.

I hesitated between quickly biking on and just hanging out in that alley for a while, seeing what would happen. Then an elderly man, carrying one of those silver bowls, walked by and gave me a friendly smile. I smiled back and found the courage to open up and talk with him.

“Excuse me,” I said, “what is this occasion about?”

He kindly explained that this was a funeral and that I was welcome to attend. Feeling *kreengjay* (difficult to translate, but roughly, “reticent” or “reluctant to impose”) but also very happy for the opportunity to get to know my neighbors, I exchanged a few more courtesies with him before I felt that it was really OK for me to come along. I walked up to the house—and the rest is history.

The family received me warmly, and the next three days my life was determined by this family’s funeral. I woke up at 5:00 a.m. to help cook the immense amount of food that had to be prepared each day. I got to know half the neighborhood as we cut onions, prepared chilies, and worked away at the ongoing, endless flow of dirty dishes. We casually sat around the coffin and laughed as family members of the deceased tried to teach me Lao words. I mourned with a relative who privately shared her feelings of guilt in regard to the death. I observed countless rituals, including more intimate ones such as the deceased father’s beloved pet bird to the temple.

By the end of the multi-day funeral the family, their neighbors, and many other villagers had become friends and acquaintances that I could go back to visit. I went home exhausted but praising God for opening up this marvelous opportunity during my first week in town.

From this story we can draw a couple of principles for friendship building.

**First, building new friendships always involves a level of discomfort.** As I waited in that alley, part of me just wanted to bike on and not deal with the discomfort of meeting new people from a different culture in a setting that I did not understand. The discomfort of building the bridge to someone from another religious or cultural background is located in the fact that in such a setting we lose our coordinates. We don’t know how to sit, how to speak, how to eat, or how to be polite. We simply don’t
know how to understand. We see food on our plate that looks scary. We see religious rituals that make us uneasy. We are publically announced in a way that embarrasses us. We try to help, but we make mistakes.

We often talk about “mingling” with others as something that you just do. But the sociological figures tell us something different—we tend to hang out with those who are like us. Sadly, we see that new Adventists often lose most of their connections with non-Adventists in a matter of years. This indicates that it goes against our psychological tendencies to befriend someone who is different—someone who is not Adventist or someone from a different ethnic or cultural group—no matter how persuaded we are that we should!

A great study on American missionaries in Ecuador (Swanson 1995) showed that the missionaries ended up mingling mostly amongst their own kind on a nice, pretty campus and only went out on special mission trips once in a while. They came up with all kinds of reasons to rationalize that they were still being missionaries to the people in Ecuador, while most of the time they just hung out with other Americans and lived on a closed-off campus.

What do we see when we honestly look at ourselves? How much of our time is spent with non-Adventists or non-Christians? Do we have close friends who are non-Adventist? True mingling means choosing discomfort over comfort—again and again. I must practice calling a Thai friend rather than a Western friend when I need help, even though the language difference makes communication more complex. I should invite Thai Buddhist friends to my birthday party even though that means it will involve ministry rather than just relaxing. I should eat local food with my Thai friend even though I’d prefer to sit in my room and enjoy a bowl of cereal.

A second principle that we can draw from the funeral story is the importance of providing practical help. This, also, is not always as straightforward as it may sound. Practical help may mean doing things that you don’t necessarily like. But doing them really has a significant impact on the relationships that you are trying to form.

For example, one of my close friends in Khon Kaen frequently calls me to ask if I can give him a ride to a Japanese second-hand store where he buys broken bikes and instruments to fix up and sell for profit. A student from the local university asked me to help her with English to prepare for an internship with Disney World in America. A saleswoman called on me to mediate in the complex relationship between her and her Australian boyfriend. Providing practical help may mean lending or giving money you don’t really have, or squatting down and washing oily dishes in the hot sun. When we help to meet felt needs, we become useful in people’s eyes, and we demonstrate our sincere wish for their well-being. In this context, relationships can begin and grow.

**STEP 2: MAKING RESEARCH A PART OF YOUR FRIENDSHIPS**

Once a level of trust has been built, your mingling and serving can take on the extra dimension of research. There are different ways of making research part of your friendships.
The first way is to **explicitly share with your friends that you are interested in understanding their culture and would like their help**. This has several advantages. First, this openness makes you free to ask questions and probe answers without it being strange. I’ve done this, for example, with a young, educated woman who I befriended at a coffee shop. We began talking, and I found out that she was a deep thinker who loved conversing about science and religion. I asked her if she would be willing to be my fellow researcher, to read the Bible with me, so that I could gather her (Thai Buddhist) views on it. She enthusiastically agreed. Now we spend many hours in her coffee shop reading Bible passages together and clarifying her views on the various stories and texts. She loves the idea of joining me as a researcher and even spends time thinking about how to make the overall project better.

A second advantage to being open and explicit about the fact that you are doing research is that your friends may get pro-active about sharing cultural information with you because they know you are interested. Several of my neighbors as well as women I’ve befriended at the market are now eager to invite me to any community event because they know I would like to join for the purpose of learning.

In some cases, however, you may not want to tell your friends that you are doing research, but simply live life with them and research “under cover” as you hang out, observe, and listen to them. You may do this in case you feel that your friend would find the idea of research awkward or intimidating—or in case it may endanger your friend in some way to overtly join your research. In most cases in Thailand, however, I found that people may first feel that they have nothing to contribute to “cultural research,” but that as you consistently show sincere interest in what they say and do, almost everybody is more than happy to introduce you to their beliefs and practices.

So once you’ve either informed or chosen not to inform your friends that you are doing research, what do you do?

Here is a list of questions—though not exhaustive—that can help you zoom into understanding the culture:

1. What are people’s daily routines like?
2. What is the history of your people group? How do they remember and retell the facts?
3. What are important cultural beliefs and sayings?
4. What does the religion look like: the beliefs, practices, and values?
5. What stories do people tell?
6. What are important customs?
7. What kinds of festivals and rituals do people engage in?
8. How do people spend their leisure time?
9. How do families work? What are the relationships between men and women, parents and children, with extended family?
10. How do communities work? How is the community organized? Who are the leaders and what are their roles? How do they relate to the community members?
11. How do people deal with crises? E.g. sickness, death, conflict.
12. What are important values?
13. Who are important players (people or beings that play a significant role)?
14. What are people’s main goals for life? (Are they simply trying to survive day to day? Or are they working for a future goal?)
15. How do people reach those goals?
16. What are important needs?

Here are some different ways you can gather this kind of information:

1. **Following daily life and hanging out.** A great way to get access to normal daily life and all its encounters, habits, and values, is to ask your friend if you can spend a few days with him or her (and their family) to develop an understanding of what their life is like. If a few consecutive days is too long, you can spread the days out over a longer period of time. Agree on a time to meet in the morning and join them that day with whatever they are doing—cleaning, cooking, visiting friends, raising children, working, gardening, going to the temple, etc. Get involved and help out as much as you can, while you observe the dynamics of an ordinary day among your people group.

   Another way you can observe daily life is in public life—sit in a park, a mall, a restaurant, a temple, etc., and observe people’s interactions and hopefully meet some new friends too. Simply hanging out and observing life happening around you is one of the most effective ways of doing research!

2. **Join special occasions.** Aside from ordinary life, many special occasions shed additional light on your people’s culture: weddings, funerals, birth ceremonies, new house ceremonies, graduations, initiations, public holidays, local temple festivities, community activities, concerts, sports events, etc. Join such events as much as you can. You will meet lots of people and gain lots of insight.

3. **Interview.** After making some observations by hanging out and joining people’s daily lives and special occasions, you may want to focus on a particular topic and ask a person questions about that. For example, in our research in Khon Kaen, I would focus certain weeks or months on certain topics. One month I went around and asked all my friends who they thought were important figures in Thai history. Another month I went around asking about different spirits and their characters. An interview does not have to be formal—it is really just talking, but with an intentional agenda on gaining insight into a particular topic.

4. **Mix.** The more you can diversify your research methods, the better. That means, work in a team and have different team members do research with different people. If you can work in a team with both men and women, native and non-native, young and old, you will be able to research many different situations and people who differ in class, ethnicity, age, gender, etc., and get a good overall picture of your culture.
STEP 3: PROCESSING INFORMATION AND STRATEGY

All the information you gather has to be processed somehow. Here is a basic sequence of processing your information:

1. Write, write, write. It is very important to write down your findings, even if they seem irrelevant. Sometimes I would spend a whole day with a family and get home exhausted but still not go to bed until after I had written notes from that day. It is amazing how much information you forget if you wait to write it down. Even though it takes time, the best practice is to always write your observations immediately after you’ve visited someone.

2. Connect with your team. More people see more things, so make sure you regularly connect with your team to discuss research findings. Our team got together once a month. Every month, each person had a research assignment and at the end of the month we got together to discuss it. In this way we could help each other learn.

3. When you finish your research, write a summary of your conclusions. Discuss these conclusions with your team (and other experts) and analyze the implications for your mission strategy. This is what our team is working on now.

4. Translate the implications of your research summary into an evangelistic plan. Our team will do this in April, with the guidance of an AFM trainer. We will think through everything: What do the things we learned about Thai culture mean in terms of how we “do” church? How should we lead small groups? How should we engage in personal ministry? How would we develop Bible studies? How would we offer services in the community? And so on.

OUTCOMES: SOME OF OUR CORE FINDINGS

1. SIN: ROOT OF THE DIFFERENCE IN BIBLICAL AND THAI WORLDVIEWS

One of our core findings is that the concept of sin is at the root of the difference between the biblical and traditional/modern Thai worldviews. One way we discovered this was by using a list of terms that refer to life’s goals and the proper means to reach those goals from a biblical perspective. On the basis of our culture study findings, we compared these goals and means to how Thai people would relate to them. Here is the word list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heaven</th>
<th>Good works</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hell</td>
<td>Ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>Blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift</td>
<td>Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Writings</td>
<td>Salvation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When we analyzed these items, we quickly realized that most items have clear equivalents (or translations) in Thai culture. The items with these equivalents are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prophecy</th>
<th>Altar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Lamb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These items, placed in a Thai Buddhist worldview, all make sense around what we could call "the law of reciprocity" or simply "karma." In this system, the level of your good works coupled with your heart (good intention), expressed in merit-making rituals (such as songkran or initiation into monkhood), as well as activities such as the worship of gods, bringing gifts to the temple, and listening to sacred writings and prophecy, when done in a law-like way, determine your salvation: whether you will end up in heaven or hell, and of course what your next lives will be like. The means that temple + gift + worship + baptism + sacred writings + prophecy + good works + ritual + heart lead in law-like fashion to the end—salvation (heaven and/or hell).

The Christian picture, however, includes other items for which there is no clear equivalent in Thai culture. These are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blood</th>
<th>Cross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Altar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the karmic logic of the Thai Buddhist worldview, there is no clear place for such items. This is for two reasons. First, the biggest absolute in Thai Buddhist logic is the law of karma, an impersonal mechanism that we are subject to and can manipulate to have greater or lesser happiness. Second, Thai people generally have a positive image of their own morality—their ability to do good. They frequently describe themselves as being “a good person” or “doing the best I can.” With this idea of human nature as being intrinsically good, all they have to do is simply choose to do good (by using
all the means mentioned above) and the law of karma will determine the success of their present life as well as future lives. We have found that this karmic reasoning is very much alive in both more traditional, lower-educated and the modernized, higher-educated segments of society, albeit in somewhat different forms. Within this reasoning, words like blood, cross, obedience, altar, and lamb do not make sense because they point to things that are foreign to karmic law.

In biblical thinking, however, the biggest absolute is a sovereign God on whom all life and all happiness depend. Also, in the biblical worldview every single person is a sinner, unable to do good aside from God’s help. In biblical thought, the ability to do good and to live and have happiness are made possible by the death of the One who is perfectly good. So there is death (blood, cross, altar, lamb) that then makes life possible. This personal sacrifice indebts humans to the One who died, and so they are personally accountable to Him—hence the idea of obedience.

Because of this fundamental difference, all the other words listed also gain a different meaning. For Christians, good works are a response to, not the source of, salvation; worship is not to make merit in exchange for favors but to do justice to the name of the One who is absolute; law is not the impersonal law of karma but the relational covenant between humans and God. However, since the words are similar on a superficial level, could it be that Buddhists hear the Christian message and think we are saying the same thing they understand, while glossing over the more incongruous things like our talk about the altar and the cross? How can we introduce the idea of sin and salvation in a way that really makes sense? How to get across the idea that man is sinful and that God had to die to save us from that sin?

2. INCLUSIVISM: CHRISTIANITY AS ANOTHER PATH TO POWER AND GOODNESS

Thailand is remarkably religiously inclusive. I will never forget a trip I took to the immigration service in Khon Kaen. When the employee who was helping me saw that I was here on a religious visa, he exclaimed enthusiastically: “Oh, you are here to teach religion! That is wonderful. Well, you don’t have to pay anything for your documents! Saaathu!” This Buddhist man gave me a free service because I am a Christian missionary. His response is similar to many I have received.

From what we have learned in our culture study, I would say that there are two reasons why Thai people think so inclusively about religions, or why they think that every religion is a good path (except perhaps Islam; many of my Thai friends are starting to voice criticism in response to news reports of violence). The two reasons are that they see religion as primarily a source of (1) goodness and (2) power.

Regarding goodness, the Thai understanding of religion is primarily moralistic: it teaches you what is good and what is not, which fits with the karmic logic we just talked about. If we know how to do good things, we will gain what we desire: blessings in this life, some time in heaven, and then a better rebirth. This explains the standard Thai response to religious diversity: “All religions teach people to be
good people!” (I must have heard this phrase a hundred times in response to my Christian identity.)

Regarding power, Thai people look for power in religion—they look for “winning.” Winning the lottery, winning a nice boyfriend, winning health. Such power (khwaam saksit) does not so much reside in a single delineated item or entity but is rather understood as an entire dimension of reality that is manifested in a multitude of forms: old trees, seven-colored cloth, Buddha images, white thread, chanting, holy water, amulets, meditation, bells, spirit houses, temples. It is easy to continue this list with Christian items such as the Bible, prayer, church liturgy, as well as Christ himself. This is why Thai people are generally very open to receiving prayers from Christians and even to come to church and hear about the Bible—there is power (blessing) residing in such activities.

This highly inclusivistic take on religion is, on the one hand, a great blessing for the church. It provides a lot of opportunity to share! On the other hand, within an inclusivistic framework there is no motivation to switch religions. After all, within the Buddhist belief system, the reasons why Christianity is great (its goodness and its power) are the same reasons why Buddhism is great, so what would motivate someone to go through the trouble of shifting adherence?

Another challenge of the inclusivistic mindset is that even those who are on their way to identifying themselves as Christians may not see why an exclusive allegiance to God is necessary. Their wide open approach is in stark contrast with the biblical God whose name is “‘Jealous’” (Exodus 34:14) as well as Jesus’ depiction of himself as “‘the way, the truth, and the life’” (John 14:6). In a conversation with a Thai friend about wai-ing (lifting up the hands, palms pressed together, as a way to show respect), he told me: “I wai everybody. I wai the Buddha, the spirit houses. I wai Jesus Christ too! Why do Christians only wai their own God?”

The question here is: how can we present Christianity in such a way that Thai people will feel that an exclusive commitment to Jesus is both desirable and logical?

3. REINCARNATION: A PERSISTENT NOTION IN A MODERNIZING SOCIETY

A while back, a Thai Buddhist friend and I visited the head monk of a nearby forest temple. We discussed Buddhist concepts for about three hours. When we got to the topic of reincarnation, my friend asked me how people in the Netherlands (my country) view this issue. The only thing I could honestly say was that most Dutch people believe that there is only one life. The monk then responded with a heart-felt chuckle, as did my friend. They did not judge me, but it was clear that this idea of “only one life” was very exotic to them.

With the rapid modernization of Thailand has come an increasing influx of scientific ways of understanding the world. Many people are a little shy to confess their allegedly “backwards” beliefs regarding the spiritual world. However, we found that the notion of reincarnation is persistently embraced, even though modern Thais may not be as
preoccupied with their future lives as they are focused on the present life. Yet everyone seems to know someone who remembers their previous life; people regularly refer to their future lives; and monks and spirit mediums advise people on the basis of what has happened in their past lives. Reincarnation seems to be a widely assumed notion.

Even one of our church members in Khon Kaen, a lady in her seventies who was baptized a few years ago, revealed that she had not yet changed her thought on this topic. She told me, “I met so many nice people in this church, and they helped me so much. It must be because of the bun (merit) from my previous lives. We must have done thambun (merit-making) in our previous lives together.” One of the women we are currently studying the Bible with is deeply convinced that the biblical God is the highest God and that He always answers her prayers. She wants to be committed to being part of the Christian community for the rest of her life. However, she still talks about next lives and how what we do now will effect those lives—without showing a hint of awareness that this idea might not be compatible with biblical thought.

Do you notice this same issue in your context? What have you found that works to reform the belief in reincarnation effectively?

4. SATAN: A HARD-TO-TRANSLATE FIGURE

The gospel only makes sense if we understand who Satan is. We only see the problem that Jesus came to solve if we understand that this earth is involved in a cosmic conflict between God and Satan. We can only rejoice in the solution Jesus brought when we realize how wicked Satan is and that his deceptions and power are the cause of all suffering in the world.

Our team found, however, that it is not easy to translate Satan into Thai terms that clearly convey his character. In the Thai worldview, there does not seem to be a consistent spiritual opponent. Sure, there are spirits that can do you harm. In some rural parts of the country, people will tell you that your newborn baby is ugly in order to protect the child from spirits who might snatch him or her. In a modern city like Bangkok, people put stickers on their car saying their car is a color that it is not (e.g. “this is a blue car” on a white car) in order to trick spirits into not harming you over the fact that your actual car color does not match the color of your birth day. In many ceremonies, wai-ing the spirits is partially fear based and focused on asking for forgiveness for any wrongs done, to ward off any problems. Spirits physically attack people—make people invisible, choke throats, drown children, create unrest, etc. People honk their horn when passing by places where someone died in a car accident, knowing their spirit can’t depart after such tragedy and may possibly do harm. However, there are many differences between these cases and the biblical figure of Satan:

1. Satan is always evil and always against you. In the Thai perception, spirits may only temporarily do something evil and, under different conditions, may work on your side and help you out.
2. Satan can’t be placated or controlled. The Thai perception holds that spirits can be placated and controlled to do what you want by manipulating certain formulas.

3. Satan deceives. In Thai perception, deception is not a core activity of spirits. In fact, spirits are not believed to have that level of intentionality or intelligence but simply respond in relatively predictable ways to human behavior.

Furthermore, even the power of spirits is not as self-evident anymore as it was in the past. Some of my friends talked about the *maan* (a term Christians often use for Satan) as a figure or concept that seems to linger somewhere between an impersonal force for evil, bad things and people, and even one’s own negative actions or attitude.

What do people need to know about Satan, and how can we teach it?

5. FORM VS. CONTENT: FINDING A BALANCE

There is another central difference between Thai religion and Seventh-day Adventist Christianity. Thai religious practices are heavily focused on form. This means that the emphasis is external: what’s important is the proper execution of prescribed procedures. This can be seen at pretty much every single shrine in the country. Shrines for Kuan Im, the Buddha, etc., leave no room for the devotee to doubt as to what to do. They include specific descriptions of how many lotus flowers, candles and/or incense sticks (conveniently bought at nearby stalls) to offer, and have signs with Pali prayers in Thai script, including when to bow down and how often to repeat a phrase.

The focus on form can also be seen in what those from a Protestant heritage may consider irreverence: talking, laughing, and not paying attention during a ritual.

Once I observed a ritual blessing of a car in the temple. Here’s what I wrote in my notes that day:

First, there’s elaborate chanting over the attributes that will be used to bless the car: thick white thread, candles, a flour paste, gold paper, amulets, water. The family consists of husband, wife, grandmother and young child. It is amazing how the mother does not care much to discipline the child, who is playing loud games on an iPad before the chanting starts—she does ask him to turn it off and to sit respectfully as the chanting begins, but she totally doesn’t follow through on that and ends up even casually talking with the kid as he continues playing very loudly on the iPad. At one point the monk even glances over, his soft-spoken, concentrated, mysterious Pali sounds continuously interspersed with the loud noise of the kid’s gaming. It seems that the only participation necessary for the efficacy of the ritual is to keep wai-ing—mentally and socially one can be in another place. I was struck by the fact that this lady did not seem to be embarrassed at all—I found the noise and lack of attention highly rude over against the old monk doing his chanting but also offensive to the overall consecrated atmosphere.
Such a clash of culture results from the fact that for Seventh-day Adventists (who build on Protestant traditions), what’s important is not form but content. We emphasize the inner world that’s behind our actions—our intentions, our heart, our mind. We don’t see value in reading Scripture texts in a language we don’t understand. We consider a ritual that we didn’t pay attention to as a ritual that we didn’t participate in. We think that formulaic, standardized prayers are ”empty.” We value actually understanding our Scriptures. We emphasize conscious participation in rituals. We elevate personal prayers from the heart.

It is clear that a Thai Buddhist who embraces Christianity has to go through quite a transition in terms of “how religion works.” This is probably the reason why our recent converts still feel uncomfortable praying. One of the grandmothers in our church often says: “I don’t have the skill to pray. Can you pray for me?” Another outcome of this difference is that Christians often come with poor ceremonies to substitute for very elaborate cultural ones. Thai people, for example, have very rich house dedication ceremonies, in which half the neighborhood, Brahman priests, monks, and lots of food and sacred items are featured in a day-long ceremony. I visited a woman who was interested in Christianity and had asked me to come over and help dedicate her house. I felt so empty-handed only offering her a word of prayer. When I was done praying, there was a moment of unease. Was that it? Were we done already?

The question here is: Could or should we incorporate more form in our churches and evangelistic strategies without going so far as to neglect the relationship with God? Could we develop more standardized prayers as a first step to get people to speak to God personally? Could we develop more elaborate rituals for all kinds of occasions in people’s lives? Should we prescribe in more detail and with more rigidity what the Christian life should look like on a daily basis—how to eat, sleep, work, play, etc.?

6. GOD AS OUR BENEFACTOR—USING RECIPROCITY AS A METAPHOR

One of the key relational mechanisms we found in Thai culture is reciprocity. On the one hand, this plays out on the metaphysical level: I will get back the good or bad of my current actions in my next lives. On the other hand, this mechanism is manifested on an interpersonal level: the good I receive, I must remember and pay back.

There are endless everyday examples of this logic. I give my hairdresser a present, and she cuts my hair for free. My friend cooks me a meal, and the next day I take him out to eat. When I asked my English student why she was buying French fries for one of our team members, she said straightforwardly, “Oh, because I need his advice about my trip to America.”

These exchange relationships become especially interesting in situations where the goodness that is received is so much that it is impossible to ever reciprocate. In Thailand, there are three types of benefactors that fall into this category: one’s mother, one’s teachers, and the Thai king. Regarding the mother, one of my friends once told me, her tone of voice displaying awe: “My mother is so important to me. She carried
me in her womb for nine months!” On Thai Mother’s Day, the goodness of the mother is widely elaborated on, sometimes even placing mothers on the same level as monks. Through sermons and on radio and TV, Thai people are encouraged to remember how much their mother suffered for them—how she gave you life through pain, took care of you physically, was your teacher, and so on. (One sermon said: “Think about it: she used to clean you up after you went to the bathroom!”) The mother must be honored and cared for in return, one reason why, in spite of all the changes in community and family relationships in Thailand, nursing homes and retirement homes are still a widespread taboo.

Beyond the mother is the Thai king, in whom all notions of goodness culminate: he is the father of the nation who never rested but always worked tirelessly for the benefit and happiness of his citizens. His picture is found in almost every home and in countless public places. He is Thailand’s moral authority, the one who deserves all loyalty and respect.

The Thai ability to remember the goodness that has been received and sensing the need to repay it is a very impressive cultural feature that is much less known in the West. It directly ties in with the biblical emphasis on the holiness of remembrance: God gave the Israelites strong admonishments to remember what He had done for them and gave them ritual feasts to remember His deeds by (Sabbath, Passover, etc.). I cannot help but wonder, then, if a powerful link could be made between this deep cultural value and the worship of the biblical God. How would it work if we were to present God primarily in terms of being our benefactor, with so much phrakun (goodness) that we are forever indebted to Him, and our only proper response to Him is gratitude and obedience? What if God could become a Being that does not just give a favor here and here (like many spirits and gods do) and that you can reciprocate by offering a chicken or even attending a church service, but who has given so much (created your life, promises you new life now and in the new earth) that He, just like one’s mother and king, can never be paid back?

Have you tried presenting God in this way? What do you find to be the pros and cons of such an approach?

7. RELIGION AND MONEY: CHRISTIANITY’S PLACE BETWEEN MATERIALISM AND ANTI-MATERIALISM

The enormous growth of the Thai economy plus the country’s wide entrance into global society over the past decades have significantly affected the nature and place of religion in Thailand. Wealth and worship have become connected to such an extent that some scholars talk about the “commodification of religion” in Thailand. One book summarizes the current spiritual emphasis as “Nirvana for sale.” A good example of this is the lottery craze. Both the state and underground lotteries are major topics in many people’s lives, and securing the winning lottery number is done through a variety of magical practices. Some say that kumaanthoong, magic boy images,
give you the winning lottery number if you take care of them. Others search for the right numbers in special trees or through dreams. Temples are also involved; one of the busiest temple seasons I’ve witnessed, with people crowding around each other to bring sacrifices to various gods, was the night before the lottery drawing! At a monk initiation ritual I witnessed, lottery sellers were lined up from the beginning of the ceremony in rightful anticipation that participants would “feel lucky” after all the merit gained at this ritual and would buy lottery tickets in large quantities.

Prosperity-oriented spiritual practices are sprouting up everywhere in Thailand, not only in Buddhist contexts but in Christian ones also. Modern Buddhist movements like Dhammakaya and new Christian churches like Hope of Bangkok intentionally tailor to the needs and styles of the middle class, making religion this-worldly and in harmony with the desire for socio-economic progress.

At the same time, there are many who lament what they see as the decline of authenticity in religious practice through the concentration on money. Some find it unfair that rich people have more chances to make merit than the poor because they have more to bring to the temple. Others reject the corruption in the monkhood—scandals about monks with designer bags in private jets or fake monks in robes during the day, hanging around in bars at night, are heard frequently. There is a trend among some toward what could be called “Buddhist pristinization,” the search for the “original” teachings of the Buddha (and the Buddha only), without all the corruption, traditionalism, and superstition. There is a longing for the more meditative goals of Buddhism (a calm, content heart) and practicing a pure, moral life. Some don’t donate to monks or temples anymore but make their merit through general humanitarian activities such as helping schoolchildren or street dogs.

As Christians, we must be aware that as we seek to make the God of the Bible known in Thai society, we are stepping into this tension between materialistic and anti-materialistic forms of religion. This should prompt us to reflect on what our standpoint is in this debate. Do we offer Christianity as a way to material blessings, much like many charismatic Thai churches and modern Buddhist cults do? There is some truth in that—if you read through Genesis, for example, almost all of God’s promises are related to material and physical welfare (offspring, land, wealth, flocks, old age). However, Christians can also relate to the anti-materialistic reaction against prosperity religion, considering the dangers of wealth that Jesus talks about and the importance of character development and spiritual understanding over against simply getting rich. What does Christianity offer in this tension, a focus on material blessings (like charismatic cults), an other-worldly spiritual focus (like Buddhist pristinizers) or a balance of how to be modern in a spiritual way (e.g. how to be rich and still moral, etc.)?

EVALUATION: WAS OUR STUDY OF CULTURE IMPORTANT?

In this paper I have shared how our missionary team in Khon Kaen engaged in cultural research and what some of our core findings are. Now I would like to briefly
evaluate whether our study of culture was actually important. To me, the answer is a resounding “yes.” If we had not done this study, we might have presented the gospel and concluded that our Thai Buddhist friends got it all because they seemed to agree, whilst in reality they likely:

- would not understand the biblical concepts of sin and salvation and therefore would interpret all the Christian terminology via their karmic logic
- would only have a temporal, non-exclusive commitment to God
- would still believe in reincarnation
- would understand Satan as a spirit that can occasionally do harm, without understanding him to be their constant spiritual opponent who cleverly deceives and whom they cannot control
- would have trouble practicing their Christianity because its forms are too vague, unprescribed, and not elaborate
- would see God as someone we can get even with by exchanging favors, rather than as Someone to whom we can never reciprocate enough, and will owe eternal loyalty to
- would understand Christianity simply as a guarantee to material blessings.

Doing cultural research has helped us be aware of what the ones we seek to share the gospel with may or may not easily understand, what they might need to grow in as Christians, and what we need to clarify for ourselves in regard to where we stand on certain matters.

I would like to suggest that in any mission project, whether in your own country or abroad, it is vital for the success of your mission to make research a part of your ministry. Let us, as we mingle to show our sympathy, also “mingle to understand”!

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

QUESTIONS FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH

So you’re ready to begin digging into the culture in which you are serving! You will be greatly rewarded as you take time to prayerfully study and identify core beliefs that need to be addressed as you bring the gospel to the people to whom you are ministering.

While the topics and questions in this worksheet on the following page have been created with Buddhist people in mind, this worksheet will help guide you as you begin thinking about your unique ministry context.

SIN

1. **Descriptive question:** How do your target people understand sin and salvation?

2. **Applied question:** What have you found effective in helping your people understand that (1) they are sinners and (2) they need a Savior?

INCLUSIVISM

1. **Descriptive question:** How do your target people evaluate other religions?

2. **Applied question:** What have you found effective in helping your people come to an exclusive commitment to Christ (giving up all non-Christian spiritual beliefs and practices)?

REINCARNATION

1. **Descriptive question:** To what extent is the belief in reincarnation adhered to in the people group in which you minister? Have you seen baptized Christians still struggling with this teaching?

2. **Applied question:** What have you found effective in helping people accept the view that we are all allotted only one life and then either eternal death or eternal life with God?

SATAN

1. **Descriptive question:** What do your target people believe about the character of Satan or any cultural equivalents of Satan?

2. **Applied question:** What have you found effective in helping people to understand that Satan is their consistent enemy who deceives them all the time and whom they cannot control or manipulate?
FORM

1. **Descriptive question:** How important is form versus content in the religious practices of the people group in which you minister?

2. **Applied question:** What have you found effective in developing *prescribed* forms, rituals, and rules that make it easier for new Christians to practice Christianity? (E.g., think about standardized prayers, elaborate rituals for all important events in life, specific rules for daily life, etc.)

RECIPROCITY

1. **Descriptive question:** How do your people deal with situations in which one person receives something good from another person? Does a system of reciprocity exist in your people group?

2. **Applied question:** Have you experimented with presenting God as the great Benefactor (like the Thai mother or king) to Whom we cannot reciprocate and to Whom we therefore owe our eternal loyalty? If so, assess how this has worked for you.

MATERIALISM

1. **Descriptive question:** How do the people among whom you minister relate to materialism on the one hand and anti-materialism on the other? How is this reflected in their religious practices?

2. **Applied question:** What ways have you found to clearly present the biblical view on material versus spiritual blessings?
CHAPTER 10

Ernesto Douglas Venn

INTRODUCTION

The format of this paper (see “Further Toward a Theology of Mission for the City,” chapter 12 in Van Engen 2009) uses a personal experience in an urban ministry context to raise mission issues and examines Scripture for insights. This is followed by reflection on these experiences (Van Engen 2009:ix). This reflection includes the following elements:

a. The Story
   i. The Location
   ii. The Participants
b. Reflecting on the Story
c. Reading the Local Urban Context
d. Gleaning 2 Kings 5:1–19 for Insights
e. New Urban Mission Insights
f. Recommendations for Mission Action

THE STORY

LOCATION

The soi (ซอย, a small alley), in front of the Thonburi Gospel Outreach Center, a Hope for Bangkok church plant on Taksin Road Soi 4, in the Thonburi District of Bangkok. This soi, with its crowded multi-story houses, serves as the playground for the neighborhood children, a habitat for rats, and cats, and a shortcut for the motorcycles trying to bypass Wong Wian Yai’s (วงเวียนใหญ่) congested traffic. After a heavy rain, this soi floods with water. Thonburi, the former ancient capital city of Thailand, is now one of the 50 districts that make up Bangkok. Located on the west side of the Chao Phraya River, Thonburi covers an area of 3.3 square miles (8.55 km²) and has 175,768 residents.
STORY PARTICIPANTS:

a. “Mr. Big” (คณุใหญ่, Khun Yai), an elderly Thai-Chinese businessman living alone in the Thonburi neighborhood.

b. Pastor Prateep Prachwong, a recent theology graduate from Asia-Pacific International University (AIU) assigned to the Thonburi Hope for Bangkok church plant. Ethnically, Pastor Prateep is from the Hmong hill tribe in northern Thailand, and his family is located in the Lopburi Province.

STORY NARRATIVE:

c. “Mr. Big” (คณุใหญ่, Khun Yai) speaks to Pastor Prateep Prachwong:
   i. “I’ve been watching you and your church for the past several years as you have been working in our community.
   ii. “I am a wealthy businessman in this community, and I had a resort near Phuket, located in southern Thailand. But when the tsunami hit on December 26, 2004, it destroyed my business.”
   iii. As they continue visiting, Mr. Big shares with Pr. Prateep how he lives alone and that his family now rarely visits him.
   iv. Mr. Big continues, “I notice that you care for the people of this neighborhood who don’t have time to care for themselves, as they are trying to earn a living.”
   v. Mr. Big referred to various wholistic community service activities happening during this evangelism week, which included free haircuts, free eye exams and eye-glass distribution, community health check-ups, a community concert, after-school programs for neighborhood children, and ongoing English/French classes.
   vi. “When I go to the local temple, I am greeted with respect, because I am wealthy. But you are different. You care for all the people and don’t show favorites, whether they are poor or wealthy.”
   vii. Mr. Big then shared, “I want to learn more about your God.”

REFLECTING ON THE STORY

As a church-planting missionary, it is the author’s goal to serve in wholistic ways so that Christ can be seen, and more people can say with Mr. Big, “I want to learn more about your God.”

Due to the coordinating duties of supporting six simultaneous public “reaping” evangelistic meetings going on in different parts of the city during that week, the author was prevented from being a part of this conversation, but later in the week the author was able to meet Mr. Big personally and get the details of this conversation from Pastor Prateep.

In this paper, the author will use the “lens” of this experience and the experience of the church-planting teams and volunteers shared with the author during five years...
of service as the coordinator for the Thailand Adventist Mission (TAM) Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Initiative.

The Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Initiative used various methods and strategies in an attempt to carry out the gospel commission across Bangkok: art and music classes; prayer ministry; small groups; child evangelism; media and Internet; Nature Discovery; Teaching English for Spiritual Purposes (TESP); community service; disaster response, etc. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the author will focus on health ministry. Through Mr. Big’s experience in Thonburi, one sees the effectiveness of consistent, long-term, ongoing health ministry in sharing the gospel. As Van Engen and Tiersma point out in the story selection, one can see the “macro issues of the city through the eyes of the micro concerns of persons” (Van Engen and Tiersma 2009:255).

Mr. Big shares the overall issues of his Thonburi neighborhood, which include a “lack of caring” with its tangible inaccessibility for the working class, to preventive medical education and health screening.

**READING THE URBAN CONTEXT**

How can the gospel of Jesus Christ go forward in Bangkok to touch the lives of others like Mr. Big? Is there something that we, as the body of Christ, have forgotten that Christ instructed us to do? How do we as Christians hinder the spreading of the gospel in Bangkok and other cities?

Prior to learning the lessons of how the gospel of Jesus Christ can change lives through health ministry, we must understand the urban context of Bangkok. Bangkok is the capital city of Thailand and is divided into 50 districts (เขต khet). These 50 districts are then further divided into 169 subdistricts (แขวง kwaeng). A district chief appointed by the governor manages each district. District councils are elected to four-year terms and serve as advisory bodies to their respective district chiefs.

Bangkok, like other major developing cities, continues to grow. The population of the greater metro area of Bangkok is approximately 14 million people in 2015. Many Thais come to Bangkok looking for a new start through jobs or education. Foreign asylum-seekers come to the Bangkok regional office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in hopes to go to a third country. Unofficial estimates include more than a half million illegal immigrants from Cambodia, Myanmar, Russia, Ukraine, Pakistan, Nigeria, India, China, Bangladesh, and other countries (New World Encyclopedia 2012).

Bangkok—a religious city. Bangkok is a city full of religious shrines, temples, and other holy places, similar to what Paul encountered in Athens (see Acts 17:22, 23). Even Bangkok’s name is filled with religious significance. It has been called the City of Angels, the Great City, the Residence of the Emerald Buddha, the Impregnable City (of Ayutthaya) of God Indra, the Grand Capital of the World Endowed with Nine
Precious Gems, the Happy City Abounding in Enormous Royal Palaces Which Resemble the Heavenly Abode Wherein Dwell the Reincarnated Gods, a City Given by Indra and Built by Vishnukarm (Sternstein n.d.).

The majority of Bangkok’s population is Buddhist (92 percent). The rest are Muslim (6 percent), Christian (<1 percent), Jewish (300 residents), Hindu and Sikh (0.6 percent), and others. There are more than 400 Buddhist temples, 55 Islamic mosques, 10 Christian churches, two Hindu temples, two synagogues, and one Sikh gurudwara in Bangkok (New World Encyclopedia 2012).

This brief survey of the local urban context provides the background for the Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Thailand, also known as Thailand Adventist Mission (TAM). The author will review the local Adventist context and background of the “Tell the World” global strategic plan of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventists in Bangkok. According to Dr. Surachet Insom’s research in compiling the TAM Centennial book, the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Thailand first started in Bangkok in 1906 with Robert A. Caldwell, a young ministerial graduate from Australia, who sold the English-language health magazine Good Health to the English-speaking community (Insom 1996:8).

Background: Tell the World global strategy plan. At the 2005 General Conference Session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Tell the World strategy was launched. The Hope for Big Cities Initiative was a part of this strategy. In 2006, the Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Initiative (H4BKK) was started as a part of the General Conference’s Tell the World strategic plan, with its seven areas of global focus:

1. Personal Spiritual Growth by encouraging daily personal Bible reading and prayer
2. Community Service serving the needs of the people
3. Personal Witness where each member shares Christ through witnessing and small groups
4. City Outreach through the Hope for Big Cities Church Planting Initiative
5. Church Planting
6. Evangelistic Programming through the seed sowing and reaping evangelism cycle
7. Media Ministry as a tool to share Jesus and to prepare people for His second coming.

In Bangkok during January 2006, there were five organized Seventh-day Adventist churches with a membership of 1,404, one organized company with a membership of twenty-four persons and one organized group meeting with a membership of twenty-six people, making a total membership of 1,454 (Paul 2006:19–26). The ethnic make-up of Bangkok’s membership at this time was 35.5 percent Filipino and other foreign nationalities, 27.5 percent Thai, 19 percent Karen-Burmese, 18 percent Thai-Chinese.

Thus with Tell the World and its Hope for Big Cities urban church planting initiative, the Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Initiative was launched with the goal to plant new churches for the ethnic Thai population of Bangkok.
With this picture in mind of Bangkok’s religious urban context of the city and of the Adventist Church, we now turn to how the gospel of Jesus Christ can go forward in Bangkok to touch the lives of others like Mr. Big.

Let’s examine next the story of Mr. Big and Ms. Little—the Syrian general, Naaman, the little slave girl, the king of Israel, and the Great God—found in 2 Kings 5. Let us explore this ancient story to gain a better understanding about how we can spread the gospel today using the tools of health ministry in Bangkok and beyond.

GLEANING 2 KINGS 5:1–19 FOR URBAN MINISTRY INSIGHTS

In order to gain insights for urban ministry, the author will examine the participants of the account found in 2 Kings 5:1–19.

A. FIRST PARTICIPANT:
Mr. Big Naaman, the commanding general of the Syrian army.

Notice how the Bible describes how “big” Naaman was: “Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper” (2 Kings 5:1).

First, he was a leader among men. Second, he was a great man. Third, Naaman was an honorable man, respected by the king. Fourth, he led the Syrian army to victory, through God’s blessing. Fifth, Naaman was brave. But despite all Naaman’s relationships, his abilities, skills, and experience, the text does not end here with “happily ever after.” Mr. Big had a big problem—leprosy, or “living death,” as some describe this disease (Nichol 1953:876). He had reached the highest earthly status and gained everything that this world has to offer. As Naaman faced the reality of this disease, the thought of losing everything forced Naaman to search for answers from an unlikely source. Someone little.

In Thonburi, Mr. Big, like Naaman, faced the life situation where he was looking for answers from an unlikely source. A small, humble place—the Thonburi Center.

B. SECOND PARTICIPANT:
Ms. Little, a young slave girl who was taken captive from Israel.

Notice how Scripture describes her and what challenges she faced in the following text: “And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman’s wife” (2 Kings 5:2).

What insights can be learned? First, she was young. Second, she was taken from her rural home, and it is likely that her parents were killed during this raid. Third, she was a foreigner working far away from her home in Israel. She was from a different ethnic group, with a different language, religion, customs, rituals, food, and culture. Fourth, she served Naaman’s wife as a slave in Syria’s capital city.

God used this little girl, Ms. Little, to bring a message of hope to Mr. Big—
Naaman. God used someone small to point Mr. Big to the only source of healing—God. God continues to work in this same way today, using the small to reach the big. Ellen White, in the book, *Testimonies for the Church*, reminds us of this.

God tests and proves us by the common occurrences of life. It is the little things which reveal the chapters of the heart. It is the little attentions, the numerous small incidents and simple courtesies of life, that make up the sum of life’s happiness; and it is the neglect of kindly, encouraging, affectionate words, and the little courtesies of life, which helps compose the sum of life’s wretchedness. It will be found at last that the denial of self for the good and happiness of those around us, constitutes a large share of the life record in heaven (2:133).

As the members and volunteers of the Thonburi church plant demonstrated God’s grace through these small acts of disinterested benevolence, they passed God’s test, as described by Ellen White in *Testimonies for the Church*:

I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to **prove His people** and **develop their true character**. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our **sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence**. This is **God’s test of our character**. If we have the true religion of the Bible, we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a **deep interest and unselfish love** for those who are our brethren, and who are **less fortunate** than ourselves (3:511).

In Thonburi, the Holy Spirit prompted Mr. Big, through his years of watching this church plant, to talk with Pastor Prateep and ask to learn more about God. So the Holy Spirit prompted the little maid to point her master to God’s servant, the prophet in Israel. “Then she said to her mistress, ‘If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy’ ” (2 Kings 5:3).

Leprosy is a devastating disease. Today in Bangkok and other cities of the planet, many people have this same problem—they have the disease called “living death.” Living death without hope—no hope for a chance to hear the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, which is, as the Bible describes it, “the blessed hope” of Christ’s soon Advent (see Titus 2:13, 14). Yet notice the faith response of Ms. Little, and how this then inspires Mr. Big to look to the Great God!

So it is through health ministry, as individuals step out in faith to make a lifestyle change, that they also experience God’s saving grace in practical ways.
C. THIRD PARTICIPANT:
The king.

The reverse is true as well. Those who try to share the gospel through health in urban centers in their own strength can see themselves in the next participant of this story, the king of Israel, as he receives the letter from Mr. Big’s boss, the king of Syria, in 2 Kings 5:4, 5:

Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said,

Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.”

Today there are many Adventists who claim to know God, but when faced with many lifestyle diseases facing the urban centers, one can see the same reaction as the king of Israel. “Why are you bothering me with the health issues in this city? I can’t do anything about the problem!” Others say, “It’s not my responsibility to provide health care or health education. That’s why we pay our taxes to the government. Let the government take care of the problem.” Like the king of Israel, we forget that we serve the great and living God! We think that God can’t use someone little like us, or our churches or health ministry programs, to make a practical difference in the city.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary has this to say about the king:

The king of Israel realized that this was a disease that only God could cure, and it was beyond his faith in God to believe that man could be used as an instrument in the hands of the Lord to restore anyone stricken with such a disease as this (Nichol 1953:876, emphasis supplied).

Adventist members and leaders are not immune to soul leprosy or “living death” in its various forms. Many lose sight of our great God and have lost their living faith. Thus today we witness the neglect of the urban centers around the planet. Many may only have an intellectual knowledge of the gospel within the context of Revelation 14:6–12, without a vital, active, faith relationship with Jesus Christ that moves them to care. What is needed is a two-handed faith—one hand that clings to the eternal hand of Jesus Christ, as our second hand extends hope in practical ways to those all around us within the urban setting.

But what can the Adventist church do to spread the gospel in Bangkok? Does health ministry really work? Through the story from 2 Kings 5, what new values and priorities is God trying to communicate to us? Can we apply this ancient story from
the Bible about Mr. Big, Ms. Little, and the king of Israel to re-examine our methods, realign our goals and staffing priorities to be able to effectively share the Good News about our great God using the tool of health ministry? To that task we now turn.

NEW MISSION INSIGHTS

“I believe there is no country more open to unrestrained missionary effort than Siam, but I believe that there can hardly be a country in which it is harder to make an impression” (Smith 1982).

As we cross the intersection of belief and action to find new values and priorities, to re-examine our urban church planting methods, and to realign goals and staffing priorities, the author acknowledges his limitations. Using the words from the wisest of men, King Solomon, the author resonates with the missionary serving in Thailand 119 years ago—and agrees “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

But rather than merely conducting church as “business as usual,” the author proposes serious consideration be given to Naaman’s story of healing and its implications for expanding God’s kingdom in Bangkok and beyond. The author proposes three insights gleaned from Bangkok’s context:

INSIGHT #1 – CARE MORE, TALK LESS

Jesus Christ was clear about the mandate to go to the globe and make disciples. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 was given to all believers to accomplish—including Ms. Little, the young slave girl away from home, and others like her. Christ calls ordinary people, and even doubting disciples, into the joy of spreading the gospel to every person.

Yet in the minds of many Adventist believers in Bangkok, there is a mindset that fulfilling the Great Commission is only for those who are paid—the missionaries, pastor, church planters, evangelists, and teachers. So many members just attend church on Sabbath morning, eat lunch, and go home. Thus our members are missing out on the joy of soul winning, and Bangkok remains unreached.

Perhaps this misconception comes from a lack of understanding the biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers. Monte Sahlin, an Adventist urban missions researcher, made this connection from one study he conducted. He identifies that the problem with most local churches is that they focus primarily on themselves. There is a “strong internal focus and relatively little concern about surrounding community or the city in general” (Sahlin 2007:120).

INSIGHT #2 — PRACTICE WHOLISTIC HEALTH MINISTRY

Healing, which includes spiritual, physical, social, and emotional health, is one
of the methods used by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to accomplish the Great Commission by making disciples of all nations of the globe:

**Our Mission:** The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the ‘Three Angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.

**Our Methodology:** We pursue this mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through:

- **Preaching.** Accepting Christ’s commission (Matthew 28:18–20), we proclaim to all the world, in these last days, the everlasting gospel of God’s love, most fully revealed in His Son’s life, ministry, atoning death, resurrection and high priestly ministry. Recognizing the Bible to be God’s infallible revelation of His will, we present its full message, including the second advent of Christ and the continuing authority of His Ten Commandment law with its reminder of the Seventh-day Sabbath.

- **Teaching.** Acknowledging that development of mind and character is essential to God’s redemptive plan, we promote the growth of a mature understanding of and relationship to God, His Word and the created universe.

- **Healing.** Affirming the Biblical principles of the wellbeing of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration (Adventist Church of Peninsular Malaysia).

Yet with this methodological approach, what practical difference can one expect a local Adventist church or a new church plant to make amidst the staggering urban health problems of Bangkok?

As the Hope for Bangkok church planting teams and volunteers have conducted community-based Adventist Health Expos (มหกรรมสุขภาพแอ๊ดเวนตีส) across the city over the past several years, one can see promising results. By meeting real needs of people in physical, emotional, or relational health, there is an awakened interest and openness to discuss spiritual issues. Another plus is that people actually attend.

One example of how meeting physical health needs through medical missionary work tears down prejudice took place in the Ramkhamhaeng neighborhood of Bangkok, as reported to the author by Pastor Reben Huilar. After he conducted a local health expo in a public weekend market, the following Sabbath a Muslim man came to the Ramkhamhaeng Adventist International Church nearby and asked, “Where’s the stop smoking class?”

This example from this Ramkhamhaeng neighborhood of Bangkok illustrates what Ellen White wrote in 1909, in the book *Testimonies for the Church*:
As a means of overcoming prejudice and gaining access to minds, medical missionary work must be done, not in one or two places only, but in many places where the truth has not yet been proclaimed. We are to work as gospel medical missionaries, to heal the sin-sick souls by giving them the message of salvation. This work will break down prejudice as nothing else can (9:211).

A second example of the promising results using a wholistic health ministry took place at the Bangkok Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Church during 2009. The planning team included Ms. Pornwilai Tantrarungroj, also known as Dr. Ae, an Adventist physician, and her sister, Ms. Pornsook Tantrarungroj, PhD, also known as Dr. Oat. They met with the author, who encouraged them that God would use them if they, like Ms. Little, would do their part. Thus they organized the “NEWSTART for Your Life” program with the support of the Thonburi H4BKK church plant. The team planned well, and the monthly program included health screenings to check on the progress made since the past meeting. The organizers also coordinated an interesting series of health talks presented by Adventist health professionals on various topics. They addressed all aspects of a wholistic health ministry: spiritual, physical, social, and emotional health. They were surprised on the first day that more than 70 elite non-Christians attended. And over that year, as they built friendships with the attendees, eventually two made their decision to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and soon-coming Savior through baptism.

**INSIGHT #3 — ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

A third health ministry insight that the author gleaned from this biblical narrative in 2 Kings 5 was the practice of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). John McKnight, a professor from Northwestern University, and co-founder of ABCD, encourages communities not to solely focus on their problems (homelessness, poor education, slum housing, illiteracy, etc.) but rather on what resources are available to address these problems. By involving the abilities and skills of the individuals, coordinated with the community associations and local institutions, more can be accomplished for the kingdom of God.

Brother Roger Atun, a retired widower from the Philippines, provides an example of ABCD. After learning the Thai language and partnering with Mr. Vinai, a Thai businessman, Brother Atun organized the medical ministry in a Bangkok slum near the Onnut area in 2010. Through partnerships with Ekamai International School, community leaders and dedicated church members, they were able to meet real needs through an ongoing children’s ministry and tutoring (social/education/mental health), prayer ministry (spiritual/emotional health), small group Bible studies (social/spiritual health), and rice distribution (physical health). Several have accepted Christ and have been baptized and are continuing to minister in wholistic ways.

This has been our experience as we have used health ministry to spread the gospel
at our various church plants in Bangkok.

Here is a summary of the insights we have gained as we have used wholistic health ministry to share the gospel and to prepare the Thai people for Christ’s soon return.

A. INSIGHT #1 — CARE MORE, TALK LESS

By caring for our local communities in meeting practical needs with health ministry, the walls of prejudice toward the gospel are torn down.

B. INSIGHT #2 — PRACTICE WHOLISTIC HEALTH MINISTRY

By practicing a wholistic health ministry that includes spiritual health, physical health, social and emotional health, we have seen more people open their hearts to the Holy Spirit’s prompting and have seen their lives change as they have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior.

C. INSIGHT #3 — ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

By networking in our communities we can find the needed skills, talents, and resources among the people, the various community associations, and local institutions to conduct wholistic health ministry.

By integrating these three health ministry insights into our church planting praxis, we will see how, in the next section, Mission Action, we can realign our goals to put the gospel in action.

MISSION ACTION

The author proposes two practical, real-world actions that can be implemented in Bangkok from the Bible account of Mr. Big, Ms. Little, the king, and our Great God.

MISSION ACTION #1 — COMMUNICATE AND ADJUST EXPECTATIONS TO HEALTH MINISTRY

Second Kings 5:11 tells us how Naaman became angry due to his unmet expectations. His idea of healing clashed with God’s instructions through the prophet Elisha. As a Big Man, Naaman had every scene of the “movie” of his restoration to health outlined in his mind, from the warm and glowing scene of his restoration with his family to the pompous scene of how the king would restore his position as the top general in the Syrian army. Yet General Namaan’s expectations were completely wrong.

So with health ministry—expect “expectation collision.” At the October 7–9, 2011, Adventist Health Expo (AHE), we experienced several unmet expectations, both negative and positive. This health evangelism event was held at MBK Center Mall in the Pathumwan District of Bangkok. As reported by the MBK Center Mall staff, there are approximately 90,000 visitors daily, and 120,000 visitors on weekends. We had preventive health screening stations where one hundred volunteers per day
would conduct lifestyle education and preventive health screening (i.e. height, weight, blood pressure, body mass index, eye exam, blood sugar test, dental exam, skin exam, hand grip strength test, etc.).

Some unmet expectations included those individuals who expected us to dispense free prescription medicine. Instead we freely dispensed basic lifestyle health education. Others complained to one Thai pastor about the poor quality of the free eyeglasses dispensed. Another man interviewed by a Thai pastor knew more about the various topics than our volunteers, so he walked away disappointed with his unmet expectation of learning more about his complex medical condition.

But we also received positive feedback from many whose expectations were exceeded. Several individuals asked for Bibles at the counseling table. Others submitted prayer requests. And many asked, “When will you do this again?”

On Sabbath, October 9, 2011, the author visited with Khun Meow, a woman who later started attending church in Thonburi from this first contact at the Adventist Health Expo at MBK Mall. On November 27, 2011, Khun Meow volunteered at Thonburi church plant’s local community health expo. Dr. Surachet Insom, the health ministries director for the Thailand Adventist Mission, shared with the author how he later visited with her and they had a Bible study together. She now understands more about God’s love and how He cares for our physical and spiritual health. She said, “I never knew these things [about health] were in the Bible!”

One must clearly communicate the objective of health ministry. From the author’s perspective, the object of health ministry is to point people to Jesus Christ. They must begin to see Jesus as Creator, Savior, Lord and Healer, and experience healing in a wholistic manner. From the author’s perspective, the object of health care is to address health concerns and complaints, and to prevent illness, through specialization, though in a fragmented manner.

In the book *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143, we see this wholistic view described as “Christ’s method alone”:

The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished. Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”

**MISSION ACTION #2 — HEALTH MINISTRY TO FOCUS ON PREVENTION**

When conducting health ministry, one must keep the focus on prevention. This is the second practical, real-world application to put the gospel in action. Preventive medicine looks at ways to eliminate the causes of disease rather than dealing with the signs and symptoms. We will now review an illustration from the Bangkok context.
Table 1  Thailand Total Deaths by Cause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 10 Causes By Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Stroke</td>
<td>73,429</td>
<td>14.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Coronary Heart Disease</td>
<td>53,328</td>
<td>10.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Diabetes Mellitus</td>
<td>35,787</td>
<td>6.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Lung Disease</td>
<td>32,190</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Road Traffic Accidents</td>
<td>29,778</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>29,255</td>
<td>5.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Liver Disease</td>
<td>25,522</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Influenza and Pneumonia</td>
<td>23,570</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Kidney Disease</td>
<td>22,040</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Liver Cancer</td>
<td>19,321</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1, from the “Health Profile: Thailand,” one can look at the top ten causes of death in Thailand (World Life Expectancy 2011). From this data, ministry plans can be made. All top causes of total deaths in Thailand can be directly addressed through health ministry focused on prevention through lifestyle.

Reben Huilar, the Filipino church planter with the H4BKK team, conducted a cooking school in his neighborhood. Mr. Tony, his neighbor, had previously worked as a chef in Canada, so Reben invited him to help teach the cooking school. By showing ways to cook delicious and nutritious food in an inexpensive way, the risk from these “killer diseases” can be lessened.

RE-TELLING THE STORY

Back to Thonburi. During the same week that Mr. Big spoke with Pastor Prateep about his desire to have Bible studies, the Thonburi church plant conducted a local community health expo, which included free eye exams, preventive health screening, counseling, prayer, and consultation with an Adventist physician. As the planning team compiled the results of the registration questionnaire, they were surprised. The author filmed Mr. Vinai as he reported his findings to Pastor Chanchai, the TAM ministerial director. More than 100 people came, more than half requested home visitation, and 13 asked for Bible studies to learn more about Jesus!

As acknowledged through the recent scientific research (Buettner 2009), Seventh-day Adventists encourage the practice of a “culture of longevity.” The foundation for this comes from the biblical view of wholistic view of health. This includes the four aspects of health including physical, social-relational, mental-emotional, and spiritual health.

It is the author’s prayer that the lessons learned from reflecting on 2 Kings 5 and the stories and lessons shared from Bangkok regarding health ministry will inspire
others to expand the kingdom of God using health ministry to prepare more people around the planet for Christ’s second coming.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Notes
1. This chapter has been adapted from a paper for the CEAR Conference, “Hosting Personal Encounters with God: Sowing the Gospel in Asian Fields,” from a paper originally submitted by the author for the class, MN 520 “Encountering the City,” taught by Jude Tiersma-Watson in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary during July 2011.

At the time the paper was originally written, the author was serving with the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Thailand as the Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Coordinator.

The author would like to acknowledge how God used Jim Park for inspiration in his October 1, 2011, sermon presented at the Ekamai Thai Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bangkok, Thailand, based on 2 Kings 5:1–19, entitled, “Big, Little, and Great.” When the paper was written, Jim Park was serving as the director of the Big 4 Program and professor of discipleship and mission at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS), located in Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

The paper is dedicated to the Thai and foreign church planters, the officers and department leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Thailand, Adventist Volunteer Services (AVS) volunteers, the supportive students, staff, and administrators of the six Adventist affiliated schools in Bangkok (Adventist affiliated schools include those operated by the Thailand Adventist Mission and those owned by loyal Seventh-day Adventist members; TAM-operated schools include Adventist Ekamai Thai School [AES], Bangkok Adventist International School [BAIS], Ekamai International School [EIS]; schools owned and operated by Adventist members include NIVA International School [NIS], Ramkhamhaeng Advent International School, [RAIS], and Trinity International School [TIS]), and the many active men and women from the established churches who served together to “UpLift Christ” through the Hope for Bangkok Church Planting Initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Thailand from 2006 to the present.

2. See photos of these meetings at https://picasaweb.google.com/Hope4bkk/THONB?authuser=0&feat=directlink.
3. “Company” is a term used within the Seventh-day Adventist Church to describe the classification of a congregation as it progresses to become a church. The Thailand Adventist Mission provides this definition of a company: “Where a united membership of believers of at least 20 baptized members, meeting with a church leader regularly on Sabbath at a specific place for Sabbath School and worship with the objective of growing into a organized church may be organized for ‘Company’.” (Source: “Development of Guidelines for Organizing Group, Company, Church,” Thailand Adventist Mission, May 15, 2007.)

4. “Group” is a term used within the Seventh-day Adventist Church to describe the classification of a congregation as it progresses to become a church. Here is how the Thailand Adventist Mission defines a group: “Where a group of united believers of at least 5 baptized members, meeting for fellowship and worship with a church leader (assigned) meeting regularly on Sabbath at a specific place for worship with the objective of growing into a organized company and church may be organized for ‘Group’.” (Source: “Development of Guidelines for Organizing Group, Company, Church,” Thailand Adventist Mission, May 15, 2007.)

5. All Bible quotations in this chapter are from the NKJV unless otherwise marked.

6. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) was developed by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann. To learn more about the ABCD Institute in the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University, located in Evanston, Illinois, explore their website at www.abcdinstitute.org.

7. See Exodus 19:5, 6; 1 Peter 2:4, 5, 9; Revelation 1:5, 6; Revelation 5:9, 10; Revelation 20:6.

8. See Table 2 for an Overview of Health Expo Results from the Bangkok Metro Area, November 2010–November 2011.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Community Location</th>
<th>Organizer</th>
<th>Community Partnership</th>
<th>Faith Based Partnerships</th>
<th>Attendees</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
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<td>11/10-14/10</td>
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<td>Surachet Insom E. Douglas Venn AHE Planning Committee</td>
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<td>Reben Huilar</td>
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</table>
1. Communicated with nearby Flood Evacuation Center leader to invite evacuees to attend TAM Health Ministries Director, two physicians and three health educators from Chinese Church, volunteers & support personnel from H4-BKK church plants.


WORKS CITED


Park, James H. “Big, Little, and Great: 2 Kings 5.” Sermon presented at Ekamai Thai Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bangkok, Thailand, October 1, 2011.


ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 11

MAKING DISCIPLES AMONG BUDDHISTS IN MANDALAY, MYANMAR

Gavin Johns

Myanmar is in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division and in 2014 had an estimated population of 53 million. Of the total population, approximately 85 percent is Buddhist (2014 census). The Bamar is the largest ethnic group, comprising more than half of the country’s population.

History has demonstrated that it is very difficult to reach the Bamar people for Christ. Many attribute this to the fact that Christianity was imported from the West during Burma’s subjugation as a colony of the British Empire, and so Christianity is seen as a tool in the hands of foreign invaders to control Burma (as it was then known) and make it serve foreign interests. After the country regained its independence from the British in 1947, Buddhism has been honored in the constitution as the official religion of Myanmar, with the full protection of the government, and other religions are seen as threats from foreign countries.

CHURCH PLANTING IN MANDALAY

Mandalay City is both a former capital of Myanmar and the cultural heart of the Bamar people of Myanmar. It is located in the northern central dry zone of Myanmar on the east bank of the Ayeyarwady River. A city traditionally dominated by the Bamar people, there is growing ethnic diversity, with other ethnic groups coming to the commercial center for work and education, as well as a large number of Chinese making this town their home. Historically, Mandalay was the last seat of the last independent royal city. The last king of Myanmar was exiled to India in 1886, and that marked the beginning of British colonial control of the country.

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Myanmar estimates that there are only 50 Bamar Seventh-day Adventists in the country. Mandalay is a city in the Upper Myanmar Mission (UMM)—one of five local fields in the Myanmar Union Mission.

The first Seventh-day Adventist church in Mandalay was organized in the late 1950s, about 50 years after Herbert Meyers and A. G. Watson pioneered Seventh-day
Adventist missionary work as literature evangelists. The church was built on the south side of the moat around the royal inner city. The property there included a church, school, and a vacant lot. The school and lot were later nationalized by the government to establish a preschool.

The one Adventist church in Mandalay was filled primarily with the traditionally Christian Chin people of the western highlands, which made it less attractive to the Bamar people of Mandalay. There was interest in establishing a church for Bamar people in Mandalay.

Over the years, Mandalay had experienced several devastating fires across the crowded old sections of the city. To resettle people and to prevent more fires, the government surveyed large sections around Mandalay and established extended roads and subdivision areas. In 1988, Maranatha Volunteers International donated funds for the purchase of land and a new house-church building for a worship group in this new section of Mandalay. The group that met there struggled for a long time and experienced a lot of conflict with the community. It eventually closed, and the members began to meet in private homes.

In 2010, the Upper Myanmar Mission chose to reopen the church and assigned a Global Mission pioneer to conduct church planting among the Bamar people. Brother Ehel Htoo (pronouncedehr-TOO), a former Buddhist and an ethnic Bamar, was appointed as the Global Mission pioneer. At the time he was working in Mandalay as a taxi driver, after having spent many lonely years away from his wife and two daughters due to his work abroad both as a deck officer in the merchant marine and later as a factory foreman.

As Ehel Htoo began work, he found that there were approximately 20 Adventist members. He also found that the house-church building was in very bad shape. The relationship with the community was still poor. So he began his ministry work by remodeling the house church while at the same time building on the contacts and friendships made from his time as a taxi driver to develop trust with the community.

In the coming months God indeed blessed. Worship resumed in the upstairs sanctuary, and the church began to grow steadily. By the end of 2014, the church had 57 regular church members and has now been given full church status. The members are not all ethnic Bamar, but the majority are from Buddhist backgrounds, resulting in a group that is more similar to Bamar culture.

So what are the secrets of success in Ehel Htoo’s ministry?

In addition to the importance of prayer and personal devotion to Christ, Ehel Htoo has wisely been working in the following ways:

**BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS.**

Ehel Htoo already had a relationship with many Buddhists in the community and made this the first focus of his ministry. As friendships and trust were established, those who had formerly tried to cause loud distractions (such as blaring their stereos) stopped and began to greet the church group warmly.
ESTABLISHING LOCALIZED WORSHIP GROUPS.

Ehel Htoo’s members were spread across the city, and for a while he worked hard to drive around each Sabbath and bring them to the church. Soon he realized it would be better to form two additional worship groups and conduct services in members’ homes on Sabbath afternoon rather than drive around to bring them all to church. This meant that it was much easier for Adventists to invite their neighbors and friends to join the services, as they were in their local area.

EMPOWERING CHURCH MEMBERS FOR MINISTRY.

Sometimes Ehel Htoo has his church elder help him by doing the visiting and leading out in the small groups, but even then he attends the group meetings and takes part in the worship program. He remains an active support—not just giving assignments to lighten his responsibilities.

VISITING MEMBERS AND INTERESTS REGULARLY.

Ehel Htoo visits his members and interested Buddhists regularly. In fact, the majority of his time is spent in visitation. When members are absent, he visits or calls to find out why they haven’t attended church. He is always on the lookout to make friends and invite people to church. Even if they don’t come, he visits them and tries to build up relationships with the intention of introducing them to Jesus.

BEING FAMILIAR AND COMFORTABLE WITH BUDDHISTS AND THEIR TEACHINGS.

When monks visited one of the small house groups in Amarapura, they came to learn about Christianity in order to gain skills for debating Christians. However, because Ehel Htoo was a former Buddhist, he was able to draw on his experience to answer questions such as: “What is the Christian concept of Nirvana?” “How can Christians be sure that the Scriptures are accurately preserved?” and “How did this world begin?” Eventually the monks became quite interested, and one left the monastery and professed faith in Christ.

POINTING PEOPLE TO GOD FOR HELP.

Oftentimes members and Bible students have desperate financial needs. One such person was a widow who needed a tin roof for her leaky, one-room shelter that she shares with her 9-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter. While Ehel Htoo could have purchased the tin for her, he mentored her in praying to God for help in order to show her that her dependence is not on man but on God. This woman’s faith in God was strengthened greatly when, a short time later, the government offered her tin for her roof.

While Ehel Htoo has been having some great success, like all gospel workers, he also faces significant challenges in his church planting. Here are a few:
EQUIPPING HIS MEMBERS.

Ehel Htoo’s greatest challenge is how to train up his members to be disciples for the Lord who are ready and able to confidently share His love with others.

FUNDS FOR MINISTRY.

As one might expect, money is a challenge. A majority of the members are quite poor, and with no proper transportation system, it is hard for members to get together. While Ehel Htoo has a motorbike and a small pickup truck for transporting members, he struggles on his US$90 monthly stipend to make ends meet.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS WITH CHURCH LEADERSHIP.

Sometimes Ehel Htoo experiences a mismatch between realities in the field and what is expected of him in terms of work policy. This has led to some misunderstandings with his superiors. While leaders can be very committed to God and the work, sometimes they exhibit narrowness of understanding that can be difficult for the local worker. In each part of the field there are challenges that must be met, and it is important for leaders to spend time with their workers in the field to see the realities on the ground firsthand.

TESTIMONIES OF BUDDHIST BACKGROUND BELIEVERS

The following are two testimonies from church members at Ehel Htoo’s church in Mandalay. Let’s learn from how God has been working in their lives.

DAW NI LAR

Daw Ni Lar is a Bamar and former Buddhist. She married a Christian while working as a state employee and eventually had five children. Her husband had a poor-paying job, and they struggled financially as they tried to raise their five children. One day tragedy struck Daw Ni Lar’s home—her husband had a stroke and was rushed to the hospital, where he was found to be paralyzed and unable to speak properly.

At the particular hospital where her husband was admitted, discharges took place every Friday, with only the sickest allowed to remain for the weekend. When Friday came, the hospital asked Daw Ni Lar to take her husband home. But she had no way to get him home as she didn’t have a vehicle or the money to pay for public transport. She was discouraged, and the thought that her husband wouldn’t be able to work to provide for the family was completely overwhelming. And so, for the first time, out of desperation, that Friday morning, Daw Ni Lar prayed. “Jesus, if You are God and You are powerful, please send husband home walking today. If you do this then I will believe in You.” She had barely finished her prayer when she looked out of her window and saw her husband walking toward the house with the assistance of a cane. She was so surprised and amazed at how God had immediately answered her prayer in such a dramatic fashion that, from that day forward, she knew that God was real and chose to put her faith...
fully in Him. Daw Ni Lar is now a very active member of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Mandalay and hosts a group of worshippers in her home.

KHIN MOE WAI

Khin Moe Wai was a Buddhist from the Danu ethnic group, a small group of about 115,000 people found only in Myanmar. The Danu are part of the Tibeto-Burman people clustered near Inle Lake in Shan State, where they are primarily fishers and agriculturalists.

Khin Moe Wai was living in Shan State as the eldest of four children when her mother passed away. When her father remarried, Khin Moe Wai left home and migrated to Mandalay seeking vocational training and work to take care of herself.

Life was not as easy as she expected when she arrived in Mandalay, and she was not able to work as a seamstress as she had hoped. Eventually, she married a Danu man and had children. When her second child, a daughter, was born, she found out that her husband was having an affair with another woman. She divorced him and was left with her two children and no livelihood or financial support from her ex-husband.

Life was very difficult. Khin Moe Wai became very discouraged and bitter. To make ends meet, she sold vegetables and fruit at the market, but life was difficult, and she often had nothing. Eventually she sold the small bare home her husband had left her and found a cheaper one, using the leftover money to purchase a few pieces of furniture and other necessities. This helped improve her living situation.

During this time, Khin Moe Wai visited an older Danu woman, Ama Shan, who was like a surrogate mother to her. Ama Shan was about her mother’s age, and they became good friends. Ama Shan was a Baptist Christian and invited Khin Moe Wai to join in the prayer meetings she attended. Khin Moe Wai accompanied her, but just for courtesy’s sake, since she was a committed Buddhist. Eventually, however, she found that she was experiencing peace as a result of the prayers. She especially found comfort in the words of Psalm 43, which closes with these words: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (NKJV). Eventually, Ama Shan was converted into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Whenever Ehel Htoo, the Global Mission pioneer and Adventist church leader, visited Ama Shan’s house, if Khin Moe Wai was there she did her best to avoid him and return home. Ehel Htoo would ask if she wanted prayer, but Khin Moe Wai would always excuse herself. One day, as the church leader was visiting Ama Shan’s house, Khin Moe Wai had just returned from the market and had a strong urge to open her heart to God by receiving prayer. However, since Ehel Htoo knew how uncomfortable Khin Moe Wai was about their prayer time, he waited for her to leave before praying. It was getting late, and Ehel Htoo had no choice but to ask yet again if Khin Moe Wai wanted prayer. This time she did, and her life was changed as a result. She experienced a peace and joy that she had never felt before. The bitterness and loneliness that she had been burdened with was replaced
with a sweet peace and assurance for the future. She felt an urge to attend church and get to know God personally. This started a journey with God that she has committed to never turn away from.

Though Khin Moe Wai could not see God leading and preparing for her future, now as she looks back over the past, she can say with confidence that through her divorce and bitter experience, God guided her to know Him. She said, “I will not exchange anything for my God today.” She is building up her experience and relationship with God through daily Bible reading, developing a strong prayer life, and witnessing about how God has blessed her in her walk with Him.

Her father, also a Buddhist, was very angry with her for becoming a Christian. But she planned to visit him and requested prayers for her and her father to be reconciled peacefully. Even so, she is willing to sever her relationship with her earthly father if that will hinder her relationship with her heavenly Father.

Khin Moe Wai still has problems and uncertainties, particularly as a single parent. But she has faith in God and knows He will never leave her. She has her assurance from Him. She is living on state-owned land that could be taken back any time, but even in that she is putting her trust in God.

CONCLUSION

Today as we work to spread the gospel message among Buddhists, it is important that we do less sermonizing and focus more on expressing the love of God in our daily lives. As we have spoken to people who have experienced a new life in God, we can see that there is nothing that God cannot do for anyone.

It seems that as a church we are often more concerned about increasing our membership than in making disciples of Jesus. But Buddhists must see Jesus lived out in our lives. They need to see the divine love of Jesus practically expressed. They have a longing for something that only the forgiveness, grace, and salvation of Jesus can offer them. Through our lives, they will be able to receive practical lessons that speak more strongly than our sermons.

It is time we equip and challenge our church members and workers to experience the love of God in their lives and to share their testimonies with their neighbors. The love of Jesus must be the driving force leading us to share the gospel with others.

The administration at each level of the church must be aware of the Global Mission pioneers working within their territories, instead of seeing the Global Mission work as a project of the General Conference. Their work needs to be seen as a branch of the work of the Missions and Unions. The Global Mission pioneers need the support of the concerned Missions they are working in. They need the district pastors to visit and pray for them. Today this work is considered as a project from the Division and General Conference rather than owned by the Mission and Union. It is time we change our attitude so the work can progress.
CHAPTER 12
THE GOSPEL SPREADING IN CHINA'S LEPROSY COLONIES AND IN JAPAN:
USING CHRIST'S APPOINTED METHOD (ISAIAH 58)

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In a world filled with many cultures, creeds, colors, and conflicts, one might wonder how Jesus can be introduced to the billions still living without knowing Him. Many denominations and religious groups have created various strategies and have worked earnestly to communicate the gospel to different people groups all over the world. However, through the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, we can learn Jesus’ effective method in reaching people. During His ministry on earth, Jesus spent more time ministering to the poor, sick, and suffering than in preaching, teaching us that through our lives and actions, people are pointed to Him.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14, 16).

Ellen White, who was burdened with a love for souls, wrote, “The world will be convinced not so much by what the pulpit teaches as by what the church lives. The preacher announces the theory of the gospel, but the practical piety of the church demonstrates its power” (White 1900 [B]:260).

A Bible study can be culturally relevant and a sermon can be logical and eloquently delivered, but unless Christ’s love is practically shown through our lives, we cannot truly share Him. “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Christians are to be Christ-like, and the world is to see His character and love reflected in our lives. Jesus came to serve and not be served, and we are to imitate His example (Mark 10:45). During her ministry, Ellen White wrote many times about God’s desire for His people to follow in Christ’s footsteps, doing the work outlined in Isaiah 58.

I have no fears of workers who are engaged in the work represented in the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. This chapter is explicit, and is enough to enlighten
anyone who wishes to do the will of God. There is plenty of opportunity for everyone to be a blessing to humanity. The third angel’s message is not to be given a second place in this work, but is to be one with it (White 1952:33).

THE TOWFOLD REFORM OF ISAIAH 58
The work specified in these words [Isaiah 58] is the work God requires His people to do. It is a work of God’s own appointment. With the work of advocating the commandments of God and repairing the breach that has been made in the law of God, we are to mingle compassion for suffering humanity. We are to show supreme love to God; we are to exalt His memorial, which has been trodden down by unholy feet; and with this we are to manifest mercy, benevolence, and the tenderest pity for the fallen race. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” As a people we must take hold of this work. Love revealed for suffering humanity gives significance and power to the truth (White 1952:31).

A modern ministry that is following the counsel given to Ellen White about our need to do the work of Isaiah 58 is the leprosy ministry in China. The ministry was started in 2006 by an elderly Korean layman named Mr. Kim, who is 82 years old. He was convicted by the Word and the Spirit of Prophecy that God’s prophecies would soon be fulfilled and that the gospel needed to be spread through the work outlined in Isaiah 58. He came alone to China after serving Japanese blind people for five years and Korean lepers for 17 years.

CHINA
In China—the most populous country in the world and one that is still in some of the greatest need of receiving the gospel—some gospel workers may believe that the best strategy to establish new work is by first trying to reach out to influential leaders of society. However, God is using humble means to reach all classes through those who are truly “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40).

China has around 600 colonies for those with leprosy, which is more properly referred to by modern medical science as Hansen’s disease. These colonies are filled with abandoned, mainly elderly people, who need both physical help and the good news of Jesus.

Sadly, every year, many lepers commit suicide because they feel hopeless and lonely. Although they are the Lord’s precious sons and daughters, they were thrown away by their families and society many years ago and have been living as outcasts in about 600 isolated places all over the country. Even though the people in the leper colonies were infected many years ago, they have been treated with modern medicine and are no longer contagious. However, many have severe handicaps and may be blind, deaf, mute, crippled, or are missing fingers, hands, or legs. In spite of this, they have been helping one another and
trying to live self-sufficiently. However, since they are now getting older, many need more help bandaging their wounds, cleaning, showering, cooking, and feeding themselves.

When the people in China’s leper colonies receive love and care for their physical needs by the ministry’s volunteer missionaries, their hearts naturally become open to hearing about Jesus. As they see love acted out in the lives and actions of the volunteers, they then can trust the volunteers’ message of Jesus’ love for them. When they are open to studying the Bible, they learn that Jesus came to save them and has a plan to use them to share His love and the message of His soon return to this world. This gives them hope and a new purpose for living! Then suicide, which is so common in the leper colonies, disappears. Furthermore, when Christ enters their hearts, their lives are transformed from looking out only for themselves to taking care of those who are in need within their colony. They have the joy of Christ in their hearts and pray for the Holy Spirit so they can repent and put away their sins and be used in fulfilling the Great Commission.

GRANDMA DENG MEI

One grandma in a leprosy colony in Guangdong Province is 87 years old and is a particularly bright ray of sunshine, showing the world how Jesus has changed her life. Her name is Deng Mei, and she is blind, has no fingers, and cannot walk. Her only family members died when she was young. She never went to school, and she has been living as a despised outcast from the world since young-adulthood. Because of her disabilities, the volunteer missionaries help feed her, dress her wounds, clean her room, and take care of her other daily needs. From all outward appearances, Deng Mei would have every reason to be an unhappy person. However, Grandma Deng Mei is one of the sweetest and most joy-filled people one could ever meet.

People who meet her for the first time wonder what is the secret behind her joy. The answer is simple: she has Jesus’ love in her heart. Since she came to know Jesus as her Friend and Savior, she always has words of thanks and praise on her lips, and her prayers show that she knows Him as a real friend. Her prayers start with, “Jesus, hello!” and then she proceeds to tell Him about her day and thank Him for everything, especially for sending the volunteers to come and help her at the leprosy colony. She asks Him to bless all the other people at the colony and the volunteers and their families too.

Deng Mei is a firm believer that Jesus died on the cross for her. Because of this, she has been able to forgive those who have hurt and abandoned her. When she is asked, “What is sin?” she replies that sin is “not helping others.” When the volunteers tell her that Jesus loves her, she replies, “Yes, Jesus loves me. God loves me. All the volunteers love me.” She is also thankful to Grandpa Kim. “If not for him, so many volunteers who love me would not have come here to help me and other patients.”

Because she realizes Jesus’ great love for her, she also wants to tell others about Him. Even though she is blind, she recently started memorizing Bible verses as the volunteers teach her how to introduce her best friend Jesus to others.
That particular leprosy colony is unique in that many groups and individuals from the community come to visit several times each month. To any visitor who comes by her room she says, “I don’t have anything to give you, but I want to share with you some Bible verses.” She then proceeds to recite several Bible verses, including John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:26–29.

Because of Grandma Deng Mei—someone who is weak, foolish, and despised by the world’s standard—many people are able to hear the good news. She doesn’t have any selfishness, pride, hatred, or jealousy of any kind, and her life bears the fruits of the Spirit: “Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23). She has the one thing she can take with her to heaven—a character made beautiful by Jesus!

Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve“ (Mark 10:45), and Grandma Deng Mei’s character is a reflection of Jesus as she shows selfless love. All her earthly possessions can fit in a few boxes on her bed, but even though she doesn’t have a lot of money or many belongings, she always wants to share what she has. If she is given three bananas, she’ll share one with her blind roommate, give the second one to a volunteer, and then finally eat the third one. She sometimes even uses her own money to buy fruit to give to the volunteers. When asked not to spend her money on the volunteers, she replies that giving makes her happy.

Today, at the leper colony in Guangdong Province, Deng Mei is a beautiful embodiment of the love and character of Jesus. Through Grandma Deng Mei and many others with leprosy in China, it is evident that God is not dependent on proud and worldly people to accomplish His work. He can use blind, crippled, and fingerless grandmas in leprosy colonies to share His message of mercy to the world.

The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness (White 1900 [A]:415–16).

One may ask how to develop Christ-like character. “It is in doing the works of Christ, ministering as He did to the suffering and afflicted, that we are to develop Christian character” (White 1940:165).

Christ genuinely cared for people and their needs and also shared the good news with them. This is the work of Isaiah 58, and this is what we are called to do. In *Christ’s Object Lessons*, Ellen White writes,

Divine truth exerts little influence upon the world, when it should exert much influence through our practice. The mere profession of religion abounds, but it
has little weight. We may claim to be followers of Christ, we may claim to believe every truth in the word of God; but this will do our neighbor no good unless our belief is carried into our daily life. Our profession may be as high as heaven, but it will save neither ourselves nor our fellow men unless we are Christians. A right example will do more to benefit the world than all our profession.

By no selfish practices can the cause of Christ be served. His cause is the cause of the oppressed and the poor. In the hearts of His professed followers there is need of the tender sympathy of Christ—a deeper love for those whom He has so valued as to give His own life for their salvation. These souls are precious, infinitely more precious than any other offering we can bring to God. To bend every energy toward some apparently great work, while we neglect the needy or turn the stranger from his right, is not a service that will meet His approval (White 1900 [A]:383–84).

By following Christ’s method of Isaiah 58, not only have people living in the leprosy colonies been reached, but also some staunch Communists, non-believers, and members of other denominations have also been reached. They were initially drawn by the desire to serve the people in the colonies and ultimately decided to follow Christ wholeheartedly. As they saw the love of Jesus lived out in the lives of the missionary volunteers and were able to study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, many learned about and accepted Bible truths, including the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and Jesus’ second coming. Now they have joined the full-time missionaries who are living with “all things in common” (Acts 2:44-45) and are united for the sake of spreading the gospel.

**DA-BO’S EXPERIENCE**

One young Chinese woman (nicknamed Da-Bo), who is only 16 years old, has been a full-time missionary with her mother, twin sister, and older sister since she was about 12 years old. When she was young, her mom often gave her money to give to homeless people. Back then she thought that she was a child who had a lot of love. Later, her family came to visit the leper colonies, and when she saw the patients for the first time, she realized that she needed God’s love to love them. She pondered why God left these suffering people on this earth, and later she realized that God had left these lepers on this earth so that she could recognize the sinfulness of her own heart.

Not long after, the family became full-time missionaries and went to serve at a leper colony in Guangxi Province. Shortly after arriving, Da-Bo had an experience there that touched her heart. A volunteer serving there took them to meet a man who had some serious sores. The volunteer asked the man how these girls should address him. What he said shocked Da-Bo. The man said, “Call me ‘Older Brother.’ ” But he was more 80 years old! Another man, also more than 80, asked them to call him “Fa-
ther.” She wondered why these two people wanted to be called “Brother” and “Father,” terms used within families. It seemed odd at the time, but their answers showed what was really in their hearts. Da-Bo started to understand that they must have suffered a lot living without having a family.

One day, the man who had asked Da-Bo to call him “Brother” became sick and died. It happened so unexpectedly that Da-Bo didn’t have a chance to share Jesus with him. In the past, she had never regretted that she hadn’t shared the gospel with others before they passed away—even with her relatives. But after Da-Bo came to serve in the leper colonies, her thinking and her heart changed. Now she felt as though she had missed a great opportunity to share the gospel with “Brother.” Within one month of his death, four or five other patients passed away. Each time one of them passed away, it pierced Da-Bo’s heart. When she heard that there are 240,000 lepers in China, she felt a huge burden on her heart to win them to Christ.

Shortly after, when her mom asked if she wanted to go back to school or continue with the leper ministry, Da-Bo responded, “If I don’t have love, what good is it for me to go to school?” Even though she realized that this one decision would change the course of her life, she determined to give up everything, including school, so that she could continue this ministry with her family. She would occasionally doubt her decision and ask herself, “Why did God choose me to help these poor and suffering people? All the other kids are having fun. Can’t I just do this work when I get older?”

However, one meeting with a man in the colony completely changed her outlook and confirmed her decision. The man wistfully told Da-Bo, “It would’ve been good if you volunteers had come sooner. You guys came too late. There are so many grandpas and grandmas who have committed suicide already. If you had come sooner, there would have been far fewer grandmas and grandpas who would’ve committed suicide.” The weight of those words, the reality of the fact that only Jesus gives absolute hope, became a sobering reminder.

After this encounter, Da-Bo said in her heart, as Isaiah once said, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.” Now she is very thankful that God asked her and her family to follow the pathway of Jesus in doing this work.

**FRUITS IN CHINA**

God has opened the doors for the work of Isaiah 58 to be done in China, and Christ’s method is bearing fruit. So far, 677 people in the leper colonies have been baptized, and currently around 300 are preparing for baptism. Some who have been baptized for only two or three years have memorized large portions of Scripture. Some have also learned to read and write Chinese characters for the first time—all through Bible study. This is miraculous because most of them never went to school and were illiterate until the Christian volunteers came. This is clear evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in their lives. As Zechariah 4:6 says, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit. . . .” Men and women in about 20 leper colonies are reading the Bible and
worshipping together. Sadly, there are few missionaries, and only half of those colonies have a missionary presence.

In a country technically closed to the gospel, doing the work of Isaiah 58 is helping the light spread, even to those in high positions of society. People can resist the truth and object to doctrines, but few can argue with a life that is filled with mercy to those in need. When people outside of the colonies hear about the work of unpaid local and foreign volunteers in the leper colonies and see the unexplainable joy in the lives of the elderly residents, they are touched and want to know what is motivating these volunteers to do this type of work. This has opened up opportunities to share the reason—Jesus’ love is in our hearts. And He asks us to share that love and hope of eternal life with others.

NEW FRONTIERS IN JAPAN

Another country that is in need of the gospel is Japan. With only 1 percent of the entire country Christian, some people say that it is one of the hardest mission fields in the world. Although Japan is very different from China, God is opening doors through the work of Isaiah 58. In Japan, most people have their physical needs met; however, there are people who are also outcasts and who are in great emotional and spiritual need. Ellen White writes,

Not all can be reached in the same way. There are many who hide their soul hunger. These would be greatly helped by a tender word or a kind remembrance. There are others who are in the greatest need, yet they know it not. They do not realize the terrible destitution of the soul. Multitudes are so sunken in sin that they have lost the sense of eternal realities, lost the similitude of God, and they hardly know whether they have souls to be saved or not. They have neither faith in God nor confidence in man. Many of these can be reached only through acts of disinterested kindness. Their physical wants must first be cared for. They must be fed, cleansed, and decently clothed. As they see the evidence of your unselfish love, it will be easier for them to believe in the love of Christ (White 1900 [A]:387).

In the winter of 2014, God opened the doors in Japan for several missionaries to start meeting and witnessing to the blind and those who are both deaf and blind. One of our missionaries met one middle-aged Japanese man, Mr. Tanaka, who can speak but who is completely deaf and blind. People communicate with him through Braille, finger Braille, and writing on the palm of his hand. After several visits with Mr. Tanaka and with those helping to interpret for him, trust was built, and the missionary invited him to join the Christians for a group lunch during the New Year holiday. In Japan, New Year’s is the biggest holiday. Businesses are closed, and families enjoy time together. When Mr. Tanaka came, he was very thankful and shared his heartbreaking story. It had been 30 years since he had been out of his house for the New Year’s holiday.
He shared how, as a young man, he had completely lost his hearing, but before that, he had heard about Jesus. He had questions about this unknown religion and went to a Christian church to ask the pastor some questions. However, the pastor was very busy and didn’t make a strong effort to meet with him. Mr. Tanaka made great efforts to come back, trying to meet the pastor, but because he was blind, he was continually brushed aside. He finally gave up, and for 30 years, he never again “heard” about Jesus. However, God had not forgotten His child, and in His providence, sent one of our missionaries to meet him. His story is still in progress. The volunteer missionaries continue to keep in touch with the blind and deaf man, who is interested in continuing to study the Bible more.

FOR OUR OWN GOOD: ISAIAH 58

God is not only opening doors for the gospel to be spread all over the world through Isaiah 58 ministries, He is also preparing individuals to become part of His remnant people—sold-out Christ followers who give up all for Him and work to fulfill His great commission. Following Christ requires obedience to His commands, which leads us to see our spiritual destitution and then ask God for His Holy Spirit and love so that we can share Him with others.

God gave me the amazing opportunity to join the leprosy ministry in February of 2013. Now, the question I am most often asked is, “Aren’t you afraid you’re going to get leprosy?” Thankfully, the answer is “No.” With modern medicine, leprosy is an easily curable disease, and all the men and women in the colonies have been treated and are no longer contagious. However, the most detrimental characteristic of leprosy is the inability to feel. Even after treatment, the areas affected are still numb to pain or temperature. Because of this, while cooking, some of the women do not realize that their hand is being burned from scalding water. Even when we’re dressing the wounds of the men and women, they say it doesn’t hurt even though the wounds may be large and deep.

Before doing the work of Isaiah 58, I didn’t know I was a spiritual leper. In fact, I thought I was in better condition than most people and didn’t need treatment. However, God brought me to serve people with leprosy to show me that I was actually the one who needed to be healed from my leprosy of selfishness. Since I was born and raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home and have attended Adventist schools from first grade through university, it had been easy for me to compare myself with others and think of myself as a “good person.” I had been on many mission trips (including spending a year as a student missionary overseas), hosted and led many Bible studies, been an active part of the leadership in my church’s youth ministries, and gone door to door canvassing. However, I had divided up my life into separate categories, one labeled “For myself” and the other labeled “For God.” In my spiritual pride, I thought I was doing well while I was actually trying to follow after the world’s standards and still trying to follow God at the same time.

However, after I started to volunteer in China and began to face circumstances that challenged my concept of what it meant to “deny self” and follow Jesus, I was
confronted with the ugly truth that I actually did not have God’s true love for the people He had asked me to serve, or for anyone for that matter. But as I cared for the leprous men and women, God was speaking to my heart and helping me realize that even though I had openly professed to be a follower of Christ, I had, in reality, been living for myself through my selfish actions. I was used to ignoring others in need around me while making my own plans and spending time and money on myself and my wants. As a result, my heart had become desensitized and destitute of love. As these realizations started taking place in my mind I read a quote from Ellen White that says, “The leprosy of selfishness has taken hold of the church. The Lord Jesus Christ will heal the church of this terrible disease if she will be healed. The remedy is found in the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah” (White 1940:85).

Then it hit me. I was the real leper! On the outside I looked normal, but my heart was numb, and I was decaying spiritually because of my selfishness and sin. I wondered how long I had not known my condition. I had been living without Christ’s love in my heart, which prevented me from living the life outlined in Isaiah 58. How long had I been ignoring the suffering and afflicted who were dying without knowing Jesus? God showed me that I was like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan. They thought they were spiritually healthy, going to church every Sabbath, eating clean foods, and having a lot of Bible knowledge, when, as Jesus pointed out, they were actually breaking the very principles of God’s law—love to God and love to others (Matthew 22:37–40).

I am so thankful to God for His mercy in giving me this spiritual wake-up call and helping me to realize my great need for Him to heal me so that His image can be seen in me. Ellen White also writes that, as we help others, God works on developing our characters.

I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God’s test of our character. If we have the true religion of the Bible, we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our brethren and who are less fortunate than ourselves (White 1885:511).

In God’s mercy He asks us to be co-laborers with Him so that He can reach the suffering and afflicted and at the same time mold our characters. As we let God change us, we can be used by Him to fulfill His prophecies and hasten His return. God is
longingly waiting for people who have His love and reflect His character to proclaim the three angels’ messages to the world.

**COUNSELS FROM THE BIBLE AND SPIRIT OF PROPHECY**

Fellow laborers in His great harvest field, I hope we will be able to follow the light we have been given in Isaiah 58 as we seek to fulfill God’s prophecies and hasten His soon return. While laboring in widely differing places around the world, we might wonder how to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those God places in our paths while we share the third angel’s message. Thankfully, the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy give us many counsels on how to follow Christ’s method.

Some practical advice given in the Scriptures includes:

- “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12, NKJV).
- “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:15–17, NKJV).

Through Ellen White we have been given many practical counsels on what we, collectively as a church and individually, should be doing to put our faith into practice. In *Christ’s Object Lessons* she wrote, “When those who profess to serve God follow Christ’s example, practicing the principles of the law in their daily life; when every act bears witness that they love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves, then will the church have power to move the world” (White 1900 [A]:340).

Some excellent counsel can be found in “The Church’s Need” from *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 260–268. In addition, we can see more practical counsels in *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 275–278:

By our churches there is a work to be done of which many have little idea, a work as yet almost untouched. “I was an hungered,” Christ says, “and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.” Matthew 25:35, 36. Some think that if they give money to this work, it is all they are required to do; but this is an error. Donations of money cannot take the place of personal ministry. It is right to give our means, and many more should do this; but according to their strength and opportunities, personal service is required of all.

The work of gathering in the needy, the oppressed, the suffering, the destitute, is the very work which every church that believes the truth for this time should long since have been doing. We are to show the tender sympathy of the Samari-
tan in supplying physical necessities, feeding the hungry, bringing the poor that are cast out to our homes, gathering from God every day grace and strength that will enable us to reach to the very depths of human misery and help those who cannot possibly help themselves. In doing this work we have a favorable opportunity to set forth Christ the crucified One.

Every church member should feel it his special duty to labor for those living in his neighborhood. Study how you can best help those who take no interest in religious things. As you visit your friends and neighbors, show an interest in their spiritual as well as in their temporal welfare. Present Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour. . . .

The hours so often spent in amusement that refreshes neither body nor soul should be spent in visiting the poor, the sick, and the suffering, or in seeking to help someone who is in need. . . .

On special occasions some indulge in sentimental feelings which lead to impulsive movements. They may think that in this way they are doing great service for Christ, but they are not. Their zeal soon dies, and then Christ's service is neglected. It is not fitful service that God accepts; it is not by emotional spasms of activity that we can do good to our fellow men. Spasmodic efforts to do good often result in more injury than benefit.

Methods of helping the needy should be carefully and prayerfully considered. We are to seek God for wisdom, for He knows better than shortsighted mortals how to care for the creatures He has made. There are some who give indiscriminately to everyone who solicits their aid. In this they err. In trying to help the needy, we should be careful to give them the right kind of help.

As the body of Christ, we are not all called to the same line of service. However, He wants each one of us to have His love in our hearts so that we can be changed by Him, to be used to share Him with others. Without His love in our hearts, any supposed “obedience” to His commands is meaningless. We cannot live our Isaiah 58 unless we are motivated by Jesus’ love to help our physically, emotionally, or spiritually suffering brothers and sisters. However, if His love dwells in our hearts, His love will go forth in actions.

May we prayerfully take to heart the practical counsels He has given us in His Word and the Spirit of Prophecy. May we daily ask God for His love to live the life outlined in Isaiah 58. Praise God that through the work of ministering to others He not only wants to reach those in need, He also wants to re-create our characters. Through His remnant people—people whose characters reflect Christ—God wants to share His last message of mercy to the world!
MORE COUNSELS

- Isaiah 58
- *SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G White Comments on Isaiah 58 (vol. 4, pp. 1148–1152)
- “The Least of These My Brethren,” *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 70
- “Doing for Christ,” *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 24–37

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Notes

1. All Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the NKJV unless otherwise marked.

2. Pseudonym used to protect identity.

3. Pseudonym used to protect identity.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 13
MINISTRY SUCCESSES IN MYANMAR:
FOLLOWING CHRIST’S METHODOLOGY

Dr. Htwe Lay

INTRODUCTION

The great commission was laid upon on every Christian in Matthew 28:19, 20:
“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The good news of salvation is universal, international, and inclusive. God is powerfully working through Spirit-inspired believers to bring the message of salvation in Jesus to everyone. He is able to lead us to cross the boundaries of different religions, cultures, and prejudices if we as believers use Christ’s method alone—the method that we are told brings true success.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Is this not the fast that I have chosen:
To loose the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the heavy burdens,
To let the oppressed go free,
And that you break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
When you see the naked, that you cover him,
And not hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:6–8).

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for
them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me” (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 143).

For He says: “In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

**MY STORY**

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations’ ” (Jeremiah 1:4, 5).

When I graduated from high school with distinction, my father wanted me to go to medical school. My desire was to attend the Adventist seminary, but I submitted to my father’s wishes as an obedient daughter. My father’s motivation for me to become a doctor was that he wanted me to go further than my parents in the medical field, as my father was a registered nurse and my mother was a midwife. So I chose to become a medical doctor and attended the medical college in Yangon, Myanmar.

Because we were poor, some relatives had compassion on me and supported me financially to help cover the tuition, books, and food. Upon graduation I was assigned to work as a “house surgeon” intern for one year in one of the government’s hospitals. Once my internship was completed, I applied for a job in government service—the only way I could continue practicing medicine formally. The night before the job interview, however, I received a call from the president of the Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary (MUAS) saying that the school urgently needed a medical doctor. Unhesitatingly I accepted the call, not worrying about the scheduled job interview in government service the next day, nor worrying about the fact that I would lose my medical license by leaving the government service.

I ended up working at MUAS as a family physician to all the faculty, students, and surrounding community and also taught health classes for the school. After three years I had an opportunity to go to Loma Linda University for upgrading. I wanted to become a surgeon, but the Lord blessed me with a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree instead. After graduating from the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University, I returned to MUAS to serve the Lord with the same role.

Two years later I was assigned to the Myanmar Union Mission in Yangon as director of the health ministries department. Because of the course of these calls, I never received a medical license and haven’t had the honor of working as a doctor in the government hospitals. I felt inferior to other doctors, even though I had a MPH degree. During my term as director of the health ministries department, I enjoyed teaching and giving health seminars to different groups such as children and youth, women, and the elderly inside and outside of our denomination. As I gained
experience, I began to feel much more confident in health promotion and education and found that I was able to approach all classes of people.

Although I have attended several trainings and seminars arranged by the Myanmar government, Division, and non-government organizations involved in community development and public health programs, there was one program than changed my ways and lifestyle more than any other—a month-long lifestyle clinical training made available to me by the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. This program was particularly inspiring and influenced me to change my own lifestyle and to use this experience to benefit the lives of others to adjust their lifestyle to follow God’s way of living. I learned personally the importance of health behavior change and medical missionary work as preparation of the hearts of people for the coming of the Lord.

I thought I would never regain my medical license after leaving the government program, but the Lord had a plan for me. That became very clear when the government opened a program that allowed my old classmates and me, who hadn’t stayed with the government service, to obtain our medical licenses. After completing a one-month refresher course, our licenses were reinstated. What joy!

By this time, I had been holding medical missionary training for church workers and lay members for almost three years. In addition, Adventist supporting ministry groups abroad sponsored stipends for medical missionaries who were assigned to various parts of Myanmar to teach the Adventist health message and help people apply it in their lives. We now celebrate the successes, pray earnestly over the challenges, and regret but learn from any failures of these medical evangelists.

In my work with this growing team, our desire is to grab hold of God’s grace and set up lifestyle centers to share His love, modeled after Christ’s method of success described in *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143. We call each of these centers, “NEWSTART Lifestyle Center.” To do this, I was required to hold a medical license to help some who came in very poor health—something God had wonderfully arranged before the need arose. In these centers, our gospel medical workers really enjoy mingling with different classes of people—Adventists, other Christians, Buddhists, atheists, and different ethnicities, including Burmese and Chinese. Each person has a common desire for physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. By ministering to their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs we are able to win their confidence. The successes and blessings of this ministry spur me onward.

NEW LOVE FOR OLD FRIENDS

*Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that*
I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you (1 Corinthians 9:19–23).

After my conversion from not being able to love people unconditionally and completely submitting myself to God to reach out to non-Christians, I immediately got to work. I decided to start with my closest friends. I felt guilty about having wasted so much time by failing to give my witness about God to them. There were two friends, one a Buddhist and the other a Roman Catholic, who I regularly spent time with for many years. I called them to plan a time when we could get together. When we got together, I nervously confessed that I had missed many opportunities and had neglected my responsibility to share my experience with Christ with them. After sharing my testimony, my Buddhist friend opened up and shared that, although he was raised in a Buddhist family, he found no peace or satisfaction in his religion. He had many doubts and unanswered questions, such as Buddhism’s supposed superiority over other religions. He explained that he no longer went to the Buddhist temples and pagodas to worship but instead was seeking peace and satisfaction in his life through the reading of books and generous acts to benefit other people. He added that he did not want to depend on anything to reach his goal but instead wanted to depend on himself. He closed by admitting that he had not reached his goal yet.

I then shared more deeply about my own personal quest and about God and His Word. I expressed that although I was a Christian raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home, I had not automatically found peace and satisfaction in my life. In fact, I experienced hatred and a condemning spirit toward a person in my life, which troubled me because this was opposed to the teachings of my faith. But God was working in my life, and by His grace He had changed me to become a person who could love people unconditionally. I pointed out that reading the Bible, the Word of God, was instrumental in maturing me in righteousness and made me more patient and able to love the unlovable unconditionally. I then gave each of my friends a Bible and invited them to study it carefully as the guide for their lives.

My Buddhist friend objected, saying, “As I have been reading various books to help me, I tried reading this book, but I can’t understand it. This book is too complicated, in my opinion, so I stopped reading it.” I explained to him a general overview of the Bible and encouraged him to try again by reading the book of Proverbs, where he would find wisdom for daily living. Also, I promised to bring him a copy of Steps to Christ and The Desire of Ages, which would help him understand who Christ was, as well as His teachings.

I turned to my Catholic friend and encouraged her to study the Bible as her daily guide. I also encouraged her to not simply be satisfied with church traditions. I explained to both of them that my interest was not in religion or religious systems, but rather, I wanted to encourage them to search for meaning for their lives, which would also lead them to the truth about our universe. This experience and others led me to want to do more to reach out to non-Christians and to employ my talents and medical skills for God.
FACING PREJUDICES WITH GRACE

“Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

On one occasion, as we were holding a series of 21-day NEWSTART live-in programs—one program immediately followed another—one reported us to a local government authority and falsely accused our work, saying that we were conducting “illegal business” such as massage therapy and medical treatment without being duly licensed. I was personally accused of not holding a medical doctor license. Clearly the intent was to shut down the work and disgrace me and the team publicly. Initially I was perplexed and worried about these accusations. But with my calm restored, I finally made the decision to go directly to the government officer to explain the nature of our work, to put it in the honest light of what we were attempting. I also planned to apologize if we had ignorantly made any mistakes in overlooking requirements on us.

Prior to going, my team and I joined together in earnest prayer that God would provide the guidance and wisdom needed to know how to address the accusations. After prayer, the whole team went to the home of the chairman of the local authority. From the start, the man demonstrated that he believed the accusations against us and treated us offensively.

I introduced myself, describing my medical and health training as well as my licensure as a medical doctor. Next I introduced each member of our team. Then I explained the nature of my work as a public health educator and our activity in giving training and seminars and holding smoking cessation classes for those who wanted to quit smoking. Gradually, the officer’s face relaxed and he became friendly. Finally, he encouraged us in our good work and told us to continue our program, with the requirement that we report to his department if anyone slept overnight in the building where we were holding the training. He then began to share his own interests in health, describing his regular exercise, his avoidance of fried foods and animal fat, and how he enjoyed looking younger than his actual age.

After an hour of conversation, we left his home thanking God for His guidance in turning hostilities to friendship.

PARTNERING FOR MEDICAL EVANGELISM

And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have (2 Corinthians 8:10–12).

We held Trainers’ Training for Breathe Free Smoking Cessation twice, once in 2008 and then again in 2012. The objective of the training is to teach church members how to start a smoking cessation program in their neighborhood. Initially I had no intention of doing smoking cessation seminars, but one medical doctor
convinced me to develop this training seminar. As a medical doctor, this friend (I'll call her Dr. Nyein) had experience working in community health and government service. Dr. Nyein promised she would help teach, and so we began planning the first Breathe Free Smoking Cessation Center in Yangon and, indeed, all of Myanmar. Dr. Nyein discussed the entire program regarding its strengths and weaknesses and helped us to be effective. The following Bible text comes to mind: “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality” (2 Corinthians 8:13, 14).

We arranged the program to include a health lecture, group discussion, a health video, a juice break, and time to explain the “homework” assignment. Each team member was assigned a different role in one of these areas. My strength is in persuading and convincing people, while Dr. Nyein is strong in relating to the smokers’ social and physical problems. Other team members were well suited for handling the video or providing a refreshing drink. Each member played a valuable role, and our team worked beautifully together. More than just helping people to conquer their smoking addictions, we became personally interested in them, opening our hearts to them in order to share God’s love and introduce them to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The work we were doing drew attention from the Yangon news media, some of whom came out to our center and interviewed me about what we were doing. The result was free advertisement, targeting those interested in overcoming their smoking addiction and directing them to contact us for help. This encouraged us greatly as we saw that we were meeting real needs for Christ.

BE WISE AND HARMLESS

“‘Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves’” (Matthew: 10:16).

I invited my friends to our “Know Your Genes and Be Healthy” seminar by Dr. Sang Lee, a well-known medical evangelist and television speaker from Korea. There were two parts to the seminar. The first included daily sessions for the local mission leaders focusing on “Scientific Understanding of Divine Healing.” The second part featured evening sessions aimed at the general public. I was thinking to invite the chairman of the Myanmar Medical Council to give opening remarks, so I approached one of my former medical school classmates who was well acquainted with the chairman and asked for help giving the invitation card to him. My friend looked at the invitation card carefully and said, “You are trying to attract people to your religion through health work. I’m sorry, but I dare not invite the chairman of the Myanmar Medical Council.” I regretted that I had combined both advertisements in the same invitation card. This made my friend not want to get involved in inviting the national health leader to a religious meeting. I realized that I had not acted wisely in writing the invitation letter and should have written a separate invitation letter intended for the mission workers. I learned a valuable lesson.
Another opportunity came to give health lectures at the Korean Charity Organization in Yangon. This time I felt it would be effective to share my personal experiences of God’s blessing my health. So I started my health talk with my personal testimony, in which my nerve pain caused by cervical spondylosis was relieved through sharing love and care to another patient, who was suffering from an abdominal discomfort due to liver cancer.

I also shared the story of a rich man in Korea, a story I heard from Dr. Sang Lee, who came to Myanmar for a seminar. The rich Korean man used to support his church by donating huge amounts of money, but he got cancer. As a result, he blamed God.

“Why me?” he asked. “I have been donating my riches all my life, and now You are letting me suffer this dreadful disease. You aren’t fair.”

He finally went to Dr. Sang Lee, who was famous for his counseling skills. Dr. Sang Lee listened to the man’s story carefully and pointed out to the man he was depending on his good deeds rather than on the grace of God. He misunderstood the character of God. Dr. Sang Lee advised him to share God’s true, unconditional love with the needy. The man was inspired by the doctor’s explanation, and his life changed.

I told this story very carefully. Then, on a whiteboard, I wrote the following deeds that the rich man did during the rest of his life:

1. Loosing the bonds of wickedness
2. Undoing the heavy burdens
3. Breaking every yoke
4. Sharing food with the hungry
5. Bringing the poor to his house
6. Clothing the naked
7. Serving his own relatives.

I did not tell them that these words were written in the book of Isaiah of the Christian Bible. Instead I testified to them that this rich man was healed of his cancer, which was true. As I observed the eyes of the whole audience, they seemed full of joy and hope. They were happy to listen to what I was sharing.

Then I explained the nature of unconditional love and how this love produces hormones called endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine, which are essential for total well-being. After my talk, a lot of people approached to me to thank me and to consult with me about their own suffering. Many opened up to me about their lives and feelings.

I praise the Lord that I was able to present God to the unbelievers in a wise yet harmless way.

ONE STORY OF SUCCESS

As we were making plans to offer a new smoking cessation course, one woman arranged to send her father, a retired military officer and Buddhist, to our seminar. On the first day of classes, the gentleman (I’ll call him Saw) arrived and registered, but it quickly became obvious that he didn’t want to quit smoking. He explained that he had
been smoking for nearly 40 years and that he didn’t think he could quit. He had come only to satisfy his daughter’s desire that he quit. Although Saw was retired from the military, he was working as a shipping manager for a large military-owned company. And so, at every session of the seminar, Saw would show up late but would bring gifts of snacks. (Incidentally, the snacks started off as junk food, but as he learned, the snacks gradually became healthier.)

Saw carried two cell phones that rang often. We would patiently pause our talks to allow him to take his calls without missing the program, but it seemed that Saw was distracted and disinterested in our program. However, we remained patient and showed him kindness, despite our doubts about his ultimate success in stopping smoking. In the end, God honored our prayers and perseverance, and Saw was able to quit smoking.

As our relationship deepened and he began to trust us more, Saw opened up and shared his life story with us. First he mentioned, “You are not like the other Christians I have met before. Those people told me that I could not be their friend because I was a heavy smoker.” Another time he shared, “I was once fighting in a fierce battle with the Karen anti-government group along the border of Thailand. One night there was a lull in the fighting, and as I slept, I had a dream. I awoke, but went back to sleep and had the same dream again. This happened several times that night. I could not understand the dream’s meaning, but I could feel its importance. In the dream, I was encircled by a group of Karen people who seemed to be Christians. They were praying for me. As they encircled me in their prayer group, I began crying.

“That morning, the battle re-started with fierceness. Under heavy gunfire, 11 of my soldiers died, and I also was hit, though the bullet only struck my army uniform superficially, leaving me unharmed. I had the strong impression that the God of the Christians had saved my life. Ever since then, I have tried to donate food or money to Christian groups when there is opportunity.”

It now made sense why Saw had been bringing food and money donations to the smoking cessation center. By God’s grace, Saw made his decision to quit smoking during the fourth meeting and has been smoke free since. He gave this testimony: “I am amazed that I am able to quit smoking. My friends are just as amazed as I am! But you know, I quit smoking not because I wanted to quit but because of your love, your care, and patience with me.”

Our hearts were bursting with joy and thankfulness to God, who performed this miracle for our new friend. This miracle was not just a physical healing of an addiction, but the softening of a heart! We affirm, “Love never fails,” and “Love multiplies.” We saw firsthand that indeed it does!

While Saw has not shown interest in becoming a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we continue to hope and pray. What matters most is that we love and minister to people unconditionally. Some good outcomes from Saw’s victory over tobacco are that he now promotes anti-smoking in his offices and has enforced a smoke-free zone where he works. (Unlike many other countries, Myanmar does not
yet have comprehensive anti-smoking laws for work and public places.) In addition, Saw’s daughter is spreading the good news about her father who was able to quit after 40 years of heavy smoking. Now, because of her word-of-mouth testimonies, there is no shortage of those who want to join our program.

**FURTHER TESTIMONIALS**

*Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:6–8).*

I met a Buddhist nun through her sponsor, Thiri, who asked me to consult with them regarding the nun’s health. We had met Thiri at a massage center run by a non-Christian Korean group. One of our co-workers, who was responsible for the Voice of Prophecy Correspondence School in Myanmar, went to the massage center to get a special massage by a machine that uses infrared radiation. Through her contacts at the massage center, we were invited to offer wholistic health screenings and health lectures for clients awaiting their treatments. Thiri was inspired by our lectures and requested that I visit her ill nun for a health consultation.

We took a one-hour taxi ride to where the nun lived. I found that the nun was about my age and was at that time working on her PhD at a local Buddhist seminary. I discovered that she was suffering from entrapment neuropathy (a painful and chronic nerve disorder) as well as aching joints, bones, and muscles. I reviewed her medical record and gave her a physical exam. I explained to her the nature of her illness and gave treatment advice based on our NEWSTART wholistic health principles. She seemed inspired by the natural ways of healing. Later on, I sent some of our medical missionaries to give hot fomentations and physical therapy. I also sent her some brown rice and chia seeds, which would help improve her condition. I advised her how to manage her stress more successfully. Next, I will share my own testimony about how I suffered from entrapment neuropathy and how my condition was relieved when I began to follow Isaiah 58:6–8 and ministered to the needs of others.

During my transition from the job of being a health director to becoming a personal evangelist through a supporting ministry, I met a man from central Myanmar who had been diagnosed with liver cancer. He came with his wife and his sister for further investigations and treatment. His nephew, a mission worker, contacted me asking for my suggestions in his case. The man’s family were Baptists, and they stayed at the mission guest room. After consulting with me for further investigations and treatment, they went to the government hospital as referred. However, they could not afford further investigation, so the wife came back to me for advice. I went and visited the patient in their room. He looked depressed and was in a lot of pain. I placed a hot pack on his abdomen, made a juice from aloe vera and honey, and tried to encourage him emotionally. The next morning, his wife reported that her husband responded
very well to the simple treatment. They prepared to return home, and I gave them some charcoal powder, an aloe vera plant to grow at home, and a bottle of honey. Added to this, I gave him a new Bible and encouraged him to read the Bible every day while he was resting in bed. I also gave him the book *God’s Healing Ways*. Then I told him my mother’s testimony. She had been suffering from cancer as well and had had surgery to remove the tumor 10 years earlier. Today she is still alive and credits her healing to God’s blessing in her life as a result of her daily Bible reading. The ill man was encouraged, and after a group photo, he left with a smile from the hope and relief he had experienced in his short stay.

**CONCLUSION**

God loves everyone. We are His chosen people to bring that good news to everybody who does not know God and His love. If we really study the word of God, pray earnestly, and follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God will definitely help us in our outreach to the “Gentiles.” God has a specific method to win souls which was written in *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143. This method is a simple and effective way to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. In following Christ’s method, it is essential to find ways to mingle with people of different religions, ethnicity, and cultures. We must also study and gain a clear understanding of different religions, ethnicity, and cultures in order to contextualize the gospel message. Concern for the needs of the individual based on unconditional love is the next step to follow. Although we would not be able to fulfill all the needs, there is one universal law: “Love never fails.”

Showing love and concern is the best way to start to get people’s attention. As we minister to the individual needs as much as we can, people will have confidence in our care and love for them. The boundaries and walls of religion, ethnicity, culture, and prejudice will be broken. People will see our hearts, what our religion is, and what our God is like. Furthermore, they will try to follow the ways we think and act as the followers of Jesus Christ. But the most essential part of following Christ’s method is our own daily relationship with Him through earnest prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the daily application of God’s will as written in the word of God. God will specifically teach us how to think, how to speak and act, and how to deal with each individual.

Let us receive God’s promise in Matthew 25:34–36:

“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you for the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and You came to Me.”
1. All Bible quotations are taken from NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

2. Due to education laws in Myanmar, schools operated by religious groups are, by nature, schools for training religious workers. As such, the Adventist college in Myanmar is called a seminary, even though it trains students for many professions in addition to training pastors.

3. A sponsor is a patron of a nun or monk who ensures that their physical needs are met. This is a way for Buddhist lay people to earn merit. Often the sponsor is a close relative.
Thailand faced one of the biggest natural disasters of its entire history in the year 2011. Throughout that year, there was flooding scattered around the country. The northern and central areas were claimed to be the most affected areas as the flood lingered, damaging crops and people’s livelihood for a long period of time.

At that time, I was working as a pastor in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province as well as taking my master’s program at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies. Students who were under the Buddhist outreach program were required to remain in Thailand. The course was being offered at Ekamai SDA Thai Church, Bangkok. In early October, however, large amounts of water had begun to flood downward from the northern part of Thailand. In responding to the emerging needs, Pastor Surachet Insom directed me to immediately travel back to Ayutthaya to take care of my family and the church members. After obtaining permission from my professor, I traveled back to my designated area that very afternoon.

During the night of October 7, I remember clearly that the water level began to rise up to the brim of the earthen dykes that served as barricades. The water eventually overflowed and flooded the surrounding areas of land where we lived. I decided to drive to the Noi Bridge and park my car there. That same night, the flood claimed its right, covering up the dry ground completely. We stayed on and fought with the water for a full day and a night. We gave up our fight on October 8 as we realized that the water depths in many areas had reached chest level and higher. Our neighbors who lived near the House of Peace Outreach Center came to rescue us with their boat. Traveling out from the flooding area was a difficult journey. On a regular day, it takes just ten minutes to walk to reach the area. On that day, however, we actually spent more than an hour due to the rapid current that kept us changing our route several times to avoid its overpowering strength. We stayed at the outreach center for a night before a Thailand Mission vehicle arrived to pick us up. We were taken to Bangkok and spent a few days at the mission headquarters before evacuating the entire family to Ubon Ratchatani Province, to my wife’s hometown.
I came back from the northeast soon after that to work with the team at the Buddhist Study Center in Ban Bueng, Nakhon Luang District. Unlike other places, the center was located on a high area and was surrounded with firm earthen dykes. Thus, the center stayed dry and was kept as the operating center led by Pastor Scott Griswold and an American missionary family, Byron and Carol Reynolds and their two sons, Daniel (Taeng-Mo) and Andrew (Taeng-Thai). From the center we could travel by car to Phachet District, heading toward Hin Gong, Saraburi Province. This was the only dry route available, and we took advantage of it, transporting aid such as rice, dried foods, and drinking water from Bangkok to the flood victims in Ayutthaya. At the beginning, due to high water levels and strong currents, we depended on military trucks for travel from Pridi Bridge to Asia Road. To go further, we hitchhiked on big trucks to the main road and requested some more rides. This could take us three to four different rides before reaching Pastor Scott’s residence. About a week later, however, the water subsided and lost its strong current. Smaller vehicles could travel the roads safely. So I decided to get my car from the Noi Bridge and made use of it later.

Many people asked how I was able to save my car from the aggressive flood that destroyed their homes, crops, and a countless number of cars. I can testify that it was entirely God’s leading. When we realized that the flood was coming, my wife asked me to park in the high area in front of our house. Thank God that, after parking my car, I again looked back. I was able to notice the stream of glistening light from the sun that reflected from the moving water that was rising rapidly. When I looked carefully again, I observed that the glistening appeared on the horizon as high as my eye level. I then was certain that if the flood overflowed the earthen dykes, the water level would not be below my neck. I decided to walk back to my car and drive it up to the Noi Bridge. I also thank God that I did not park the car on another bridge, for I would surely not be able to bring it out for use after the water subsided. As a result, we were able to help and bless many flood victims by providing them clean drinking water, food, and other necessities during the two-month flooding period.

Before sending aid and assistance to the old city on the island of Ayutthaya Municipality, I paid several visits using the military boats available near Kunsgri River Hotel. For the first few days the government did not allow local boats to travel in and out of the area due to the danger of strong and rapid currents. Only the military boats were considered safe enough to travel; thus, I depended on such means of transportation to visit affected members and take care of the outreach center. At that time, not many people were willing to evacuate due to the mounting worry over their properties. Also, food and water quickly became scarce, and prices had gone up. People were low in spirits and felt desperate. With our visitation, however, they were encouraged and felt that they were being cared for physically and emotionally. With funding from the Thailand Mission, I was able to send assistance bags containing rice and clean drinking water several times on the military boats. Prior to this, the military sent out rubber boats into the municipality without knowing the area well. Many
rubber boats were punctured by wires and broken glass along the tops of submerged fences and sank. The food, drinking water, and other supplies were damaged or destroyed. Thus, the military decided to stop using the rubber boats and began using big fiberglass boats. As I spent time with them, I could easily get access to such boats to transport the aid to the needy whenever I requested. Besides the food, drinking water, and other necessities, I also put a small card that included the outreach center or House of Peace address and telephone number inside the assistance bags. This later helped the local community to know the outreach center well.

As we planned our distribution, we also had to communicate with the local community leaders in order to maintain order. Thus, I was able to get acquainted with them. These relationships later helped to facilitate our outreach programs.

After a month passed, we received less help and assistance from the Thailand Mission. The flood waters at this time reached Bangkok, and its residents were badly affected. Thus, the mission directed its attention toward helping people around the Bangkok metropolitan area. Pastor Nipitpon Pongteekatasana, the mission executive secretary, was working hard as the coordinator to channel help from various organizations within our church to the flood victims. He was the in-charge person who also purchased the rice and water. But supplies were limited, so everything had to be shared.

During the time when there was nothing to distribute, I spent my time at the tents of the military station and became closely acquainted with various personnel, including the highest ranking officer in the executive unit. I took the opportunity to share my knowledge of basic healing and health care with him. The officer’s chronic back pain was lessened, and as a result, we became close friends. He also trusted me due to my familiarity with the local community and whereabouts.

Many trucks came daily, loaded with goods and necessities for distribution to the flood victims. The people who lived around the edges of the island were privileged to receive more help and aid as they could be easily reached. However, the needs of the residents in the central part of the island were not taken care of as well. Thus, I guided the military boats loaded with survival packages to the central areas to make sure that they too received aid. As a result, the local residents in that particular area remembered me well. Even though the later survival packages were not sent from the Thailand Mission, the locals still thought that they were sent directly from the House of Peace, the mission’s outreach center. They were happy to see me every time I led the military boats there. They felt that they received the most help from the mission. One of them even said, “Your mission is really wealthy. We keep getting food and supplies from you.” Repeatedly, I assured them that the continuous giving and supplies were from God as He paved a way for us to have them delivered where they were needed most.

I made several trips daily with the military boats. I have to admit that I was sometimes worried for my safety as I watched how strong the water current was in the rough waters. But I prayed, and the soldiers’ fears instantly disappeared. The soldiers also felt protected and safe.
The local people became fond of the House of Peace even before they realized our mission and purpose for being in their community. They only knew that God came to rescue them and provided for them in time of need. As I have previously mentioned, it was really helpful to the outreach programs we initiated later on.

I traveled two or three times daily into the inner part of the island, distributing life boats and the survival packages to the local residents. I continued doing this for weeks along with other organizations at Nakhon Luang District.

In November, the water level subsided. In many areas, however, the flood continued to linger. When winter season came, the flood victims began to suffer from the cold weather. I made a proposal to Khun Udom Srikureja for help and assistance. He generously provided rice, drinking water, blankets, and T-shirts for distribution. He also brought some cash to give away to children of flood victims’ families.

To reach the needy, we went to Sra Bua Canal that had been recommended by the village supervisor, Khun Roj. This area was first hit by the flood, and the water was still affecting the area due to its low level. It was a heart-touching moment when we first arrived there. The entire village remained under water. Only the roofs of two-story houses were visible. The villagers had not been able to save anything valuable before the flood claimed the area. Later we were able to conduct some outreach programs, including a women’s ministry outreach program in this particular area, with the help of the same village supervisor.

The heavy flooding became a great opportunity for us after the water level subsided. Everything went back to its original stage after the flood. One thing, however, had changed—the relationship between the local residents and the House of Peace. The locals continued to show their appreciation and praise regarding what they had experienced from the center. They eagerly participated in the activities of the House of Peace and its outreach activities. Christmas programs and health seminars were received positively. When I went back to get my family from Ubon Ratchathani, my wife solicited donations of clothes and toys from church members and relatives. We collected more than twenty sacks of clothes, which we carried in our car and on the roof as well as in the bed of our pickup. While driving back to Ayutthaya, I was stopped by police many times for overloading my truck! But when we mentioned that those overloaded sacks were for the flood victims, the police immediately treated us well and even directed us to safer routes throughout the journey.

All the donated items of clothing and toys were distributed to the local residents and their children on Christmas Day. It was one of the biggest post-flood events in the community. We made use of the area in front of the House of Peace Outreach Center. Our neighbors were even willing to work for just a half day to allow us to use the area in front of their shops. We built a stage with the support of Khun Roj, the Sra Bua village supervisor. Acharn Anupong from Ang Thong Province, Acharn Pongnarindh, and their church members came with food to celebrate with us. Friends and local residents willingly appeared with food and desserts. Our children, along
with some of the village children, performed the story of Jesus’ birth on stage. We also had singing, a meal, and distributed gifts donated by church institutions, including schools and the mission hospital in Bangkok. The local people and store owners also donated many things as gifts for people who participated in our Christmas program. At the end, everybody received a gift and was happy with the event. We even had some leftovers, which we used in later outreach activities. Overall, more than 300 people participated in the Christmas event. While a large event, we spent the least amount of money compared to other events we hosted.

By working hard together during the flood, we benefited the House of Peace’s subsequent activities and programs. We helped the local people to clean their houses, picked up trash, and collected the remains of unwanted materials around the community. Byron and Carol Reynolds, the American missionaries, helped get rid of mildew, a black fungus. Materials and tools for cleaning were purchased for different communities. We tended to the needs of the elderly who were incapable of helping themselves. Other residents were employed to clean and do the work. This greatly helped them to generate some financial support for their families. The production of EM (Effective Microorganisms) balls for water purification also helped us to have more opportunities to reach the local people, befriend them, and gain trust.

My wife helped to address the medical and health-care needs of the local residents. Many of them became ill and suffered from various health problems after the prolonged flood. Fortunately, my wife is a nurse, so she was able to help in this area very well. Many fellow pastors who do not have a nurse-wife such as mine might wonder how they can also provide such care and support. I would like to assure you that the NEWSTART program is efficient enough to help you in this area. It is the basic healthful living principles that can serve as a key into reaching people in regard to their health.

As we were able to reach families after the flood, we were able to carry the health message to each one of them effectively. We were able to testify of God’s love and grace that exists within our own family. I concentrated on witnessing to them of His love and providence through various opportunities, God’s countless blessings, and the talents that God has graciously given our children. Initially, I did not begin with biblical teaching but rather focused on the solid evidences in our lives. I only made connection with the biblical principles and Christianity much later. While speaking to the people who were non-believers, the Bible verses I quoted most focused on two topics: clean food in Genesis and the fifth commandment that talks about paying respect to parents. Whenever I gave a talk to families with children, I often emphasized this latter principle. I gained more trust, and more parents began sending their children to participate with us in music lessons and English classes. Not only did a big number of children attend our activities regularly, but also adults seemed to develop a keen interest in healthful living. Thus, we decided to conduct regular health seminars on Wednesdays.

We were able to assess people’s interest and perception toward the House of Peace and our outreach programs. Previously, we needed to use the parking area within the
campus of a university dean’s residence. But there were parking fees involved. After the flood, however, there were no required fees. Anybody who came to the House of Peace would get a free parking space. The dean himself was a regular attendee at our health seminars on Wednesdays. He also attended health talks every day during the Health Expo program in Ayutthaya conducted by Pastor Surachet Insom. Our landlord contributed food and desserts whenever we had outreach activities or meetings. Our neighbors were generous to support us with their space, food, and gifts for kids who participated in the programs. I can definitely say that we could organize any activity throughout the year without requiring any funding from the church because of the support we experienced from our community.

Toward the end of 2012, we had seven baptisms. The Christmas program before we left for our further study in the Philippines was as big and eventful as the one after the flood. This was indeed God’s tremendous blessing that came along with the water crisis in 2011!
CHAPTER 15
OPERATING BUSINESS FOR GOD IN A SMALL THAI TOWN

David Tan

CHALLENGES OF FINISHING THE MISSION IN SMALL TOWNS
In my travels as president of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division’s Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries (SSD ASI) between the years 2006 and 2011, I made the following observations:

• Very few of our church members operate their own business.
• A large number of our young people and fresh graduates flock to the cities to seek employment.
• Sabbath-keeping is a big problem for those who are employed by non-Sabbathkeepers.
• Most of the small-town churches have only a few aging worshippers.
• It’s challenging to cover the costs of hiring a pastor or even a Bible worker to place in the small-town churches.
• There are many towns that do not have any Adventist presence.

As I made these observations, I found that we have a very serious mission challenge not only in our large cities of more than one million, but also in our smaller cities and towns where our church is supposed to be strong. As our youth become adults, they are moving toward the cities, where their faith in God is being challenged and many are losing their salvation. But back in their rural homes the churches are dwindling in size. The resultant decrease in offerings and tithes causes an increased challenge in supporting a pastor or even a Bible worker to help the local church to continue its mission. It seems that the problems feed off each other—creating even bigger problems and creating a seemingly hopeless case.

In this paper I will discuss models for addressing the issues of earning a living while fulfilling God’s mission in the small cities and towns in Asia.
CHALLENGES OF EVANGELISM THROUGH BUSINESS

I come from an Adventist business family background. The company that our family owned had a significant business presence in many Asian countries. However, we had been operating the business by industry standards around the world, and our concentration was predominantly on growing our market share and profits. Though we operated as ethically as possible—even closing the factory and office during the Sabbath hours—we never considered using the business for evangelism. We couldn’t see how the two objectives could be mixed. Thus, being faithful Christians, we operated an honest business and, as appropriate, we used our company’s profits along with our family’s wealth to make significant donations to charity, community service programs, student scholarship, and to church projects.

But I began asking myself, “Is this the way a Christian business should operate? Are we to leave the spreading of the gospel to the church and the making of money to businessmen, professionals, and church members?” Even though the answer is obvious and rhetorical, for years there has been a distinct divide between church and business and between religion and career to the point that many Adventists are “seventh-day keepers”! Six days they do secular work and activities and only on the seventh day they remember God.

“BUSINESS FOR GOD” CONCEPT

It was during my final year of my second term as SSD ASI president that God impressed upon me the need to address the challenges I had been observing. Thus, Divine Heritage ministry (DH) was conceived. We selected the small town of Muak Lek, near the Adventist-owned Asia Pacific International University (AIU) in Saraburi Province, Thailand, to be our testing site. The purpose of this ministry is to develop and operate profitable small businesses in small towns with the goal of serving and making contacts with the community. The goal of Divine Heritage is to enable Bible workers to support their ministry through a self-sustaining business and to establish a community of believers or a church in the small town where they live.

EXPERIMENTAL STAGE

1. DH GRANOLA

I started first producing DH Granola for sale back in 2010. I used a few AIU college students to produce and sell the product. The business quickly grew from producing five kilograms of granola per month to producing 50 kilograms per month. This seemed to be a good start. However, the business stagnated in Muak Lek, and it seemed we had reached a saturation point. Also, the business was reaching many foreigners, but Thai people were not interested. This is understandable since cereal is not a traditional staple breakfast item for Thais.

2. DH MUSHROOM

In 2011, we registered Divine Heritage (Thailand) Co., Ltd. and decided, after doing some research and visiting some farms, to go into mushroom farming on the
recommendation of a church member. From our calculations and observations we concluded that mushrooms would be easy to grow and could be quite profitable. One of our main objectives was to produce compost packs that contained sawdust impregnated with the mushroom spores. We could then ship these packs to different towns so that Bible workers could grow the mushrooms and sell them in the markets. They would thereby have a reasonably good income and be able to get in touch with the people living in the town. However, this again fell short of our expectations. After persistently working on the business for a number of years, we continued to find that mushrooms are very sensitive to the environment and that production is greatly affected by heat, low humidity, and air quality. We also found that there is a large amount of work and care that is required by the would-be mushroom farmer. Nevertheless, we kept the farm open, and it is still producing mushrooms today. Here is what we discovered after operating the farm for the past five years:

- Some rural farmers would like to grow mushrooms to supplement their income while they wait for their main crops to mature for harvest.
- Fresh mushrooms are in demand both in the morning and evening markets.
- There is a shortage of fresh mushrooms available in small towns.
- After five years of being the biggest mushroom farm in Muak Lek, we have built up a reputation and good following in the town. Ajarn Ruangwit, our CEO of DH and also the Bible worker for Muak Lek church, is now known to the town as the Mushroom Man. This has given us credibility in the community and has helped us to befriend many of the town folks. Also, by keeping the quality and price of mushroom packs stable, we have developed a good reputation with our buyers and growers.

Recently, during the 2015 National Dairy Festival, we introduced fried mushrooms and found them very popular to the fairgoers. As a result, we have started selling fried mushrooms in the night market.

After the past five years of operations, we concluded that even if we do not want to enlarge our mushroom farm, we can still trade in fresh and fried mushrooms and be profitable by getting mushrooms from other growers. We have found that selling what the market needs is a great way to connect with people in the community. We now intend to focus our mushroom business more on being the trader than the grower.

3. DH BREAD

In 2014 we brought in a Filipino medical missionary family to help develop our wellness program. Soon after they arrived, we started the bakery component by setting up a small home-based bakery at the front of their house. The wholesome bread business is still in its infancy, but business is expanding with an increased number of customers buying our bread. Each week, besides producing and selling bread, Brother Allan Faina mingles in the community sharing the wellness message, giving massages,
visiting homes of interested folks, and conducting group Bible studies. We have made plans to conduct wellness classes and, later, to train other self-supporting medical missionaries. This new ministry is growing rapidly, with our DH Bread even being purchased by a few international schools around us.

4. VEGETABLE COLLECTION CENTER

Last year we contracted the help of a local farmer to plant corn on a piece of our land near Muak Lek. Through this, the idea of setting up a crop and/or vegetable collection center has developed. With the experience gained through our mushroom business, God has recently brought us another Thai church member who has experience in marketing. We are now looking for a suitable shop in Muak Lek to launch a vegetable distribution business. By God’s grace, if this materializes, we can collect crops and vegetables from neighboring farms and sell them at the morning markets, cafeterias, hotels, and even the wholesale centers. This will help us to increase our network within the community and thereby give us opportunity to share the gospel with more people.

5. SPONSORSHIP

Through these small-business ventures, God has graciously provided funds to support the businesses as well as enough money to support a few other outreach projects. They are:

- Adventist Health Expo and Bangkok Van Ministry
- Evangelistic outreach programs of Asia Pacific International University through the DH Student Evangelism Fund
- 2014 Student Literature Evangelism Program in Bangkok, where more than 30 students from Chiang Mai Adventist Academy spent two months selling and giving out literature. This was supported by the DH Publishing Fund.
- Translating and publishing *The Ministry of Healing*, *Steps to Christ*, and *U-Turn for Your Health*, in partnership with Dr. Soontharee Tantraprarongroj (Mary), the Bangkok Chinese church, and Mr. Udom Srikureja. Current projects include translating and publishing the first edition of *The Great Controversy*, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, and *Christian Service*. Other books and tracts are in the pipeline.

6. FINISHING GOD’S MISSION IN MUAK LEK

Toward the end of 2014, the Seventh-day Adventist churches and institutions based in Muak Lek decided to join hands to organize events that would impact Muak Lek in a bigger way. By God’s grace, we are claiming Muak Lek for Jesus with the target of making this small town a strong evangelistic hub for the region. In 2015, each institution has agreed to head up at least one major project that will be supported by all the parties concerned. The first event was to set up a booth at the National Dairy Festival, and the second was a 7 Days of Blessings project. For future projects, in April
2015, we plan to make a big impact as we participate in the Songkran Water Festival; in August, during Thailand’s Mothers’ Day, we plan to kickstart a “One Baht Meal!” program; and in December to host “Christmas @ Muak Lek.”

Our approach is based on the following two strategies. First, evangelistic companies. In a letter dated Sept. 16, 1900, Ellen White wrote to the conference presidents. She said:

In every large city there should be a corps of organized, well-disciplined workers; not merely one or two, but scores should be set to work. . . . Each company of workers should be under the direction of a competent leader, and it should ever be kept before them that they are to be missionaries in the highest sense of the term. Such systematic labor, wisely conducted, would produce blessed result (Evangelism, 96).

Since Asia Pacific International University (AIU), Adventist International Mission School (AIMS), Mission Health Promotion Center (MHPC), and Divine Heritage (DH) are all located in Muak Lek, a town with a population of 77,000, we could test the concept of involving a large pool of volunteers in major outreach programs.

The second strategy is called the Funnel Technique. This is a four-step sales formula that has been used by many successful companies around the world. We find that Jesus Himself also used the method to obtain followers. The book, The Ministry of Healing, page 143, states: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people.” And here we see His four-step method:

1. Awareness: “[He] mingled with men as one who desired their good.”
2. Interest: “He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs . . .”
3. Decision: “. . . and won their confidence.”
4. Action: “Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ ”

We have recently started to use this four-step systematic approach to harnessing sales and also to win souls for Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Although we are still struggling, learning, and experimenting to find the right principles of operating the “Business for God” model successfully, we see God’s leading in helping us to learn and progress. So far we have learned that selling at community markets provides an excellent venue for Bible workers to sustain their livelihood as well as quickly create many excellent contacts with the local residents. This opens doors for greater outreach opportunities. Also, this model requires minimal business startup costs or overhead to operate.

We have also found that because Divine Heritage ministry is not tied down with stiff regulations, it has been able to make quick decisions to support and try out new outreach programs with other resources that God has provided the ministry.
By God’s grace we were also able to start the Muak Lek church on the second floor of the Divine Heritage office in 2013, with a transfer of 20 members from the AIU Thai church. Currently, our weekly attendance ranges between 15 and 20 worshipers, of which four are newly baptized members from the community. We also have around 20 non-members attending Bible studies with Ajarn Ruangwit and Allan Faina on a weekly basis.

With our partner institutions here in Muak Lek, we look forward to testing the “evangelistic companies” concept of rapid establishment of a congregation of believers in a new area.

We believe that as we improve our services to the community through our businesses, our presence will become better known. By leveraging our business, we will be able to use our growing influence to demonstrate Christ’s love through regular visitation and prayer for our friends and customers. Our expectation and constant prayers are that many will respond to our invitation to join us in following Christ. With fervent prayer we envision that very soon Muak Lek will become a Christian town and a strong evangelistic hub for the Saraburi and Nakhon Ratchasima provinces.
CHAPTER 16

CONFRONTED BY THE SPIRITS: IS OUR GOD REALLY MORE POWERFUL?

Kyle Tumberg

INTRODUCTION

For years she wondered why she could tell almost instantly if someone was involved in the spiritual “dark side.” Many had told her they could tell that she “has what it takes” to practice black magic. What was it about her? Why did she have these seemingly supernatural powers of discernment? And why were so many people telling her she should become a witch? Her curiosity was piqued, and she had to find out. So she decided to visit a very wise old Buddhist monk, who apparently was able to tell people what their “past lives” had been like. *Understanding my history will help me make sense of the present,* she thought to herself. With nervous trepidation she entered the temple.1

“You were heavily involved in black magic,” the monk said. “In fact, you used to enrich yourself quite well financially from it. People would come to you so that you could cast spells on people and help them to get what they wanted. As a result of your practice, families were torn apart and much sorrow and misery was caused.”

She sat spellbound as the wise old monk unraveled, point by point, the details of her “former life.”

“What do I need to do in order to make up for this now?” she pleaded with desperation in her voice.

“To atone for the mistakes of your past, you must help people who have been the recipients of curses and spells of black magic. You must help undo the damage that is being done.” She left the temple with a deep sense of guilt and an intense desire to do what she could to rectify the damage she thought she had caused.

My wife and I listened intently as our language teacher, Khru Ice, shared this story about her past with us. We could tell that she was quite distressed as she elaborated more fully on the details of her current situation and her desperate desire to help friends involved in the spiritual “dark side.” She told us that she has a hard time
sleeping at night and could sometimes go three or four nights without any sleep. The next thing she shared caught us both by surprise.

“I recently consulted a hoodoo practitioner, and he is helping me use white magic to help reverse the curses of black magic.”

Knowing that my teacher claimed to be Christian, I was beginning to feel troubled by the extent to which she was affected by the actions of her supposed “past life” and her seeming endorsement of the use of white magic, even if, in her mind, it was for the purpose of providing help or relief. Does she still believe in karma? Does she not know about the dangers of meddling with the occult world? And doesn’t she realize that God is more powerful than any form of magic or karma? I thought to myself, and I asked her the following question: “Have you prayed that God would deliver your friend from the evil powers?”

“Yes, I tried that, but I didn’t see any results, so I consulted with the hoodoo,” she responded with a sigh, almost as if she were saying, “Prayer just isn’t powerful enough.”

After talking with my language teacher, a Thai “Christian,” I began to see that in her mind, prayer and faith were not enough when it came to dealing with the supernatural realm. It caused me to begin thinking about what we can do to tangibly demonstrate that God is more powerful than the spirits.

PERVASIVE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF THAI CULTURE

Living in the country of Thailand for more than a year has given me the opportunity to observe the culture and religion in various ways. I remember talking with a Buddhist monk at a temple in Chiang Mai about the current state of Buddhism. He lamented that it seems the majority of people seem to be more interested in simply “making merit” than in really studying to understand and apply the core principles of Buddhism to their daily lives. In other words, religion to them was more about how they could use it to benefit themselves in both their future and present lives.

Author Pattana Kitiarsa would agree with my monk friend, as he has stated, “Popular Buddhism is different from its scriptural or canonical counterpart. . . . It is oriented towards this-worldly or mundane concerns, and not towards scripture-based teachings and principles for spiritual attainment” (2012:2). As a result of this phenomenon, many Thai people seek the advice of “magic monks” or spirit mediums for “fortune-telling, business decision making, occasional merit-making, health, and of course, lottery numbers” (Kitiarsa 2012:43).

Gwendolyn Toynton tells us in Occult Traditions, “The religious traditions of Thailand have always included the belief in the spirits and the ability to manipulate them by means of magic” (Lycourinos 2012:221). One hardly has to be in Thailand for any length of time to see how prevalent the belief in the spiritual world is. On many street corners and by most buildings and houses you will find spirit houses with offerings prepared for the spirits. “Thai belief does not only consist of beneficial Gods
and spirits. It also abounds with belief in ferocious spirits of pure malevolence, from whom the villagers seek magical protection” (Lycourinos 2012:222).

For Thai people, religion seems to be centered on how they can use it to better their lives along with how they can appease the spirits. In both cases the use of magic or the supernatural is seen. In order to successfully evangelize Thai people, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the reality of the “dark world” and how much it affects people’s day-to-day lives. If we fail to take this to heart, we will no doubt default to western evangelistic approaches that deal primarily with seeking to convince people of a certain set of beliefs. However, “in Thailand it is often hard to define someone's beliefs. Statements of beliefs are a rarity in Thai culture. . . . Thai Buddhists often define themselves by what they do rather than what they believe” (McDaniel 2011).

Because of the “pragmatic nature” (Kitiarsa 2012:2) of modern religion in Thailand, we must show in practical ways that God is more powerful than any evil spirit and that He desires to give us supernatural aid to help us here and now, in our day-to-day struggles.

As Christians we can show Thai people that we are indeed involved in a spiritual war and that there are certain things that we can do in order to receive power. The fundamentals of intercessory prayer in the context of spiritual warfare and the power found in the sacred text of Holy Scripture provide a foundation we can build from to create an evangelistic approach that will be relevant and effective in Thailand. Let us now take a look at some biblical stories that will give us insight into how God revealed Himself to pagan cultures with similar spiritual beliefs and practices.

BIBLICAL EVANGELISTIC STRATEGIES FOR PAGAN CULTURES

Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” As Christians, we understand that much of this world is in darkness (Isaiah 60:2) and that we have been called to give to this dark world “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:6). What we see from Jesus’ words in Matthew 5 is that when “men see our good works” they will “glorify” the Father.

Deuteronomy 4:6 says, “Keep therefore and do them [God’s laws]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” It is God’s desire that His people shall live out and represent in their daily lives the great principles of His law, which are a transcript of His glorious character. When His people do this, those in “darkness” will “come to thy light” (Isaiah 60:3). This is clearly seen in the story of Daniel and his three friends in the land of Babylon, where their captivity was “boastfully cited by the victors as evidence that their religion and customs were superior to the religion and customs of the Hebrews” (White, 1903:54).

Scripture tells us that Daniel and his friends were unbending in their fidelity to the principles of God’s law. They refused to compromise in spite of ridicule and even the threat of death (Daniel 1:8–10; 3:16–18; 6:10). However, even though
the “stubbornness” of Daniel and his friends caused great rage and perplexity in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian leaders, Scripture tells us, “In all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (Daniel 1:20).

It was because of Daniel’s steadfast commitment to God that the king was led to acknowledge faith in the God of heaven (Daniel 2:47; 4:37) and to enact a decree that no one in his kingdom should “speak any thing amiss” against Daniel’s God without suffering the penalty of death (Daniel 3:29).

What we can learn, then, from the story of Daniel is that even in a pagan, spiritualistic culture like that of Babylon, or Thailand, or any like culture today, God’s people can demonstrate His power through their commitment to biblical principles in their daily lives. Any evangelistic approach that fails to acknowledge the importance of biblical faithfulness and personal integrity surely falls short and will undoubtedly be found impotent for the converting of the heathen.

It is clear from the words of Jesus that He intended for His followers to have power in their ministry and that He did not intend for them to engage in any soul-winning activity until they had obtained it (Acts 1:4, 8). Jesus knew that without power they would make little difference in a pagan world filled with skepticism. “Without a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour, it is impossible to make your faith felt in a skeptical world” (White 1915:274).

Scripture tells us that the early followers of Jesus took His parting words to heart, as it is recorded that “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33). The evangelist Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, and it is said that “the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:6). The power in Philip’s ministry included the casting out of unclean spirits and healing the sick (v. 7).

The story of Philip is of special interest to me because of the prevalence of sorcery and supernatural power that “bewitched the people” (v. 9). Scripture tells us that the people of Samaria “all gave heed [to Simon the sorcerer], from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him [Simon] they had regard, because that of a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries” (vv. 10, 11).

I take comfort from the fact that the Bible tells us that “when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Even cultures highly influenced by sorcery or animism can be reached when they see tangible demonstrations of God’s power worked out in the lives and ministries of God’s followers.

Another story that illustrates this concept is found in Acts 19, where the Bible tells us that “God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19:11), and “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” (v. 17). The city of Ephesus was heavily involved in the practice of “curious arts” and magic, like much of Thailand. If it hadn’t been for the miracles wrought by Paul, Christianity would not have gained a
strong foothold in that licentious city. Look at the following quotation from Ellen White (1911):

These manifestations of supernatural power were far more potent than had ever before been witnessed in Ephesus, and were of such a character that they could not be imitated by the skill of the juggler or the enchantments of the sorcerer. As these miracles were wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the people had opportunity to see that the God of heaven was more powerful than the magicians who were worshipers of the goddess Diana. Thus the Lord exalted His servant, even before the idolaters themselves, immeasurably above the most powerful and favored of the magicians. . . . In accepting Christianity, some of the believers had not fully renounced their superstitions. To some extent they still continued the practice of magic. . . .

By burning their books on magic, the Ephesian converts showed that the things in which they had once delighted they now abhorred. It was by and through magic that they had especially offended God and imperiled their souls; and it was against magic that they showed such indignation. Thus they gave evidence of true conversion (286–288).

Because the power of God was so markedly evident in the apostle Paul’s ministry, his converts experienced genuine conversion, which led to the abandoning of magical arts. White (1911) tells us, “Ephesus was a popular center for the worship of Diana. The fame of the magnificent temple of ‘Diana of the Ephesians’ extended throughout all Asia and the world” (286). And “by this manifestation of the power of Christ, a mighty victory for Christianity was gained in the very stronghold of superstition. The influence of what had taken place was more widespread than even Paul realized” (289). No matter how much of a stronghold pagan or occult practices may have in a particular culture, God’s power can bring genuine conversion and transformation in marked ways.

It is obvious that God wants to give His people power and to demonstrate His superiority to all people entrenched in false religious systems. Therefore, if we want to be successful at reaching people bound in religious spiritualistic or occult practices, we need to emulate the example of those that have gone before us.

Look at the following quote:

Since this is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it. . . . The presence of the Spirit with God’s workers will give the proclamation of truth a power that not all the honor or glory of the world could give (White 1911:50).
The disciples of old were willing to obey the command of Jesus and pray earnestly for the reception of the Holy Spirit. They were willing to search their hearts deeply and rid themselves of all sin in their lives, and they received the promised gift. As a result they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Daniel and his friends were willing to demonstrate the power of God’s truth in their daily lives in spite of tremendous external pressures, and they saw the conversion of a king.

It is clear to me from Scripture that no matter how difficult it may appear to be to evangelize a culture, it is not beyond the power of God. When we as God’s people get serious about seeking the Holy Spirit earnestly, putting away all sin, and boldly standing up for the principles of God’s law no matter the cost, we can expect to see the kind of miracles that many of God’s faithful ones of old experienced.

Allow me now to share two recent experiences regarding how God has been working in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

**GOD SPEAKS TO A SPIRIT MEDIUM**

“Just as you did through Balaam, please speak Your will to my father through his seer, since this is the only person he listens to for advice,” prayed Sorn. “I know God told us not to seek the advice of seers, but that is all my parents know—they aren’t Christian. But I also know that God used Balaam’s mouth to speak blessings instead of curses for the sake of His people.”

Growing up, Sorn, Cherd, and Lin went to study at a Seventh-day Adventist school in Singapore, while their siblings, Joy, Dida, and Choke lived in Khon Kaen, Thailand, where their father owned a prosperous business.

“In Singapore, one of their teachers started ‘running after them,’ ” said Dida, “trying to tell them about God.” Finally Cherd started studying with this teacher, and soon Sorn and Lin followed suit. An Amazing Facts pamphlet caught their eye, and the three of them studied through the series.

“It just made sense,” Sorn said. “I learned so many things that were so ‘amazing’ that I had never heard about before! When we decided to try this God, God answered so many prayers that I knew this was right. Moreover, God was able to change me, and if God could change me, then He is the true God. I knew it was impossible for anyone else to change me!”

On school break, Sorn, Cherd, and Lin returned to Khon Kaen and taught their younger siblings what they had been learning. All of them followed the truth the best they knew how. However, their parents resisted Christianity and were antagonistic about their children’s new beliefs. Life continued like this for many years—until a few weeks ago.

Many Thai people seek the advice of seers. There are two in particular that Sorn’s father trusts and always seeks advice from. As he approached the seer’s house, a strange sight startled him. The lights were off; there were no images around; there were no shrines. Upon speaking to the seer, this is the story he heard:

One of the seer’s clients forgot to bring back the payment he promised one god who
helped him with a certain business venture. So this god was upset at the seer. Accordingly, the seer sought help from the other god, but this god said that he couldn’t help because the two gods didn’t interfere in each other’s affairs. Still without relief, the seer sought a higher god who could overrule in this situation. In vision, the seer saw the Highest God coming with many angels, the God who could overrule any other false god or power, the Christian God. The seer’s god symbolically gave his scroll to the Highest God, demonstrating this God’s superior power and showing where the seer was to get advice from now. (The seer had always received the scroll from the god to read the directions of what the people were supposed to do). The Highest God said, “Worship me only.”

Evidently, the seer obeyed. The images were gone; the shrines were gone; and the other false god didn’t give the seer any more problems. In spite of this change, since this was the seer that Sorn’s father trusted, he still asked the seer for advice regarding direction for his children. The seer replied, “Have your children pray about what to do and then bless them in that decision.”

Ever since, Sorn’s father has encouraged them to go to church, and we pray that soon he himself will personally accept the Highest God too.5

DEALING WITH DEMONS

“You heard a demon speak?” I exclaimed almost incredulously as Ricardo told me about the season of prayer our team had had with Mee Mali earlier that day.

“Yeah, we heard it speak a couple of times,” he replied in a very somber tone and then went on to say, “We will be fasting and going back to pray again tomorrow.”

I assured him that I would fast and pray and join the team as well. Feelings of trepidation with a sense of excitement began to overwhelm me. I knew this was serious and that I needed to pray more earnestly than I ever had before.

We were not able to pray with Mee Mali the next day, but we went back on Wednesday. Our prayer time with her seemed to go well—there was no more demonic activity. However, the next day I again received a phone call from Ricardo saying that Mee Mali had requested us to come and pray for her. So I canceled my afternoon plans so that I could accompany him.

Mee Mali was requesting prayer for her mentally challenged son, whose erratic behavior and, at times, violent outbursts were a constant source of stress and anxiety for Mee Mali and her employees.6 She is well known among the Christians in Khon Kaen as she has requested prayer from many of the churches but has never found healing or deliverance for her son.

Sensing that there might be demonic activity not only in the son but also in Mee Mali, we decided that it was important to educate Mee Mali on how the devil can gain access to people. Ricardo read through a list of many behaviors that can give Satan a foothold, such as fortune-telling, tarot cards, astrology, and so on. We told Mee Mali to tell us all of the occult behaviors that she had ever been involved in, both before and after becoming a Christian. After she shared, we prayed with her.
Within 30 seconds of starting the prayer, Mee Mali began to cough, and then we heard a demonic laugh that sounded like a witch in a horror movie. My skin tingled, and I began to feel slightly chilled. I wanted to claim Bible promises, but my mind went blank. Eventually I thought of Revelation 12:11: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.”

Since that time, we have not seen any more demonic manifestations in Mee Mali, but we are continuing to pray with her regularly.7

CONCLUSION

The ubiquitous presence of the supernatural and the occult in Southeast Asia presents an unavoidable challenge to missionaries seeking to make converts to Jesus Christ, the only true God. Because people are used to consulting spirit mediums or magical monks and see visible demonstrations of supernatural power, they need to see that the God we serve is truly more powerful than any other God or spirit. How to do this is the challenge that confronts the missionary.

From the Bible we can see examples of God demonstrating His power in remarkable ways in cultures heavily entrenched in the occult, such as Babylon in the days of Daniel and Ephesus in the days of Paul. It was through the unbending fidelity of Daniel and the Spirit-filled witness of the early apostles that Christianity was able to triumph over paganism in all of its forms. I believe that it is through these same means that Christianity can triumph in the face of the spiritual strongholds of Southeast Asia.

In my limited experience as a missionary in Thailand, I am convinced that the only way missionaries can truly show that God is more powerful than the spirits is by demonstrating His power in their lives. This requires that we diligently seek for the filling of the Holy Spirit through persevering prayer, humble contrition of soul, and earnest confession of sin. I recognize that my experience is indeed limited and that this may sound like an overly simplistic prescription in a highly complex spiritual environment. Yet I am convicted that this lies at the foundation of any lasting mission success. It is my hope and prayer that those of us working in Southeast Asia will diligently pursue the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, and not rest content until we have seen that God’s power has truly changed our lives, so that we can demonstrate to others that He is indeed more powerful than any other god or spirit.

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Notes
1. The material in this paper has been adapted from a research paper I wrote for AIIAS in 2014 entitled, “How to Incorporate Power Encounters into an Evangelistic Program in an Animistic Context in NE Thailand: Are There Any Bible Stories That Provide Clues?”

2. Someone who helps people gain access to the supernatural to receive help with daily problems.
3. The introductory story is taken from an article I wrote for *Adventist Frontiers* magazine entitled “The Buddhist Christian.”

4. Bible quotations in this chapter are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

5. This story was written by AFM student missionary Breanna Thornton. Names have been changed to protect privacy.

6. Mee Mali is the owner of a motorcycle dealership and lives in the same building, along with her son.

7. This story was submitted to be published in *Adventist Frontiers* magazine in April 2015.

**REFERENCES**


ONE would have to search far and wide to find a Bible-believing Christian who would argue that prayer is unnecessary in missions strategy. Yet for all the lip service we might give to prayer, many missiologists and missionaries (including me) have frequently gone amiss in our intercultural outreach due to an overdependence on what we ourselves can do rather than depending on what the Spirit of God can do in and through us in answer to prayer. Pausing long enough to honestly evaluate what we have done and what the corresponding results have been, the picture once again becomes clear that prayer is a critical, indispensable component of a successful mission strategy and outreach. And why is that? I’d like to suggest three reasons.

**REASON #1**

Prayer gives birth to both missions and missionaries. It was like that in Bible times, and it still happens that way today.

**AS IT WAS IN BIBLE TIMES.**

When Jesus spoke of the need for “workers” (missionaries/apostles) to be sent to the harvest field, His stated method of recruiting and deploying them was *earnest prayer*, asking the “Lord of the harvest” (Morris 2008:42; Matthew 9:37, 38).* The very next verse in Matthew (10:1) says that Jesus “called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits.” But Luke seems to indicate that on the night before He called and appointed these 12 apostles, Jesus “spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12). So prayer played an important role in the birthing of the first apostles.

Later, in Acts 9, another missionary (apostle) was born in the house of Judas on Straight Street (v. 11). Here, Saul, the persecutor of Christians, after being confronted by Jesus and blinded by the heavenly light that flashed around him, “took the energy he had used to murder disciples of the Way and turned it to prayer, fasting, and waiting on God” (Willis and Blackaby 2002:193). During that three-day prayer vigil, God
revealed to him that he was a “chosen instrument [a missionary] to proclaim my [Jesus’] name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel” (v. 15). He was not only shown his great mission in the broad sense but also was shown the opposition he would face in executing it—“how much he must suffer for my [Jesus’] name” (v. 16). Thus prayer played a critical part in the “birth” of perhaps the greatest missionary on earth next to Christ—Saul (later the apostle Paul).

Later again, in Acts 13, we find Saul and Barnabas “worshiping the Lord and fasting” with a group of other believers in the church in Antioch. It was during this extended time of fasting and prayer that “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (vv. 2, 3). Therefore, biblically, we see that prayer was critical in the birth of both missionaries and mission itself.

SO IT IS TODAY.

Prayer still gives birth to missionaries and missions. There are endless examples that could be mentioned. I will mention just a couple.

MUSLIM MISSIONS IN AFRICA.

Willis and Blackaby share the story of some missionaries in a resistant African country who were studying the book *Experiencing God* together. “They went on a prayer retreat in a government park to ask God where He was working.” The idea was that they wanted to join God in His work wherever He was currently working. Then:

Early one morning, one of the single women exercised by walking down the road near the park. A young man walking up the road stopped her and asked why she was in that part of Africa. She told him her group were Christians and were there to pray. The Muslim young man was surprised because he didn’t think Christians prayed much. As he asked more questions, she realized that he was seeking God. She took him back to camp, where a friend who knew his heart language, Zarma, shared Christ with him. He trusted Christ on the spot. He asked them to go out to his village in the bush and tell his family.

And following that divine lead, the missionaries went to where God was working and reaped a harvest of 14 young men who themselves became missionaries in their own right. Prayer was critical to the discovery of this mission to these Muslims in the bush! (Blackaby and Willis 2002:189–191).

CITY MISSIONS IN NEW YORK.

Another great example of this comes from the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York. Most Christians who’ve been around for a couple decades have heard of the six-time Grammy-award-winning Brooklyn Tabernacle choir. But many don’t know the story of
the Brooklyn Tabernacle and its powerful, multi-faceted gospel outreach mission to the multi-ethnic population in the dangerous and drug-infested communities of Brooklyn and Manhattan. There are several dozen ministries on their website and many others that don't even appear there. But how did all these aspects of their mission to the people of Brooklyn and Manhattan come about? Pastor Jim Cymbala explains,

Most ministries in our church have not begun with a bright idea in a pastor's meeting. We usually don't say, “Let's start a street outreach,” and then go recruit laypeople to staff it. We have learned over the years to let God birth something in people who are spiritually sensitive, who begin to pray and feel a calling. Then they come to us. “We want to start such-and-such,” they say—and the ministry gets going and lasts. Discouragement, complications, and other attacks by the enemy don't wash it out” (Cymbala 1997:74).

Notice that in the case of the said ministries, both the mission and the missionaries were birthed through much prayer—not through the direct influence and urging of a pastor. And because people have had a personal sense of a direct calling from God through prayer, their motivation to start up and maintain their particular ministry or mission is internal and long lasting.

REASON #2

The second reason why prayer is such a critical, indispensible component of a successful mission strategy and outreach is that prayer, both personal and intercessory, empowers and sustains the missionary. For without personal prayer, a missionary's close connection to God is weakened, his vision becomes clouded, and missionary zeal gives way to discouragement, temptation, and ultimately defeat.

Blackaby and King said it well when they wrote, “Prayer as a relationship is probably your best indication about the health of your love relationship with the Father. If your prayer life has been slack, your love relationship probably has grown cold” (Blackaby and King 1994:184).

Ellen White warns that since it is prayer that “brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience,” if we “neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient,” we will eventually “lose [our] hold on God. . . . God’s messengers must tarry long with Him, if they would have success in their work. . . . Power will come from God in answer to the prayer of faith” (White 1915:255). If there was ever a time and place where the messenger of God needed power, it is certainly on the front lines of mission! For it is there that our victories and defeats alike unite in proving that what God said is true—that it is “‘not by might, nor by [human] power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6), and “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).
That's especially true when it comes to making a spiritual impact on the hearts, minds, and lives of others. Paul realized that he needed divine wisdom in what to say, as well as power and courage to say it effectively. That's why he *personally* prayed so much and also pleaded with other believers, like those in Ephesus, to *intercede* for him, so that “whenever I speak,” he said, “words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19). Prayer sustained Paul throughout his mission.

**REASON #3**

The third reason why prayer is such a critical, indispensible component of a successful mission strategy and outreach is that prayer, along with the Word of God, is arguably the most effective spiritual weapon that the missionary and his or her support team can wield.

Laurence Burn, the current training director for Adventist Frontier Missions, once shared a story about a couple of U.S. marines who, during Operation Desert Storm, came face to face with a formidable company of Iraqi tanks and soldiers. In his animated and interactive teaching style, Burn posed the question, “And what do you think these outnumbered soldiers did when faced with such an overwhelming enemy force? They did what every good marine would do! They demanded that they all drop their weapons and surrender! But sadly, the Iraqis responded by firing upon the marines. The marines immediately hit the ground and radioed back to the command post calling in an airstrike. And soon that enemy company was decimated!” Finishing the story, Burn drove home his point. “What the close air support is to a U.S. marine, prayer is to the missionary and every successful gospel worker” (Burn 2002). That analogy really struck a chord with me. “The missionary’s air force is prayer force.”

David Taylor uses the same analogy when he describes an exciting two-pronged mission strategy that combines (1) intercessory prayer in the form of “24/7 prayer centers” and (2) healing and deliverance ministries. He says, “First, these houses of prayer will be interceding 24/7 for spiritual strongholds to be broken—you might think of this as the ‘air war.’ But secondly, these ministries will also engage in healing and deliverance ministry on the ground in their communities” (Taylor 2014: “Intercessory Missions”). This “air war” is the prayer war of calling on God through the power of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of angels that excel in strength to help us “demolish strongholds” and “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,” and to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5). In this spiritual battle, prayer support is the most amazing and effective air support we can ask for!

Great missionaries and evangelists through the centuries have sooner or later come to this same understanding and taken fuller advantage of this spiritual weapon of prayer. I will here mention three: Daniel Nash, Mary Geegh, and J. O. Fraser.
Cymbala recounts that Charles Finney’s right-hand man was Daniel Nash, born on November 17, 1775. He was a good pastor in New York State who, at the age of 48, decided to “give himself totally to prayer for Finney’s [evangelistic] meetings.” Their strategy was this: “‘Father Nash,’ as some called him, would quietly slip into a town three or four weeks before Finney’s arrival, rent a room, find two or three other like-minded Christians to join him, and start pleading with God” (Cymbala 1997:174). Cymbala then cites one of the memoirs where Finney wrote that on one occasion,

“When I got to town to start a revival a lady contacted me who ran a boarding house. She said, ‘Brother Finney, do you know a Father Nash? He and two other men have been at my boarding house for the last three days, but they haven’t eaten a bite of food. I opened the door and peeped in at them because I could hear them groaning, and I saw them down on their faces. They have been this way for three days, lying prostrate on the floor and groaning. I thought something awful must have happened to them. I was afraid to go in and I didn’t know what to do. Would you please come see about them?’”

“No, it isn’t necessary,” I replied. “They just have a spirit of travail in prayer’ ” (Cymbala 1997:175).

This strategic intercession by Daniel Nash and his recruits was a little known yet critical secret to the amazing success Finney’s evangelistic preaching met during what came to be known as the Second Great Awakening. And it is notable that “within four months of Nash’s death on December 20, 1831, Finney left the itinerant field to become the pastor of a church in New York City. His partner in cracking the gates of hell was gone” (Cymbala 1997:176).

Experiences like Finney and Nash’s illustrate well what Ellen White said: “Through much prayer you must labor for souls, for this is the only method by which you can reach hearts. It is not your work, but the work of Christ who is by your side, that impresses hearts” (White 1946:342, emphasis mine).

Another missionary, Mary Geegh, learned to effectively use this spiritual weapon of prayer with special emphasis on the listening aspect, waiting patiently on God to speak and direct her. She learned of this type of prayer when she asked a Dr. Scudder how she could “begin to have the Holy Spirit, to help people.” He taught her the following: “The first step is to ‘wait’ . . . ‘be still’ . . . ‘listen.’ Then be definite about your sins—daily; work with notebook and pencil, write down the things the Holy Spirit speaks to your mind; determine to obey. Then share with others who come
to you for help how the power of Christ changes you” (Geegh 2004:1–3) From that
time on, she began to pray and “be still” and “wait on the Lord” until she received an
impression of direction from God, which she dutifully obeyed. Then when problems
arose or people came to her in crisis seeking help or advice, she began to take them into
her prayer room, where they would ask God for help or advice and then sit quietly and
see what thought came. Time and again, God’s Spirit gave thoughts and impressions,
brought life-changing conviction to people’s hearts, restored broken relationships, and
performed many other amazing miracles (Geegh 2004:1–3).

Geegh’s experience with prayer as two-way communication with God brings
to mind two of Ellen White’s statements: “When every other voice is hushed, and
in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the
voice of God” (1898:363). And “Christ is ever sending messages to those who
listen for His voice” (1905:509). Whether through the Scriptures, our conscience,
or the appeals of the Spirit, God will speak to us, directing our mission, if we will
take the time to listen.

J. O. FRASER.

Robb writes about J. O. Fraser, a “pioneer missionary to the Lisu tribe of southwest
China,” who saw firsthand the difference prayer could make as a strategic weapon.
Fraser “preached Christ for several years among the far flung mountain villages of this
people with almost no outward results” until “he came to the place where he asked
God to take away his life rather than allow him to labor on without results.” Then a
breakthrough occurred when two things happened:

1. The Spirit of God enabled him to pray “the prayer of faith” for several
hundred Lisu families to come to Christ.

2. He succeeded in forming a prayer support group of eight to 10 Christians
in his home country to back up the work in ongoing prayer (Robb 1991:23).

Robb then quotes Fraser, who said,

“Work on our knees. I am feeling more and more that it is after all just the
prayers of God’s people that call down blessing upon the work, whether they are
directly engaged in it or not. . . . I believe it will only be known on the last day
how much has been accomplished in missionary work by the prayers of earnest
believers at home. . . .

“I used to think that prayer should have the first place and teaching the second.
I now feel that it would be truer to give prayer the first, second, and third places
and teaching the fourth.”
Robb records that in the end, “hundreds of [Lisu] families accepted Christ” and a people movement began that still continues to this day in southwest China and northern Myanmar.

In summary, prayer is such a critical and indispensable component of a successful mission strategy and outreach because (1) it actually births both missionaries and their mission, (2) it strengthens and sustains the missionary throughout their time of service, and (3) it is arguably the most effective spiritual weapon that missionaries and their support teams can wield in penetrating Satan’s strongholds.

Though Christians of all ages have known at least in theory that this is true, it seems as though in modern times, many churches and organizations are having a renewed awakening to the awesome power of prayer as a strategic tool in world mission. Let’s now look briefly at some exciting, modern, mission-focused prayer movements, how they work, and what results they are having.

**LIGHT THE WINDOW.**

The *Mission Frontiers* journal notes that there is “a growing convergence of the prayer and healing movements with the frontier mission movement” (Mission Frontiers 2014:1). And that is exciting! One initiative that Taylor mentions is called Light the Window, which is a joint project of the US Center for World Mission and the Global Network of Mission Structures. Light the World’s goal is to raise up 10 million intercessors to pray every day for the unreached peoples of the 10/40 Window until the year 2020. Their goal is to raise up a billion hours of prayer and a billion dollars for “spiritual breakthrough among the 365 largest unreached people groups, which collectively make up 2.5 billion people” (Taylor 2014: “Intercessory Mission”). This ministry produces prayer calendars with enthrographic and other background information that can guide intercessors in praying specifically for the needs of the various identified unreached people groups as well as for nearby peoples with a Christian presence who could possibly be mobilized to reach out to them. This program plans to officially launch in 2015, and any “ministry, church or organization committed to the Great Commission under the Lordship of Christ can participate in these initiatives and incorporate them into their existing ministry platform” (Taylor 2014: “Light the Window”). Since the project hasn’t officially launched at the writing of this chapter, results are still to be seen. But the organization and planning being done makes me optimistic that it will accomplish great good.

**THE 24/7 MOVEMENT.**

As already mentioned above, there is a movement that establishes “24/7 houses of prayer” that, according to Lambert, has been around and growing steadily for quite a while. Lambert quotes the International House of Prayer Kansas City (IHOPKC), which says that
“in 1984, the number of 24/7 houses of prayer in the world was fewer than twenty-five. Today there are over ten thousand—and most of that growth has been in the last ten years; they are springing up all over the globe at a staggering rate” (Lambert 2014: “Critical Mass”).

Central to the programs, activities, and outreach of the International House of Prayer is our 24/7 prayer room, which is open to the public around the clock, day and night. The prayer room has been designed to reflect the tabernacle of David (1 Chr. 9:33; 22–24); it is a place where we never cease worshiping the Lord and interceding for our world. Each 24-hour period is divided into 12, two-hour prayer sessions, each led by a full worship team (International House of Prayer 2014).

Many people connected to these 24/7 houses of prayer embrace the “fulltime occupation of ‘intercessory missionary,’ ” which in some places means that they “commit to 50 hours of service per week, including being in prayer for at least four hours a day, six days a week” (Lambert 2014: “Critical Mass”). Their job emphasizes three main activities: (1) continual prayer, (2) deeds of mercy, and (3) sharing the gospel. There are several biblical models that inspire people in the 24/7 movement. One is the “Anna Calling,” which recounts the godly example of Anna who discovered the infant Jesus in the temple at His dedication. We read that Anna “never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying” (Luke 2:37). Another biblical source of inspiration is Luke 18:7, where Jesus says, “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?” Lambert comments that this text is immediately preceded by texts that talk about the end days and Christ’s second coming. Therefore he says that many “intercessory missionaries live with a kind of eschatological urgency” (Lambert 2014: “Critical Mass”). Another source of inspiration is the Davidic Worship model, where David created “a full time occupation of singers who ministered to God night and day” (Lambert 2014: “Critical Mass”; see also 1 Chronicles 25; 9:33). The final source of inspiration I will mention is the picture of the harps and bowls held by the elders who are ever before God and who fall down before the Lamb in Revelation 5:8. Prayer leaders see in this text “a model of worship that includes both music and the prayers of God’s people mingled” (Lambert 2014: “Critical Mass”).

But how does this 24/7 movement relate to missions? Lambert informs us that in December of 2013, the International House Of Prayer Kansas City held its first annual OneThing Leadership Summit, which drew together 500 prayer and mission leaders and started a “new conversation and collaboration between the prayer and frontier missions movements” (Lambert 2014: “Critical Mass”). There is a clear merging of these two movements underway, and Lambert sees in this a “critical mass” that is ready to take up the challenge of reaching the last remaining unreached peoples for the glory of God.
**ARME MINISTRIES UNITED PRAYER MOVEMENT.**

Started by Pastor Ivor Myers, Calvin Kim, and a team of ministry-minded young professionals during and after the Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC) conference in 2008, ARME (“Arm me!”) began as a short training program that would “arm” and equip people with practical tools for deep Bible study and a dynamic devotional life. Its main focus from the start was Bible study and united prayer. But over time, two more branches of ARME have developed: (1) MASH, which helps restore God’s call to biblical health of body and lifestyle, and (2) Special Ops, which includes A-Units Basic Training program and Mini-Revivals, weekends that give people tools to use in personal evangelism.

All of these ministries are very useful in their own right, but ARME acknowledges the secret of all their success, saying, “As those that attend ARME have realized (and you really have to EXPERIENCE it for yourself to believe it), united prayer has been the power behind the effectiveness of this training program” (ARME Ministries 2014: “History of ARME”).

So what is united prayer? It is a format of group prayer that “revolves around the pattern of praise-confession-supplication and thanksgiving [in that order] that is modeled all throughout Scripture” (ARME Ministries 2014: “ARME’s Prayer Ministry”). People are encouraged to offer *short* prayers on the specific topic that the whole group is focusing on at the moment (ie. only praises during the praise section, only confessions during the confession section, etc.). But there is no set order in which people are required to pray. People can pray whenever they want (or not at all), and people can pray multiple times as long as each time is short and to the point. Praying in this way can easily take up to an hour or longer, and people who pray in this way often testify to how close they feel to God and each other, and how they have experienced inner healing—spiritual, emotional, and even physical (see ARME Ministries 2014: “Prayer Testimonies”).

And why is united prayer so important? ARME quotes Ellen White, who once wrote, 

> We are encouraged to pray for success, with the divine assurance that our prayers will be answered. The promise of Matthew 18:19-20 is made on the condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers, there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love for God and for one another (White 1979:303).

The response to this united prayer ministry has been amazing, with churches, universities, and conferences all over the world requesting ARME to come and teach united prayer for their various events. And many people who’ve experienced ARME’s united prayer rooms at such events have returned home to start up ongoing united prayer groups of their own. It has become a truly global prayer movement, praying for latter rain power to finish the Great Commission.
EVERY HOME FOR CHRIST (A CASE STUDY).

While all of the above prayer initiatives have been widely perceived to be promising and successful, Every Home for Christ (EHC) is a ministry that has actually kept some good statistics that highlight the effectiveness of prayer in their mission strategy. EHC is a ministry that “over the last 65 years . . . has reached over 1.5 billion homes globally and received over 100 million responses to Christ through their outreach efforts in 216 countries.” Their leader, Dick Eastman, saw a vision of a global prayer movement in 1971. He is famous for his statement, “The degree to which prayer is mobilized will be the degree to which the world is evangelized.” Finally, in 2003, Eastman established the Jericho Prayer Center that operates according to the model of “harp and bowl” or night-and-day prayer (Lambert 2014: “Every Home for Christ”).

What is interesting about this strategic prayer emphasis is that for the seven-year period previous to this prayer initiative, EHC had visited or reached an average of 41,504 homes per day. For the seven-year period after the prayer initiative began, EHC visited or reached an average of 129,424 homes per day—a 312-percent increase over the previous period! And in the next two years (2010–2011) the average jumped to 221,322 homes per day!

As per “decision follow-up” (the numbers of people who have made decisions for Jesus)—the daily average for the seven years prior to the prayer initiative in 2003 was 2,770 people. For the seven years after the initiative began, the average grew to 20,122 per day—a 726-percent increase after 2004! And in 2010 and 2011, the average exploded to 38,927 per day! EHC is convinced beyond doubt that their prayer initiative is supercharging their mission to reach every home on the planet for Christ.

SUMMARY

In this brief article, we’ve taken a look at prayer in how it relates to mission strategy. We’ve rediscovered that prayer is absolutely critical to missions since (1) it births the missionary and his or her mission, (2) it empowers and sustains the missionary, and (3) it is the missionary’s most effective spiritual weapon, as the stories of Daniel Nash, Mary Geegh, and J. O Fraser illustrate so well. What’s more is that many ministries and mission organizations today are making a fresh discovery and fuller use of this spiritual weapon with amazing results!

Perhaps the only thing more amazing than this modern pioneering prayer revival in missions is the fact that it has taken the church so long to get excited about and committed to it.

Notes
* All Scripture quotations are taken from NIV unless otherwise indicated.
WORKS CITED


HOW DO WE INSPIRE INTEREST IN CHRISTIANITY in our non-Christian friends and neighbors? What does it take for someone to want to become a disciple of Christ? The key is found in Ministry of Healing p. 143:

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”

But what does this look like in a Buddhist context? This volume is a collection of papers presented at the 2015 annual conference hosted by the Global Mission Center for East Asian Religions which focused on the ‘how’ of winning confidence as Jesus did. Organized into two sections, the first half focuses on the principles of leading Buddhists to faith in God while the last half presents a number of case studies to learn from.

As you read, you will find inspiration for your own ministry and will learn how you can be more intentional in developing interested and willing disciples of Christ. Winning trust is just the first step, but it is a crucial first step in developing interest and beginning the process of grounding new believers in a correct understanding and application of the Gospel in their lives.

Winning trust is just the first step.