

Reflections from Bangkok

May, 2007

Please pray for:

- My flight back to Thailand on May 15, my adjustment and recovery from jet lag
- Our team retreat outside of Bangkok at the end of May
- The preparations of the four women who will join our team soon: Michelle, Lisa, Lexie and Christy
- Permsup slum dwellers, who are seeking new housing as they are in the process of being evicted

By Sara Stephens

Small-town Oregon, LA, North Carolina, south of the border...

I've been all over the place during this home assignment.

Sharing with churches, visiting friends, connecting with my Southern roots, even participating in a short-term mission trip in Mexico, to name a few of my activities.

There have been times of sweet rest and peace, other periods where I have been madly preparing presentations and talks. I've been practicing my Thai and working on my web design skills, talking with prospective missionaries (one of whom recently decided to join the Servant Partners internship), biking and baking and reading.

It has been fun to share my experiences with people, encouraging to hear ways people have seen a positive change in me, a blessing to see friends and family I haven't seen since childhood. I have also seen God

use me to challenge people to consider long-term missions, a simpler lifestyle, involvement with the poor where they are living. My ministry isn't con-

Playing the Thai instrument I've been learning (sah duang) at the First Presbyterian Church in McMinnville, Oregon.



finied just to Bangkok—God has been using me as a witness here, too.

Overall I am feeling rested and getting antsy to head back across the ocean. I love the States, but I'm meant to be in Thailand for now.

Returning to the field with new perspective

During my time in the States God has given me much peace and insight into who he made me to be and how I fit into our team's mission.

My tendency has been to idealize certain personality traits, certain giftings, certain ministry roles. It seemed to me that God used extraverted, spontaneous, charismatic evangelistic types more than others to bring his kingdom. In a church planting movement like ours, spending as much time hanging out with people in the slums as possible seemed the most valuable thing to be doing. Certainly that was important for my language learning. But now as I head into doing more ministry, that setting is not the best place for me to spend most of my time. And that "ideal" personality profile certainly is not mine.

I get tired quickly in unstructured social settings. I thrive better with tasks or projects to work on. I work well with computers and don't get restless spending time in front of one. I am good with detail-oriented work, analyzing procedures and systems, giving a well-

prepared teaching or Bible study. And all of those things are valuable to God and important for fulfilling our vision as a team.

So when I go back I will take on more of a managerial role of our foundation, working on things like budget and funding, personnel procedures, and promotional strategies. This foundation has helped our ministry to be holistic, meeting practical needs of slum-dwellers, and my job will be to help it to become sustainable without missionaries. The end goal is that I will raise up Thais to take on what I initiate, and work myself out of a job.

I will still live and serve with a church in the slums, but will recognize my limitations in that setting. I will be faithful with the gifts and skills God has given me, and work to not strive to be someone I'm not. "God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?" (1 Corinthians 12:18-19)

May, 2007

What God has been doing while I've been gone

While I've been in the States I've received regular emails from my two teammates who are still there, Dave and Kevin. I have been really encouraged by many of their reports.

The most exciting news to me personally is how Ahng has continued to grow and mature in Christ. Ahng is one of the youth I've invested the most in, and who lived next door to me when I was in Perm-sup. She became a believer several months after I arrived in Bangkok and is constantly impressing me with her maturity and love for Jesus. This April at the annual church-network camp she helped lead prayer and worship for the whole group. She's only 16 years old but already stepping out in leadership and encouraging others with her faith.

Other highlights:

- Thai leaders are growing in their discipleship, commitment and shared vision for reaching the slums
- A Filipino (male!) missionary in Bangkok with another mission is now helping us reach out to youth, especially boys
- People in Perm-sup are increasingly expressing their faith in their own heart language, including writing worship songs in the traditional Isan style.



Traditional Isan (Northeastern Thai) dance and worship at the April church camp.

A new business, new teammates, and other developments

With the desire to see slum-dwellers find meaningful work, and with the hopes of helping the Thai Peace Foundation become self-sustainable, we are starting a business. It is called LadderWorks and is a temp



My current teammate Jen and I hanging out with future Bangkok teammates in the LA-area.

agency for unskilled labor. My teammate Dave submitted a business plan to the Urbana competition and we got 3rd place out of over 60 applicants! This cash award plus other

funds we have received (including an offer by the Thai government to match donations), we are well on the way to launching the business. I will likely help with this venture in some capacity.

The photo on the left shows the four women who will be joining us between September and January, and two who will come a bit later. From left to right, top to bottom: me, Lexie, Michelle, Jen, Lisa, Althea, Christy. Althea still has a ways to go with fundraising, and Jen is extending her furlough for awhile, but the rest will be moving to Bangkok soon! These are all great women and I can't wait to serve with them.

Kevin and his family will begin a 1-year furlough in June, so he has been handing over church network leadership to Thais in new ways. Also, Dave will be acting team leader while Kevin is gone. Please pray for these transitions.

Finances: My personal financial needs are met, but additional donations to my ministry expenses can always be put to good use. If you'd like to give, contact me or refer to the info on giving on my website (see below).

Please pray for:

- LadderWorks, the temp agency we are starting with some of our Thai leaders, to employ and train slum dwellers
- My current good physical health to continue
- Adults in my slum (Phothong) to become believers and help Nim and I lead the church there

Coming up:

- Christy Johnson, a future teammate, will visit our team in mid-June
- Our team leader Kevin Walton and his family will go on furlough beginning June 18
- Servant Partners all-staff retreat August 12-17 in Ensenada, Mexico

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