

Land of Smiles

Newsletter of Susan Staples – Ministering in Chiang Rai, THAILAND

~ August 2018 ~

““Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.” Psalm 9:10

Greetings from the USA! Can I just tell you it feels very weird to say that! Yes, you know I am “back home”. Although I am enjoying the heat and the AZ dust storms immensely (no, I’m not being sarcastic) I do feel homesick. I miss my neighbors, my team, my English students, and of course my dog, Oreo. (I do pray he’s ok while I’m gone.) It has been such a blessing to catch up with many of you and I’m looking forward to catching up with those of you that I haven’t seen yet. I am truly blessed to be surrounded by so many wonderful friends and partners in the Lord’s work. It has also been a great time to catch up with family. For the first time since I was 12 years old, all 4 of my siblings are now living in Tucson, and I also get to meet family that I’ve never met before in NY while I’m here.

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PERSONAL SPOTLIGHT: JAELYN & NEEKON



I met Jaelyn as a 16 year old. She had recently accepted Christ and simply wanted to know Jesus more. I became quite close with her over the next 2 years that she lived with us. She decided to attend Payao Bible College. Through generous funds from some of you, she was able to go. The only requirement I had is that she graduate. If she would leave Bible college for whatever reason without graduating, then she would have to pay back all of the money that was given to her for Bible college. (Many girls tend to stop when things get difficult or when/if they get married.)

After one year, she called me and told me that she needed to drop out of Bible college due to poor health. I took her to a doctor and after running many tests, they couldn’t find anything wrong and the doctor said that it was all in her head. During this time, her entire countenance changed, and she refused to talk to me about anything. I told her that she needed to pay back her tuition for the previous year.

THAILAND PRAYER SPOTLIGHT

She refused and her family (who were non-believers and didn't want her to attend Bible college in the first place) said all sorts of horrible things TO me and ABOUT me. What was even more painful was that I had the expectation that Jaelyn would come alongside of me in the work at the girls house. We had been so close and now all of a sudden all of those expectations went right out the window.

I felt all alone and wanted to run away like Elijah did when he ran away from Queen Jezebel. I was crushed. I felt like she was my "Timothy". I realized that I had put more hope into a person than I had in God. I knew there had to be something more going on, but had no idea what. So, Jaelyn went back to her village and I didn't hear from her for almost a year. It was a painful time for me.

A year later, she called me and told me in major detail about a dream that she had had. The point of this dream was that God was calling her back to Bible college. I was speechless. I wasn't sure if this was simply a thought that popped into her head or if she was serious. So, I told her that I was glad that she was going back, but that I wouldn't pay tuition for her first semester, but that if she continued with Bible College, I would support her. She got a job working in the library. After that first term, we started supporting her again. A few years later, she admitted to me that the reason she had dropped out is because she had been extremely hurt by a fellow student and a teacher at the Bible college. She decided that if Christians are like this, then she wanted NOTHING to do with Christians or full time ministry. But upon going back to her village, she realized that God wouldn't let her go, no matter how much she tried to run away, and she repented of her attitude.

During her time in Bible college, she came to Chiang Khong to work with the girls as part of her internship, and the girls LOVED her. She would observe the girls, talk to them, and intuitively know what each of the girls needed, and she could get the girls to open up to her in a way that I never could. Then, as she was about to graduate, she called me and said that God was calling her to come work with us. I was thrilled because I was planning a visit to the USA and desperately needed someone to work with the girls while I was gone. (We had been looking for national staff for the girls house for 3 years and couldn't find anyone.) This was in 2014. I was in the USA for 5 months. When I had been here for 3 months, Jaelyn emailed me and said that she was leaving to get married. I should have seen this coming, but it totally blindsided me. It was quite a blow, but unlike the last time, I could see God's hand in the situation.

She got married before I returned to Thailand. She had met her husband, Neekon at Bible college, but he had left for a 2 year army service requirement. They got married right after he got out of the army. He went back to Bible college, and Jaelyn went with him. A year later, God gave them a beautiful baby boy who they nicknamed Tan, which means "on time" because they said God is always "on time".

When I went to visit them, Jaelyn told me that she really missed working with teenagers. By this time, (early 2017) I had just moved and was working with a church plant team. The team, made up of missionaries, Thai's and Hmong, also have a boys home (similar to the girls home that I used to have). There are 14 Hmong teenage boys at this house. In 2018, there was an opening for dorm parents at the boys home, and unbeknownst to me, Pastor Tawatchai (the Thai pastor from our team) knew Neekon because he had done outreaches in Neekon's village. So, now Neekon and Jaelyn are dorm parents at the boys house and God has brought us together in service to Him once more! What does the future hold? Only God knows. My prayer is that God will open a door in some way for us to minister to hurting women and teenagers. What this will look like, I don't know, but God knows. Maybe it will be with Jaelyn (that is my hope) or maybe it will be with others, but one thing is sure: my trust is in Him who holds us in His hand.



It is 5 a.m. and "Malee" was waiting in front of her store. She had already been awake for 1 hour preparing gifts for the group of monks that would soon pass by her store. When they arrived, she put her gifts into the monks' alms bowls. After chanting and blessing her and her business, the monks proceeded on to her waiting neighbor. Sometimes Malee wonders why her business is doing so badly even though she makes merit every morning. But probably

Thai Buddhists believe: "Do good, receive good; do bad, receive bad." This is the law of karma. It means that the deeds you do, both good and bad, affect every part of your life. Therefore, everyone is responsible for their own fate.

Everyone is stuck in this cycle of karma. All Thai people are aware that they can never live up to the good standard which Buddha taught (e.g., to always think the perfect thing, speak the perfect thing and do the perfect thing). To balance the horrible consequences of their bad karma (resulting from evil deeds), they make merit (i.e., do good deeds). Hence merit-making is one of the most important foundations of Folk Buddhism. By doing as many good deeds as possible, Buddhists hope they will have more luck in life and attain a better life in the next reincarnation. The problem is that nobody knows how much merit is enough merit. Thai Buddhists eagerly look for ways to make merit to ease the fear of the consequences of their karma, but they never achieve the peace of mind that they have done enough

- Pray that Thai people will understand that Jesus is the only way to find freedom (especially freedom from fear) from the results of their bad deeds (karma).
- Pray for them to understand that they will never be able to overcome their karma by good deeds, but that the sacrifice and mercy of Jesus is the only way out.

(excerpt taken from Buddhist prayer booklet put out by OM written by Manuel Becker. If you would like a copy, please go to www.pray4thailand.org | [in-fo@pray4thailand.org](mailto:info@pray4thailand.org))



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