

January 2014

Alex Larkin – GSI

Photo by Kanchana of the Free Methodist Church, Bangkok, Thailand



The infamous Durian fruit,
known for its musk

สวัสดี!

Global Studies Intensive:

Experimental Learning from Recognized Experts

For two weeks over the New Year, I had the great privilege of going to Thailand and Myanmar to take part in an intensive missions training event, in which over 30 pastors and missional leaders from all over the world participated. I thank everyone who supported me with their prayers and finances; you were God's chosen instrument to make this trip happen!

We started our time together listening to some testimonies. In the Book of Acts, we see how persecution of the Church ended up being the flame that started a forest fire of church growth: People were turning to Christ everywhere and then spreading and making new disciples. The same is true today for the countries of Cambodia, China, Egypt, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and others, where the Church has grown not just in spite of but also because of persecution. At the GSI, I heard many testimonies of persecution:

My roommate was kicked out of his house by a fanatic Muslim neighbor in his home country Egypt. He has friends that have recently been killed, and he himself gets death threats on his phone. Today he is a church planter.

Another man from Vietnam risked his life to help refugees escape to Hong Kong on an overloaded small fishing boat. He joined them and endured five days of constant thirst and starvation in the hot sun before arriving. In Hong Kong he stayed in a refugee camp for five years, where he found his hope in Jesus. He then was sent back to Vietnam where he was placed in prison for four years. While there he was separated from his new family, which also arrived back with nothing. Today he is reunited with his family and has a lead position in the Vietnamese Free Methodist Church.

The Myanmar government doesn't allow any Christian literature to be printed or distributed in the national language unless it has its stamp of approval, and only material that has been watered down and compromised can obtain it. So any Bibles and Christian literature that they need either has to be smuggled in or printed in another language- namely, English. Imagine you having to learn Russian and leave the US in order to become a pastor! Yet young Myanmar men and women must learn English and make a long trek into neighboring India to go to Bible College.

The GSI was so much more than just learning. It was also a time of joy, bonding, and friendship making among all who were present. This is from my journal: "This is so exciting! Right now we are learning about planting churches through building relationships with the 'people of peace' in their communities. We are soaking in the details, asking questions, and sharing about our successes and difficulties."

More at:

alexlarkin.org

Also, on New Year's Eve, a Brazilian pastor in our group went to the Thai church's prayer meeting. It was all in Thai, but at the end he heard a woman pray in perfect Portuguese. He asked the pastor afterwards, who said, "No, it was all in Thai." But when he connected with the woman he confirmed through a translator that all that she had prayed about he had understood perfectly. Now, he only speaks Portuguese and English, and she only speaks Thai. The only conclusion is that God performed a miracle!

We learned from many of the attendees about some of the major religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam), the history and current events of some of the countries in the "10-40 Window*," and of course about missional concepts: Church planting, cross-cultural adaption, and discipleship, for example.

We worshiped in local churches and were struck by the zeal and unrestrained passion exhibited by our brothers in Christ. We visited ministries such as the Jasmine Project, where young single mothers are supported in childrearing. We visited cultural centers such as the Shwedagon Pagoda, a monumental Buddhist temple where we observed Buddhist devotees praying.

I've gained a new and enlarged appreciation for Asia and its many peoples. I've lost my fear of learning tonal languages** and even have heard from some leaders there that they would like to have me work with them!

Only God knows what my next assignment is, but I am praying in excited anticipation to seek His direction! I hope that you can join me in this prayer. **Please also pray for:**

- Pastor Pa Kep's pastoral training seminar: He is currently gathered with all of the regional pastors of Myanmar -men and woman- to pass on what he learned at the GSI. Please pray for traveling mercies, effective teaching, and eager ears.
- The governments of Thailand and Myanmar: Thais are demonstrating for a more democratic government, and the Myanmar government continues the oppression of the national Christians. Praise, however, that conditions have improved some in recent years.
- Peace for Pastor Dosseh's family in Togo, Africa: His daughters become ill when he travels.

Thank you everyone, and God bless,

Alex Larkin

*10/40 Window: "The 10/40 Window is the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude... It is home to some of the largest unreached people groups in the world..." -joshuaproject.net

**Tonal Languages: "In a tone language (tonal language), different tones will change the meaning of the words, even if the pronunciation of the word is the same. Many East Asian languages are tone languages..." -wikipedia.org



Students at the Light & Life Bible College
Most Myanmar men were what's called a paso
(pronounced "pa-zoo")

