

## Empowering Every Day Local Believers

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There was a very important recent study done here in Thailand on factors related to conversion and church growth among the Thai people. A high level study of this type had not been done since 1982 which was the first time it had ever been done.

Some interesting findings came out of the study that have impacted our focus in ministry and how we prioritize what we do.

A friend recently mentioned to me that she believed missionaries were sent to places to “win people for Jesus.” This is true in one sense, but is also a common misconception that misses the fact that the job of winning people to Jesus doesn’t depend on an elite highly trained few, but on every single believer in Jesus, whether local or foreign.

This is especially true in an area where less than 1% of the population even claiming to believe, trust in, and follow Jesus as Savior and Lord.

As a missionary called in one of the five giftings mentioned in Ephesians Chapter 4:11, my primary role is to “equip the saints” (the whole body of believers in a given area) for the “work of the ministry.” That means that I am not the only one, or even one of a elite group, who is expected to do the normal work required of every believer.

No, I am expected to find my place in equipping the believers and coming along side existing groups and empowering them through the gifts and teaching abilities that God has given to me.

Now as a normal every day believer myself, I am still expected to share Jesus with others in my daily life and live the things I am asking of others to do as part of the normal Christian life. This happens whether I live overseas or not.

It just takes time to be able to effectively do it in another culture, especially where there needs to be almost a total change in the way the Gospel is shared so that it can be understandable to a Non-Western world view.

So back to the study. Here are some key pieces of information that were found.



These statistics are based on surveys done among Thai believers about what influenced them to come to trust in and follow Jesus, not what the leaders reported, but what the people themselves said.

- Only 4 out of 100 Thai believers are actively involved in making disciples each year. (Have at least led one person to Jesus)
- Yet 70% of those who came to Christ came through the witness and influence of believing family members and friends.
- Only 24% came to Christ through the influence of a Thai Pastor; which amounts to about 5-6k people per year.

- And only 6% of people are coming to Christ each year through the influence of a missionary/evangelist, which amounts to about 1k people per year.
- Of the 339k-400k Protestant Christians of the 67 million people in Thailand, only 2% are pastors and/or missionaries.
- 98% of Thai believer are “lay leaders” as some call them. I call them the “saints” who are waiting to be empowered and equipped.
- And over 42% of that number are from a variety of tribal backgrounds and not the “core” of Thailand.

There is much work to be done! But at least now we can be clearer about where our focus must lie.