

Finding the Real Reason Thai People Become “Christians”

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When new believers disappear from church and seemingly give up the Christian faith, it is often a disillusioning and discouraging time for those who introduced them to the Gospel, and perhaps even led them in saying the sinner's prayer together. Great expectations and high hopes are dashed. Why do people seem to come in and come out of the faith so easily?

As part of a series of lectures on communicating the Gospel to Thai Buddhists, Thai pastor Wan Petchsongkram offers some helpful observations on the true motivations of those who seemingly become Christians. Pastor Wan comments,

“And here is another important point about Thai people becoming Christians. Out of all the people who become Christians in 1 year, about 80% of those disappear. Have you seen this? People who become Christians and then disappear. We need to understand why this is so. I feel like this is a real problem for Christians in Thailand. When Thai people become Christians, they do so with certain reasons and because of certain factors and they remain Christians because of those reasons and factors so long as those reasons and factors still apply. But when those reasons are no longer there, they stop being Christians. Because of this, when they are still Christians and we know they are Christians because these reasons are still in effect, you should jump on the opportunity to teach them, no holds barred. If you don't hurry up and teach them while these other reasons are still in play, then when those reasons are gone, they will stop being Christians.”

In other words, Pastor Wan is saying that many Thai people make professions of faith in Christ not because they are convinced of the truth of the Gospel, want forgiveness of sin, or have had their hearts regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They make professions of faith because they are hoping that becoming a Christian will fix or solve their currently unsolvable problem. Perhaps it is a woman who desperately wants to have a child but has been unable to have one. Or a man who can't seem to give up drinking no matter how hard he has tried. Or a small business owner who has fallen on hard times and sees all their investments crashing down around them. Whatever the reason, they see becoming a Christian as a potential way to fix the problem.

It is completely normal for people to start coming to church for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the Gospel. As a teenager, I started going to a youth group at a local church because some guys from school said it was fun. It would be a gross mistake to assume that everyone who darkens the door of a church (or cell group, or campus fellowship, or whatever) does so for spiritual reasons. The fact that people have their own reasons coming to church is not the problem. The problem is when Christians fail to recognize this and lead anyone and everyone who wants to become a Christian to say the sinner's prayer and assure them they are a Christian. Doing so neither

addresses the person's felt need (the problem they want fixed) or their real need (forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God).

How then should Christians help people who express an interest in becoming Christians but may or may not be at a point of understanding and embracing the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Instead of saying the sinner's prayer with them, why not offer to pray for them, asking God to help them with their problem? And then invite them to come learn more about this amazing God who can help us. As Pastor Wan recommended, take advantage of the opportunity to teach them the Gospel while their reason for becoming interested in Christianity is still there. And hopefully, during that period of time before their problem goes away, God will give them a heart of understanding and repentance to turn to Christ. Although there may be a momentary excitement in leading someone to say the sinner's prayer and thinking that they have become a Christian, the real action in helping people come to Christ is in the day-in and day-out regular teaching of God's Word and in those quiet moments of reflection when God "turns on the lights" for people and they grasp the wonder of God's truth for the first time.