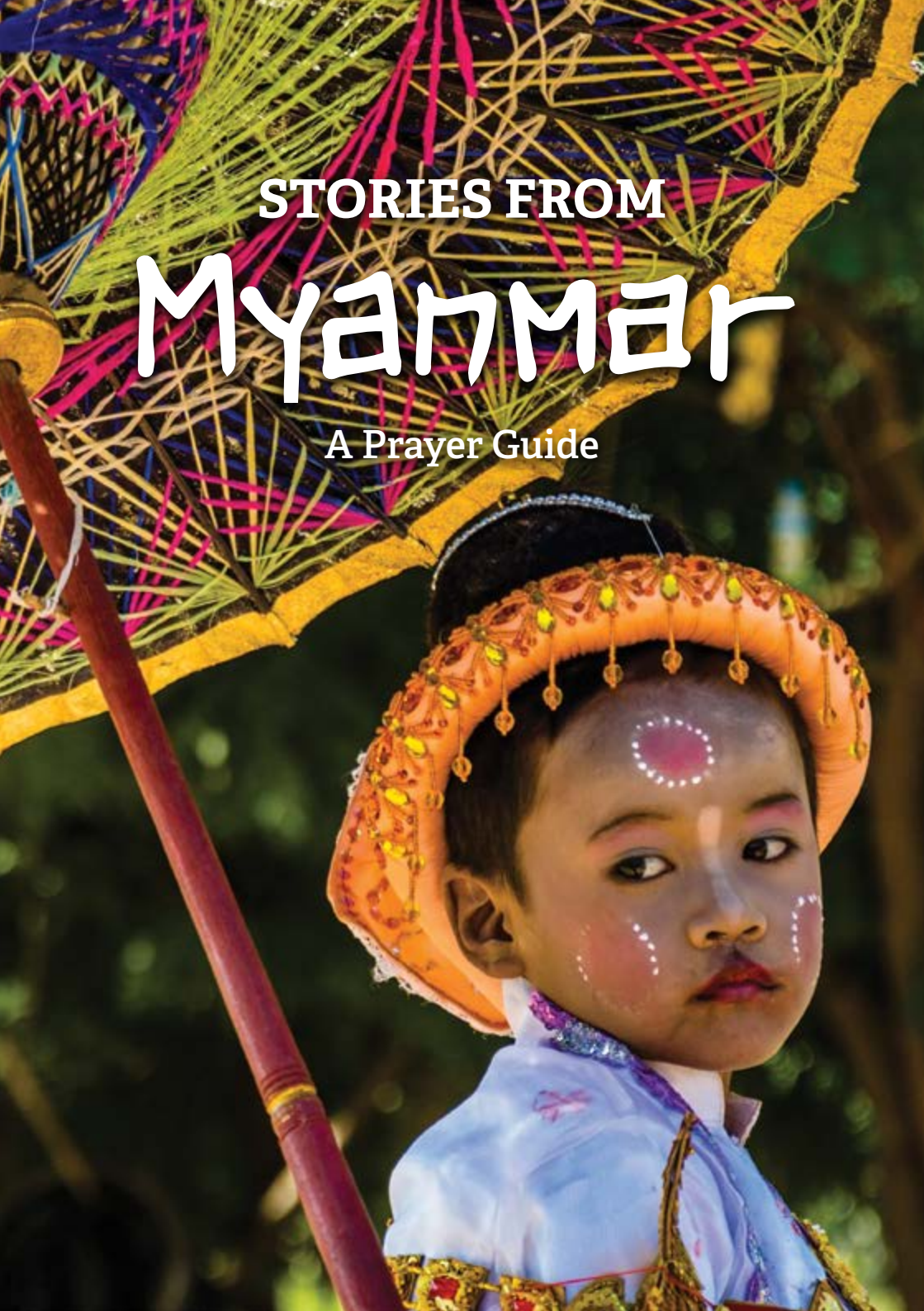
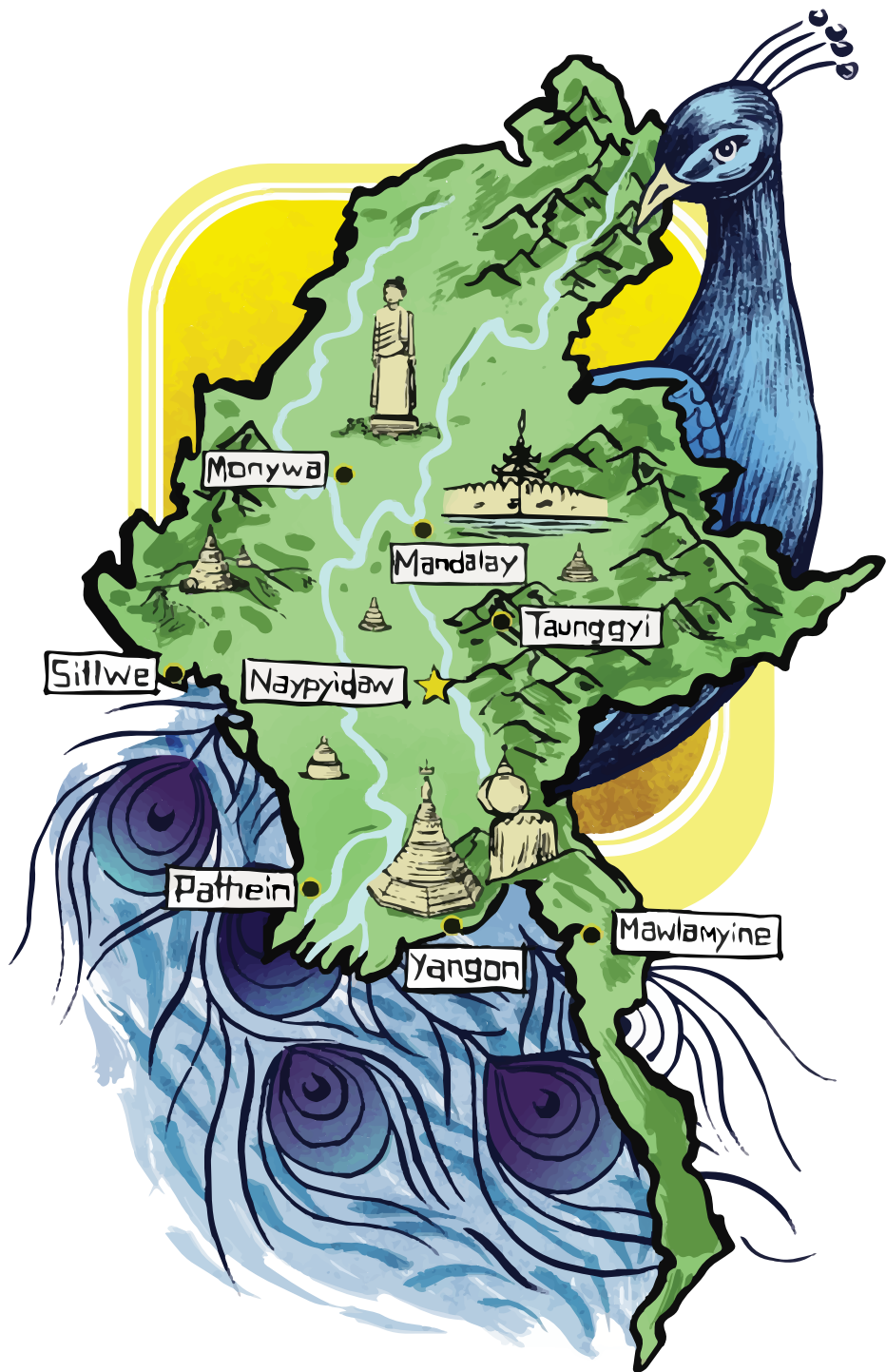


A young child, likely a girl, is the central focus of the image. She is wearing a light blue traditional Myanmar garment with a purple and gold border. On her forehead, there is a circular white decorative mark with a pink center. She has white dots on her cheeks and pink blush. She is wearing a large, ornate orange headpiece decorated with yellow and red beads. Behind her is a large, colorful umbrella with a wooden frame and a canopy made of many thin, colorful sticks (yellow, pink, blue, green) radiating from a central point. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

STORIES FROM Myanmar

A Prayer Guide





Introduction

For decades cut off from the world, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) is undergoing a steady transition, leaving behind failed socialist economic policies and authoritarian rule to embrace a more open, globalized future. Elections in 2011 enabled a pseudo-civilian government to replace direct military rule, and in 2016 the long-standing opposition party, the National League for Democracy, finally assumed office. However, monumental challenges remain.

Myanmar is still one of the most vulnerable countries to climate-change induced disasters. Long-standing ethnic tensions continue to spill over into violence, and a long-stagnated peace process, whilst showing signs of progress, remains fragile. Conflict between religious groups, particularly between the majority Buddhist (nearly 90%) and the smaller Muslim minority (around 4%) remains an ongoing challenge for national development. Poverty, particularly in rural areas, affects at least a quarter of all households.

Christian witness in Myanmar dates back over 400 years, with the first martyr, Nat Shin Naung, killed in 1612. Protestant missions arrived in the form of Felix Carey, and a few years later, Adoniram Judson, who came in 1813. While church growth was initially slow, today there are over 3 million Christians in Myanmar (6% of the population). Several senior members of the new government, including one of two vice-Presidents, are professing Christians.

While the church in Myanmar has a remarkable history of mission endeavour, efforts to reach 'unreached' groups, particularly in rural areas, remain modest. Church growth amongst Buddhist groups, such as the Bamar, Mon, Shan, Rakhine and Pa-O, as well as Muslims and Hindus, remains slow. The majority of believers and churches remain comprised of ethnic minorities.

Our prayer is that there would be a powerful mission movement in Myanmar, fuelled by believers obeying the Great Commission – fulfilling Adoniram Judson's dream of "Myanmar for Christ."

- # *Pray for breakthrough and church growth among Buddhist groups.*
- # *Pray for churches and local Christians to be renewed and inspired to focus on reaching 'unreached' groups.*

If you're interested in opportunities to serve in Myanmar, visit us at omf.org/opportunities or find our contact details at omf.org.

You can also follow *Pray for Myanmar* on Facebook for updates and sign up to receive monthly prayer news via email by following the link on our page.

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PRAY FOR THE HARVEST

One of the enjoyable things about regularly traveling in Myanmar is seeing all the different crops growing in the countryside and witnessing their progress over different seasons. Plowed fields, flooded nurseries, the brilliant green of young paddies, the heavy heads of rice bowing and turning orange, the harvesting and threshing process. And so the cycle returns. Each crop has its own time and seasons.

The different peoples of Myanmar also have their own times and seasons – not just in their cultural festivals, but seasons in their walk with God. For some, the harvest is complete and fresh sowing needs to be done. For others, it feels like the plowing is just beginning and the harvest seems far away.

We hope that the stories in this booklet will help you to have a better understanding of how to pray for the people in Myanmar. In prayer we can partner together and pray to the Lord of the harvest that He will bring in a beautiful harvest in His time.

- # *Pray for renewal where churches have existed for many generations, mainly among the different Christian minorities like Karen, Chin and Kachin.*
- # *Pray for opportunities to partner together with local churches.*
- # *Pray for persistence and wisdom in areas where there is no harvest yet, especially among the Buddhist peoples.*

“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.” – Psalm 126:5



Did you know?

Myanmar is one of the few countries in the world in a half-hour time zone. The time in Burma is UTC +6:30, which is a 30 minute difference from neighbouring Thailand.



EVERY HIGH HILL, EVERY SPREADING TREE

When I'm trying to describe Myanmar to friends who have never been there, one of the things I often do is mention how at home, we can't drive anywhere in our city without passing half a dozen churches. In Myanmar, you can't drive anywhere without passing a dozen pagodas or shrines. A number of verses in the Old Testament of the Bible talk about the people building places of worship on every high hill and under every spreading tree. These verses could well have been describing Myanmar where there are indeed pagodas on every high hill and shrines under every spreading tree.

Everywhere we go we see pagodas on all the high places, and even more in other convenient or auspicious places. Some of them have interesting names such as 'Where the Chicken Scratched' and many of them have stories associated with their founding or beginning. It's not just at the high places either. We have been to several caves and all of them also have pagodas and Buddhas in them – often with at least one monk who looks after the Buddha(s) and the cave.

Down by the taxi stand there is a big old spreading tree – a Bodhi tree – where all the taxi drivers hang out waiting for customers. On the trunk of the tree is a shrine to the local nats (spirits) where people make offerings. There might be flowers there, incense or candles and often food. Wherever we see this variety of tree there is always a shrine attached to the trunk.

- # *Pray that the people of Myanmar may be able to enjoy the beauty of God's creation without turning it into something to be worshipped.*
- # *Pray that the people of Myanmar will seek the one true God who can help them.*
- # *Pray that God's true temple may be in the hearts of the Myanmar people.*

*"Praise be to His glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory."
– Psalm 72:19*

BUDDHISM

Day 3

Every day on the bus ride from where I stay to where I teach, the bus will pass by a section on Pyay Road where the dome of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda and the plaza built around it, can be clearly seen. It is really a magnificent sight compared to the old buildings and thick trees that usually line the roads of Yangon. Even at night, during power cuts, one can always count on the lights that illuminate the Shwe Dagon Pagoda to still be on, illuminating the dome like a beacon in the dark.

The dome is made of gold in some sections, while on others it is covered by gold leaf. On the top of the dome sits the pride of Shwe Dagon Pagoda – a large jewel that reflects three different colors depending on where one views it from. To me, every dome of a pagoda represents the worldview that the Buddhists in Myanmar hold on to – with the bottom representing the masses who have not reached higher levels of enlightenment and learning, rising steeply till the top, often adorned with a parasol, representing the epitome of enlightenment: Nibanna, or nothingness that comes from having no form nor any desire.

During the bus rides, I notice how many people on the bus fold their palms together and raise them to their foreheads, whispering a silent prayer or simply to ensure such an action would increase their chances of being blessed by Buddha. Most Burmese Buddhist do not fully understand the Buddhist doctrine, but claim to be Buddhist because their family are, or simply because of a mindset that to be Burmese means to be Buddhist. Most Burmese, who are poor, are amazed and dazzled by the wealth that Shwe Dagon Pagoda and other pagodas around Yangon represent – an irony, considering that Buddhist doctrine stipulates that the higher one rises in enlightenment, the more diminished one's thoughts of earthly wealth.

- # *Pray the Burmese will realise that the God of this universe cannot be contained in a temple made of human hands, and that all wealth pales in comparison to the glory of the living God.*
- # *Pray that knowledge of God will allow the Burmese to experience fullness in life instead of the emptiness that most people face every day.*

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands." – Acts: 17:2





Day 4

ENCOUNTER WITH TWO MONKS

"It's quite frustrating that I'm not supposed to kill a mosquito sitting on my arm. Sometimes I find it difficult to control myself. And I love to play soccer, but as monks we are not allowed to play sports."

One day we were walking in the park near a Pagoda in Yangon when a young monk started a conversation with us. He wanted to practice his English. At some point, he began to share his troubles and frustrations over trying to keep the countless rules for Buddhist monks. In order to reach Nirvana, monks need to keep 227 rules – one of these being they must not kill any living creature. They also must be detached from all desire.

"It will be impossible for me to reach Nirvana," he concluded.

Then he asked if we were Christians. And thus God gave us an open door to share about Him. The monk, proud and confident, smiled encouragingly at me.

Every morning, tourists came to his monastery to see one thousand monks receiving breakfast. He was on duty, sharing the Buddhist road to extinction with westerners. We talked a bit more, and he confided that he was superior to those villagers who donated the food today. Giving alms is just the beginning. Meditation is the true way! He meditated most of the day; at times for months far away in the jungle.

We chatted some more, and I asked him whether he thought he was close to achieving Nirvana.

Silence, a sigh, and then he said softly: he would need another 1000 lives to reach that faraway goal.

- # *Pray for this young man and other monks who are faced with their weaknesses; pray that it will urge them to start looking for the Truth.*
- # *Pray that God will bring people on their path who can share the Truth with them.*
- # *Pray that God will open their eyes and hearts to understand and believe His Word.*

"Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." – John 8:32

IMAGES FROM AFAR

Day 5

Behind every pagoda in Myanmar there is a story, and the Buddha image at Maha Muni Paya in Mandalay is no exception. But in a side room, there are a few bronze images with an even longer story. According to the inscription above the figures, they, along with the Maha Muni Buddha image, were brought to Mandalay as trophies of war from Rakhine State – trophies of war against Thailand. And they were brought to Thailand as trophies of war against Cambodia.

A constant stream of people come to touch these figures. They are said to have healing power – if you first touch the image where you have a pain, then touch yourself in the same place. The figures are polished smooth and bright in those areas where people have the most ailments. But these figures are no more able to help them than the Edomite gods Amaziah brought back as trophies of war in 2 Chronicles 25:14-15.

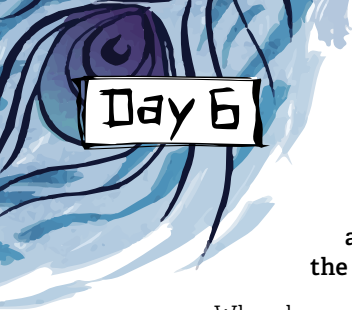
- # *Pray that God would open their eyes to see that these bronze statues are powerless, defeated images.*
- # *Pray that the people will turn from idols that are unable to either save or heal.*
- # *Pray that they will turn to their Creator who has power to both save and heal.*

"I am the Lord, and there is no other, apart from me there is no God." – Isaiah 45:5

Did you know?

Buddhism is considered the national religion, with a monastic population of 500,000.





Day 6

THE POWER OF THE NATS

He stood in front of the shrine, muttering a few words. I was seated a short distance away, but being only mildly interested, I didn't listen to his words. After a while, he lifted the offering basket that was in front of the idol, and held it a few inches above the bench.

When he was finished he returned to me. "So, did you see that?" he asks. "I was trying hard, but I couldn't lift it!"

I casually replied, "They're pretty heavy when they're full, eh?"

"No, no. What I prayed was that, 'If you're real, stop me from lifting the basket above my head'. I was trying really hard. See I can lift it easily like this..." he says, as he lifts the full basket with one hand.

Then I realised what had happened. I had been set up for a demonstration of the Nat's (spirit) reality and power. While he considered himself a 'true' Buddhist and did not worship the Nats, he showed respect for their power.

Altogether, 37 Nats are recognized in Myanmar. Most died violent deaths before becoming spirits. Many people in Myanmar give offerings to receive favours or pray to the Nats in hope of not being harmed or punished.

- # *Pray that people will see the superior power of God in their lives.*
- # *Pray for wisdom to know how to deal with such demonstrations.*
- # *Pray that God will break the power of the Nats over the people and the people's dependence on the Nats.*

"...Salvation and glory and power belong to our God." – Revelation 19:1b



I HAVE TO BELIEVE

Day 7

"I have to believe in the spirits. I don't really want to, but I have to."

Our friend is highly educated and has lived in a western country. Those like him, and those who consider themselves pure Buddhists, often say they do not believe in the spirits.

But he has seen the spirits do so many things; he says he has to believe in them. They speak to both him and his mother in their dreams at night. The spirits have helped them know the gender of a baby before the child was born and gave them some information that helped them win a court case over their business. All of this has convinced our friend that he has to believe in them.

Before people here can follow Jesus, they need to see that He is more real and more powerful than the local spirits. They also need to know that Jesus can help them with the day-to-day difficulties of living in this country.

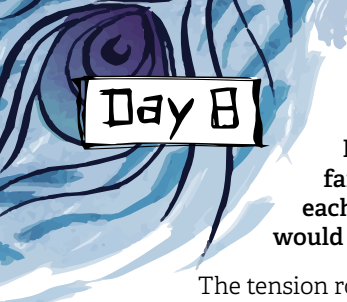
- # *Pray local believers will live lives that show forth that Jesus is real and at work in their lives.*
- # *Pray for God-appointed signs and wonders to accompany the message when it goes out.*

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." – Ephesians 6:12

Did you know?

The people of Myanmar generally have no surname or family name. Traditionally, names for their children are chosen according to the day of the week on which a child is born. Each day of the week is assigned certain letters of the Myanmar alphabet.





Day 8

THREE IN A ROW

Last year was a bad one! Two relatives had died. The family was downcast and distressed. Quietly they reminded each other that fate always comes in rows of three – so who would be next?

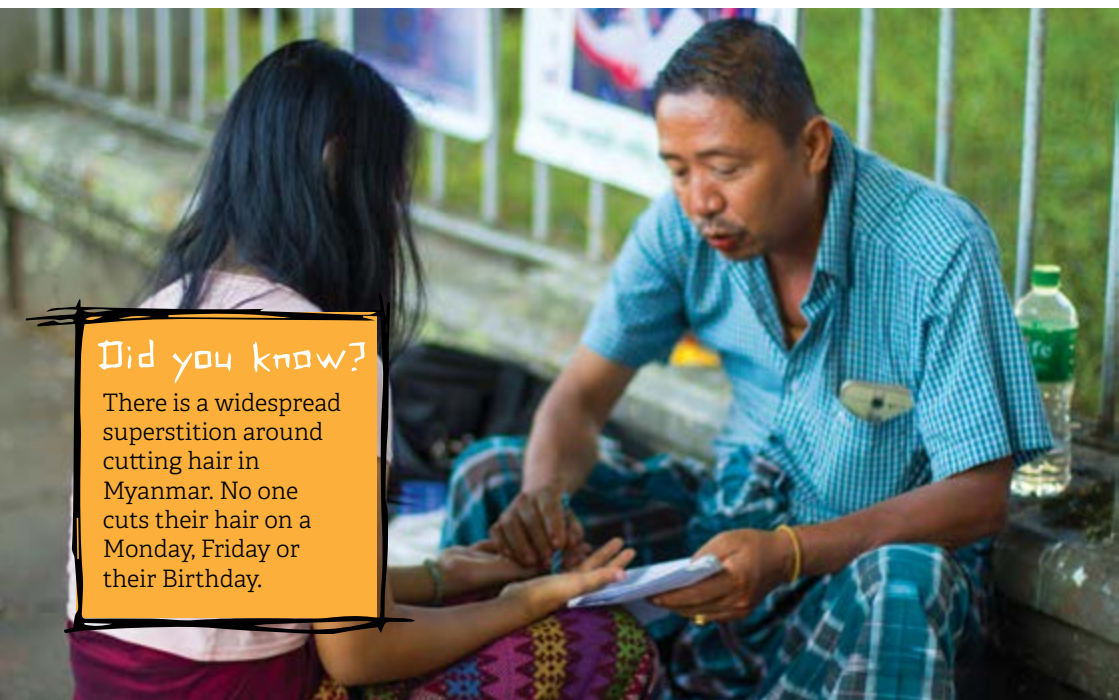
The tension rose – and finally one aunty went to an astrologer to find out who would be the third one to die. The astrologer identified my friend's mother.

And lo and behold, the mother developed heart problems (irregular heartbeat) and had to go to hospital three times within two weeks. When at home she felt like she was about to die, but at the hospital nothing serious could be found. Meanwhile, behind the mother's back, the family began preparing the funeral!

Our friend is a recent believer, and her faith has been rocked by the verdict of the astrologer.

- # *Please pray that Christians confronted with family members who consult astrologers will stand firm in their faith and in the assurance of God's sovereignty.*
- # *Pray that people looking for insights in their lives from astrologers will find the true source of hope, Jesus Christ.*

*"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."
– Romans 8:37*



Did you know?

There is a widespread superstition around cutting hair in Myanmar. No one cuts their hair on a Monday, Friday or their Birthday.



HAPPY MYANMAR NEW YEAR!

A young family entered our street from the walkway near our home. They looked in both directions, saw us and came over to join us. I brought out a chair for the mother to sit on and the daughter gingerly joined our children at the side of the road where they were throwing water on passing vehicles. We all introduced ourselves and struck up conversations. When our children's water supply ran out, they returned back down the walkway.

At the same time the next evening, they appeared from the walkway and came to join us again. And again the following day. And again the following day. By the end of the Water Festival, we had built a lasting friendship.

The family was from a nearby village, but the husband's parents lived in one of the houses on the street behind our house. They had come in to town to visit his parents and had gone out for a walk when they found us outside our house throwing water. After the Water Festival, they came to visit us often on a Saturday when they came into town to visit his family. We talked about many things including Buddhism and Jesus. We also visited their home out in their village.

We were blown away by the whole experience. At no other time would a relationship grow that quickly in Myanmar!

- # *New Year/Water Festival is a great time for building relationships. Pray that Christians would be able to make the most of these days to build relationships in their neighbourhood.*
- # *For many, Water Festival is just a fun time. However, the water is supposed to wash away the misdeeds of the previous year. Pray that many will come to realise that only Jesus can do this.*

"A friend loves at all times." – Proverbs 17:17a

TUG OF WAR

The street is crowded with little room to move and there is an excited buzz in the air. As the band plays, a long heavy rope is stretched out and lines are drawn in the dust beside the stage. Around fifty men gather at one end, as many women at the other. Each finds their place, and from the stage, the command is given. Shouts fill the air. “Ladies, pull, ladies, pull.” “Men, pull, pull.” Slowly, the men lose ground and are pulled over the line. The women raise a cry of triumph, dancing in the street, and crying, “We win, we win.” On the stage, the singer also breaks into a song of triumph.

It’s a scene of community fun. A time of bonding, friendships, and friendly rivalry.

But as with all things in Myanmar, there is a spiritual content.

For the Christian tribal groups, this is clearly a no go festival. But for Bamar Christians, the answer is often not so clearly black and white. What is just Bamar culture? What is Buddhist? Must they throw off all their customs?

As foreigners, we find festivals a good entrance into the community. We are seen to be involved and are better accepted. But like the Bamar, we often find it is not as black and white as we might expect. What is observing? What is innocent fun? Where does the line cross into the spiritual?

- # *Pray for the local Bamar Christians (and others) to see what can be redeemed in their culture, and to embrace it, but to also make it clear where they stand.*
- # *Pray for foreign workers to be sensitive to the culture, and to the Spirit’s leading.*

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” – Proverbs 3:5

PRAY FOR MY FAMILY

Day 11

I live in the city. I don't know where my husband is exactly. My son and daughter live in the village with my parents. Sometimes they come here in the school holidays to visit me and sometimes I phone them. My mum and my older sister care for them and they go to school with their cousins and other children in the neighbourhood.

I am a Christian now, but they are all still Buddhist. I tell my children stories from the Bible when they visit me or when I visit them, but it is not enough. I have been praying about returning to my village so I can live there and help all my family to learn about Jesus.

Many families here are split apart as members seek education or employment. As they enter the cities, there can be a greater openness to change. But this itself can divide families further.

- # *Pray for this young woman, and others like her, as they return to their villages to reach their families.*
- # *Pray for confidence to share about Jesus with their families along with endurance and patience to see the job through.*
- # *Pray their families will be open to hearing about Jesus.*
- # *Pray for work that will provide a sensible income without making them totally exhausted.*
- # *Pray that more young Christians will be challenged by God to return to their villages to reach their families for Jesus.*

"... and always keep on praying for all the saints." – Ephesians 6:20b



WHERE ARE THE FATHERS?

A man I knew worked as a driver. For over three years he helped with providing transport for going to and from orphanages. He had a good sense of humor and he loved children very much. He had taken care of orphans in his home for many years. Despite these admirable characteristics, he was prone to heavy drinking. He drank so much each day that he'd often beat his wife and children when he got home.

He lost himself while he was drinking. He lost his job because of drinking, and finally got really sick due to a damaged liver. His wife eventually told me that doctors said his life remaining was not so long.

Soon I visited him in the hospital. He was sitting on the chair with a swollen abdomen but thankfully he was able to talk clearly. His mind had not been clear the day before. When I talked to him, he kept saying repeatedly, "Please pray for me." He was a believer, but was not sure where he was heading, and he knew his time was coming to an end. We prayed together to ask for forgiveness of sins, and that he might go to heaven.

A few days later, he passed away in peace. He was only 44 years old.

This is one of many common stories in Myanmar. Many people are addicted to alcohol and sit in beer houses all day. They become violent towards their families, and spend all their money on drinking. They know they should stop drinking, but do not have the self-control to. They lose their jobs, they lose their families, and they lose their lives.

But it is also true that they are often desperately seeking the truth for their lives and a way to change.

- # *Pray for people who are addicted to drinking alcohol, that they would know God's love for them.*
- # *Pray for families to put their trust in God, that He is the one who is able to change their family members.*
- # *Pray that fathers will be delivered out of their desperate situations so that they can truly bless their families.*

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." – John 8:36

MISSING MOTHER

Day 13

I enjoy talking to this young Burmese lady. She always seems to be full of fun and never short of good ideas. It feels so easy and natural to practice my Burmese with her. However, today our conversation took a turn I would never have expected.

We got talking about words for different feelings. I was surprised when she told me that she is a person who always tends to look at things from a negative perspective first, and that she is very insecure. I would not have thought that.

Later, she went on to explain that since her mother had died a few years ago, some of her neighbours and even people she had considered her friends had started treating her differently. Some even pretended not to notice her. This really hurt her, and she missed her mother's protection. She said that since her mother's death, her perspective on life had changed dramatically. While I did not fully understand the reasons for the reactions of her neighbours and friends, my heart really ached for her.

As life expectancy is quite low in Myanmar, many people lose one or even both of their parents while they are still very young. This was not the first time I came across such pain because of a parent's death, carefully hidden behind a smiling face.

- # *Please pray that such inner wounds and scars can receive healing through meeting with the everlasting Father who will always be with His children and never leave nor forsake them.*
- # *Pray that God will bring His children in contact with those that are hurting.*

"As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you." – Isaiah 66:13

Did you know?

The cream you see on many faces in Myanmar is made by grinding the bark of the Thanaka tree with water to make a paste. Many Burmese women and children use Thanaka as a beautifying cosmetic. It even acts as a natural sun block and cools the skin!





Day 14



LIFE STAGES

A number of years ago I had the opportunity to regularly share with a Buddhist Burmese man about my faith. He was amicable and his wife was a believer. Despite these circumstances he saw no need to commit himself to Christ. In fact, he responded by saying, "I will consider being a devout Christian after I am retired."

At the time I just assumed that these were his own personal opinions. Recently a Myanmar pastor told me that people in Myanmar see life in three stages. The growing up/education stage, the business/family stage, and the retirement/religious commitment stage. This helped me to see the cultural context that my friend's words fit into.

- # *Pray that when people hear God's voice they will not harden their hearts or put God off till a later time.*
- # *Pray for wisdom as to how to communicate the gospel across all generations.*

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."
– Psalm 90:12

RELATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

Day 15

Ma Ni Ni worked together with Ma Su Hlaing in the same company. Both loved Jesus and wanted to show the love of God in their workplace. But as Ni Ni, the older one, was in charge of working with the younger one, Su Hlaing, the latter felt more and more stressed by the older one's attitude towards her.

Su Hlaing felt that Ni Ni was jealous of her friendships in the company, and avoided talking with her outside of work related matters. She told a friend about it, but otherwise put on a smiling face, as if everything was OK. Underneath, however, feelings were boiling.

In the end Su Hlaing left the company without telling her boss in time. At the same time, Ni Ni handed in her resignation.

In Myanmar culture, it is very hard to talk about relational problems or seek out a third party to help mediate. Again and again people leave their work, risking lack of payment and often lengthy unemployment, because they can't see a way of reconciling with each other.

Even in the church this is a difficult theme.

- # Please pray for ways of forgiveness and reconciliation to enter Myanmar society.
- # Pray that the church will be a place where they learn how to reconcile and forgive.
- # Pray for Christians to have good role models in this area.

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." – Colossians 3:13

Did you know?

Both men and women wear longyis (skirts) in Myanmar. The men wear checked or striped patterns and tie a knot on front. The women wear bright colors with different designs and tuck the knot in to the side. The men longyi is called 'paso' the women longyi 'htamein'.





Day 16



Did you know?

Myanmar depends on agriculture for more than half of its GDP. Rice is the major product.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Recently ranked third in the world for an increasing occurrence of natural disasters, Myanmar is listed as one of the countries most at risk from the effects of climate change in the next few decades. In recent years, widespread flooding has almost become an annual event.

Despite improving government efforts, the economic and social impacts often last for years afterwards. Many volunteer organisations, including church groups, provide a significant amount of aid to flood victims, and this can provide ways to engage communities with the love of Christ.

In the early years of the gospel in Myanmar, the response of God's people to a severe famine in the Delta region was a key factor in the major turning to Christ of thousands of Karen. In these days, the selfless giving of aid and support to victims of natural disasters, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, can be a major way to break down the barriers between Christians and non-Christians.

- # *Pray for those working at policy level to address the causes of disasters, and for better disaster response policies.*
- # *Pray for church groups responding to floods and other disasters to be both bold and sensitive, loving and practical.*
- # *Pray that those receiving aid would be able to know Christ and His mercy towards them through these interactions.*

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on to toward love and good deeds." – Hebrews 10:24

RURAL LIVELIHOODS AND POVERTY

Day 17

A recent survey of rural households in Myanmar asked people to describe poverty. Despite common definitions of poverty centering on income and assets, the majority of residents in rural areas in Myanmar described poverty as the lack of livelihood.

More than having enough money, or having material possessions, is the dignity of work. Exploitative practices, unfair trading, climate change and land grabs have all undermined rural livelihoods, so that youth in large numbers migrate to cities and overseas in search of work.

Despite being a rural based economy, over half of rural households do not own land, and landlessness is associated with higher rates of poverty, vulnerability and economic hardship. Landless households are three times more likely to be considered vulnerable to natural disasters or economic shocks than landed households, and are twice as likely to suffer from food shortages.

The government has emphasized rural development as the key approach to poverty reduction, but much remains to be done – restoring land seized or illegally acquired by previous governments, and implementing fair practices, for example.

However, the process is often long and tricky, frequently resulting in conflict. Old Testament principles warn against moving boundary stones, and in Myanmar the economic impact of the erosion of smallholder farmers is devastatingly apparent.

- # *Please pray for speedy and successful land reform, so that rural households can rebuild their agricultural livelihoods. Pray also for just settlements and avoidance of corruption and conflict in the land restoration process.*
- # *Please pray for those in government and non-government organizations working on poverty reduction to be able to strengthen rural livelihoods to support a future for rural Myanmar.*

*"But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish."
– Psalm 9:18*





Day 18

DISABLED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Now in his early 30s, Kyaw Lwin has been profoundly deaf since birth. Although well cared for by his family, he lives a very isolated life. Until last year, he had never even eaten a meal with anyone outside his own household, and had never been to school. Like the majority of hearing impaired persons, he does not speak sign language, making the communication of even simple everyday things challenging.

Research in Myanmar shows that people with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged in life right from an early age. A lack of education opportunities result in many people with disabilities being socially isolated. Especially those like Kyaw Lwin with hearing impairments who are unable to read or write.

A small group of Christians have established a project to help provide life skills and work training for people with disabilities, as well as sharing the good news with them. But this presents a huge challenge when trying to communicate deep truths and concepts on top of yet another language barrier. Sign language training has slowly helped to bridge this gap, but it is still a long and slow path.

At present, only a few churches have embraced the idea of specifically reaching out to include people with disabilities. For many, the main barrier is one of attitude – many view people with disabilities with a sense of pity, rather than recognising them as people created in the image of God. This means that very few of the over 1 million people with disabilities have a chance to hear the gospel in a meaningful way.

- # *Pray for those groups who are reaching out in creative ways to people with disabilities to see real fruit, and to be able to engage and communicate effectively with all different types of people with disabilities.*
- # *Pray that more churches would be motivated to adapt their services and practices to intentionally include people with disabilities.*

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.” – Psalm 113:7

REAPING TO THE EDGES

Day 19

Living in another culture for a long time begins to put a different perspective on our own culture and sheds new light on Scripture. One example of this is the biblical principle of not reaping to the edges of the field. In a culture with little or no taxpayer funded social security, this becomes very important as a means to care for the poor in society. The principle can of course be applied to other areas of life too.

Wandering around the city streets, it is common to see bags of left over rice and curry hanging from the trees. Rather than throwing extra food out with the rubbish or putting it in the refrigerator, it is placed out where those who need it can take it – without having to beg. Likewise, those who have sufficient money will pass on their clothes to others while they are still in good condition.

Foreigners, on the other hand, are often seen as being stingy. We cook just the right amount of food and don't leave anything on our plate. We use our clothes until they are worn out, and then we demote them to cleaning rags for around the house. Our concepts of good stewardship often clash with being generous. Yet our God cares for those in need. What do we model? And how can we be generous in culturally appropriate ways?

- # *Pray that as foreigners we will see the good in our host society, and uphold it as good.*
- # *Pray that we will be aware of cultural differences that may hinder our communication of the Gospel.*
- # *Pray for wisdom in how to help the needy in our society.*

*"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien."
– Leviticus 19:10*



THE IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND TEACHING

As a 19-year-old young Christian, I had just given a testimony on how I became a believer, when an older man came up to me and questioned my faith: “Do you even understand that you are a sinner?” I felt shaken.

Today I understand that the Lord saved me from feeling like a lonely outsider. Having sins forgiven was not my first need, but rather, salvation from not feeling worthy of belonging, and feeling like a total failure.

Today I understand that Jesus saved me from my shame based conscience – while what the older Christian was looking for was salvation from guilt. Most Buddhists in Myanmar need to find answers for their problems relating to shame and honor. But the way many of us learned to share the gospel is based on a theology of guilt.

For new workers in Myanmar, shame and guilt are not the only differences they have to tackle. Myanmar society highly values harmony over justice, and prefers indirect language (instead of directness), community (instead of individuality), and hierarchy (instead of equality). This means that the values and worldviews of ‘Western style’ educated workers are questioned when they try to adapt to Myanmar as their new host culture.

- # *Please pray that our workers will be able to follow Jesus’ example, humbling themselves to become relevant intercultural servants to the people they want to reach in Myanmar; understanding the necessity of adjusting the presentation of the gospel to the needs of the recipients.*
- # *Pray for good progress in language and culture learning, both in everyday language and for Christian witness.*
- # *Pray for the development of evangelistic materials that answer the questions of people with a Buddhist worldview.*

“He (Jesus) humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.” – Philippians 2:8b-9



DISTRACTED

The young man was passionate about telling people about Jesus. He went out to villages in his spare time, telling children and their families about God. He stood firm in his work situation, saying he would not work on Sundays, as he wanted to be free to go to church. He worked hard and used his spare time to serve God.

Sadly, he now seldom goes out to the villages. Most Sundays he is late for church because he has work beforehand. After church he has another job to go to. Some Sundays he doesn't even make it to the service. As for spare time for God — what spare time? He needs it all to prepare for his teaching jobs.

What happened? The weeds grew and choked out his passion!

This is not an uncommon story. The sower of weeds in people's lives is very active against any who would seek to make inroads into his domain.

- # *Pray for protection for those who want to spread the message here.*
- # *Pray that this young man and others like him will be challenged by God to remove the weeds from their lives and again pursue their God-given passion.*
- # *Pray that God would raise up two new passionate witnesses for each one the enemy tries to take out.*

"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." – Matthew 13:22



THE BOOK THAT CAN SAVE

When I was a child, I did many good deeds. I worshipped Buddha. I tried to do as much good as possible, because I believed that if I didn't, I might be an animal in my next life or a ghost or something like that. I wanted a better future life. Still, there was always a question in my heart about whether my good deeds would be enough. I was so afraid of dying!

One day, I had a strange dream. In my dream, I went to a village, but it was so quiet in this village. Nobody was there. I started shouting, 'Hello, is anybody there?'

Suddenly, a man appeared in front of me. In his hand, he held a book. He told me that all the people had already died. I found myself asking him, 'Did you kill them?' He assured me he did not.

He then observed, 'I think you are afraid of dying, aren't you?' I was very surprised that he knew, and I had to admit it was true. He said to me, 'If you don't want to die, read this book', and he gave it to me.

When I started to open the book, suddenly many people who had died rose again and became alive. But the man suddenly disappeared, and I woke up. After this dream, I wanted to find out about this book. I knew that it could save me.

About three months later, I joined some English classes on Sundays. After a while, I decided to stay for what they called a Sunday service. One day, I realised the book I had dreamt about was the Bible. At first, I did not dare tell anybody about my discovery. I simply prayed and I asked God to touch me if He was real. As I did that, I heard God calling me.

- # *Please pray for the many young people who go to English classes at different meeting places, that God will reveal himself to them as He did to this girl who shared her story and who now faithfully serves her new Lord.*
- # *Please also pray for their families, as they often find it very difficult when one of their children chooses a new way of life.*

"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." – Isaiah 55:11

KNOWING GOD'S LOVE

Day 23

Moe Moe, a university student, came to our Bible study five years ago. She sat quietly during the three hour Bible study because she came to meet her friends and hang out with them afterwards. I sat down beside her and invited her to come over and cook lunch together the following week. We became close friends and I encouraged her to continue coming to the Bible study.

Gradually, I introduced inductive Bible study to help the students engage with the text itself, to share together about what is written in the Word, and how to apply it in their lives.

One day, we did a Bible study on the Lost Son. After the study, Moe Moe came up to me and said that she felt God waiting for her so that He could love her. She knew the story, but this was the first time she understood God's love for her personally. She decided to commit her life to Jesus. Moe Moe continued to grow in faith, and after some time, she had the joy of leading her mother to Jesus.

She is now leading a Bible study group and is a good role model for the students. They can learn from her and follow her example.

- # *Pray for opportunities for students to know our Father's love for them.*
- # *Pray for more opportunities for student groups to meet and do Bible studies on university campuses.*
- # *Pray for student leaders to be equipped to lead Bible studies and be a role model for other students.*

"...and the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." – 2 Timothy 2:2





Day 24

SOCIAL MEDIA

Since February 2014, a small group of dedicated young adults have been using Facebook to share a daily Bible verse and picture. These unpaid volunteers are committed to encourage Myanmar Christians to be Bible-centered and to reach out to unbelievers. Over 24,000 people are already following this Facebook page, and many who receive Bible verses are sharing these pictures with their friends.

Most people in Myanmar think the Internet is just about social media. Since mobile phones became widely available from 2014, Internet usage has taken off at an astonishing rate. Within two years, 12.6% of the population was online and many are fervent Facebook users. This represents a target group of over 7 million, most of them young people.

Evangelism through social media is spreading the gospel far and wide. Yet at the same time, the team is following up the responses individually. Every week they receive numerous private messages with a wide range of questions. The team members often reply within minutes and are able to share on a more personal level.

Facebook is also used to build and sustain an international prayer support for Myanmar. About 6500 Christians globally follow 'Pray for Myanmar' on Facebook and receive monthly prayer updates for Myanmar.

- # *Thank God for this group of young people who are committed to sharing the Bible via Facebook.*
- # *Pray that many Christians will share these verses and pictures with their friends who don't know Jesus.*
- # *Pray for the team that does follow-up to have wisdom and sensitivity in their replies when answering different questions that come in.*

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." – Psalm 119:105

SHIFTING SANDS

Day 25

One of the challenges of partnering with the local church in Myanmar is understanding the local context, which is rapidly changing. As a result, training programs and ideas that work in other contexts, or used to be valid in Myanmar, are now less useful.

Migration affects at least one in five rural households, and this is dramatically changing the landscape of the local church. As young people migrate from rural areas, previously strong rural churches face dwindling congregations and a lack of youth from which to draw and shape the next generation of leaders.

At the same time, city churches are growing numerically stronger and there is an increasing emphasis on urban mission to the large industrial areas around the cities.

Overseas migration is a double-edged sword: remittances sent home are often a financial lifeline to smaller rural churches, but many weaker Christians succumb to destructive lifestyles while away from a supportive community. However, the church is also growing rapidly amongst migrant populations in places like Thailand and Malaysia, where non-Christian migrants seeking a sense of community are drawn to the church.

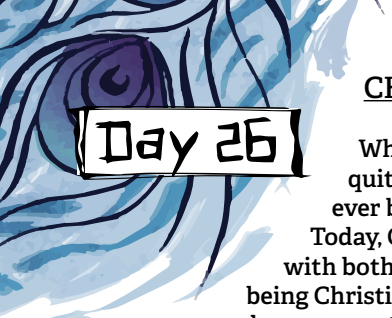
So how should we partner with local churches in mission and church planting?

One of the requests from the largest denomination in Myanmar (the Baptists) is to conduct more research on migration to better understand the dynamics and challenges. This will hopefully lead to more missional migration, where the church will actively work with people on the move. The goal is to grow leaders and churches that can minister in places where people are migrating and enable Christian migrants to be active evangelists where they end up. This requires a re-thinking of old ideas and structures and a willingness to think theologically in the midst of social change. Our role in partnership is to 'walk together, talk together' and to think of new ways to see the kingdom grow.

- # *Please pray for honest, humble dialogue with local churches.*
- # *Pray for open-mindedness from both local church and foreign workers to new ideas.*
- # *Pray for effective discipleship amongst migrant churches, and development of leaders who can undertake 'missional migration.'*

"And pray for us that God will open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ." – Colossians 4:3





CHRISTIANS IN GOVERNMENT

Day 26

While in previous governments Christians occupied quite senior positions in the civil service, very few have ever been appointed to high-ranking government positions. Today, Christians are prominent in the new government, with both the vice-president and the Upper House speaker being Christians from ethnic minority backgrounds. Christians are also represented in various senior government positions, including ministers, ambassadors, state counsellors, and a number of MPs.

However, the pressures are great and for some, the pressure from constituents to advocate specific ethnic or religious policies can create conflict with the responsibility to serve all the people. Likewise, the enormous challenges of helping lead a country out of decades of neglect can be overwhelming, and many civil servants are simply exhausted.

- # *Please pray for all Christians in government to be diligent, to have integrity, and to have the ability to withstand pressures to grant special favors.*
- # *Pray too for Christian leaders to know how to apply biblical faith into national leadership, and for wise church leaders and counsellors to help guide them.*
- # *Pray for the Christian parliamentary caucus to be an effective and supportive group to nurture not only the faith of the current MPs, but also lay foundations for a future generation of godly politicians.*

"He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure." – Isaiah 33:6



PA-O

Day 27

One of the numerous ethnic groups in Myanmar, the Pa-O, with a distinctive language and colourful cloth turbans, are found in Southern Shan State, parts of Mon State, as well as the Yangon Region. Shrewd political maneuvering has enabled the Pa-O to gain a reasonable degree of autonomy from the central government, as well as increasing economic prosperity.

The vast majority of villages in the Pa-O Self Administered Zone have at least a primary school, which is remarkable for an area once considered 'underdeveloped.' Buddhism is a key unifying force amongst the Pa-O, attested to by the lavish monasteries being built in villages across the area. For the small number of Pa-O Christians, life is not easy – they face discrimination and a degree of suspicion from their Buddhist Pa-O counterparts.

With the continuing economic challenges, many Christian Pa-O youth have little choice but to migrate – usually to Thailand to find work – making it more difficult to grow the next generation of leaders. The Pa-O Bible translation is still underway, although the New Testament is now available.

- # *Pray for the few Pa-O churches to be strengthened both inwardly and outwardly, and that job opportunities would enable Christian Pa-O youth to remain and contribute to the church in the future.*
- # *Pray for those working on Bible translation and teaching of Pa-O churches to be able to effectively ground a new generation in the gospel.*
- # *Pray for ways to reach out to Pa-O, despite the huge cultural barriers.*

"...A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." – Revelation 7:9



MON

Day 28

The Mon people established one of the earliest kingdoms in Southeast Asia, historically playing a significant role throughout the regions of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. They are responsible for spreading Theravada Buddhism throughout the region and have influenced modern-day Myanmar culture and religion.

The Mon language, distinct from Burmese, was once the most spoken language in southern Myanmar. However, through a series of major conflicts, the Mon kingdom lost its dominance to the growing Bamar kingdom. Many of the Mons assimilated with the Bamar, leaving them relatively indistinguishable. However, there are still those who maintain the distinct Mon language and culture, mostly living in the area southeast of Yangon in Mon State, bordering Thailand.

While there is a complete Mon Bible translation, Christians continue to remain a small minority among this majority Buddhist people group. Their economic situation means many young people are leaving Mon State or the country in search of work. They are particularly vulnerable to falling victims of human trafficking and becoming dependent on drugs.

- # *Please pray for Mon believers to be united in their faith and to be strengthened to effectively engage the wider Mon community with the Gospel.*
- # *Pray for improved education and economic conditions in Mon State so that young people can remain in their communities. Pray for those who are currently working in other states and countries to encounter the living Jesus Christ.*
- # *Pray for the church to be actively working to address issues such as drug abuse, human trafficking and child labour in the region.*

"... Because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed." – Luke 4:18



Photo: Mon National Day by Timo Jaworr / The Irrawaddy



GOD'S LOVE FOR THE REJECTED

Ye (14) from Rakhine State, was born without one leg. His father told Ye's mother, 'Just let him die.' Years later, she became a believer and her son followed her faith. He was very active and enjoyed playing football, wearing his prosthesis. As a teenager, his parents wanted to send him away to school because he was disobeying them. He was even thinking of becoming a Buddhist novice due to the influence of his school friends.

During the summer holidays, Ye was able to go to a month-long Christian camp for 10-15 year-olds. His sponsor (for his prostheses) was praying that God would show him His love because of all the rejection he had faced.

One night, the camp leader shared about God's love for everyone, then took the symbolic role of a parent and asked the children's forgiveness for their parents' sins against them. Many of the 30 children were in tears. Ye ran outside and bawled his eyes out, the loudest of all. After that, he was really free.

After camp, Ye went home and apologised to his parents for his rebellious ways in front of the whole family - an amazing thing in this shame-based culture! Even his Buddhist father was touched by the act.

- # *Pray for the next generation of Rakhine believers, that more teenagers will become strong in faith and make healthy life choices from a young age.*
- # *Pray for the middle-aged new believers who suffer poor health and can no longer work or visit other churches.*
- # *Pray for all the Rakhine who have moved to Yangon and other countries to escape the economic problems and religious conflict.*
- # *Pray for the scattered flocks left behind, to remain faithful.*
- # *Pray for ways to reach the next generation behind factory walls and 7 days a week of work.*

"And we pray this that you might live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way." – Colossians 1:10a



Day 30

FISHER OF MEN

A Rakhine fisherman, Mr. T.S. became a believer after two Christians prayed for his healing from alcohol-induced liver disease about seven years ago. He became completely well within a week but was without any Bible or fellowship for five years because he lived on an island five hours by boat from the mainland.

Later, he came to Yangon looking for work, but found fellowship instead, bringing his wife and staying with a Christian family for several months. During this time, he diligently learned the Scriptures and showed a great interest in helping the poor. With another believer, he went to a village in the Delta to build a pre-school and make water filters.

Upon his return, he said he'd thought he had seen the poorest people in his part of the country, but this was the poorest he'd ever seen. His practical help and humility made such an impression on the villagers that they asked us when he was coming back.

During further training, including how to kick bad habits, T.S. shared his own struggles. He had quit alcohol for several years, but went back to it when he suffered financial failure. Then he quit again, and is now seeking to stay off completely, with the help of God and his fellow-believers.

In the past 18 months of being home and working again as a fisherman, Mr. T.S. has won several other fishermen to faith. They have encountered opposition from the local religious authorities, but T.S. remains faithful, despite being threatened with expulsion from the village if he continues to preach. Training in community development has given him a vision for how the gospel can practically change a whole village.

- # *Pray for Rakhine believers who are scattered and scared – for faith, boldness and miracles.*
- # *Pray for Rakhine people to be set free from their addictions, especially alcohol, smoking and betel chewing.*
- # *Pray for Rakhine believers to overcome their ethno-centrism and to develop a love for the lost of other ethnic groups.*
- # *Pray that Rakhine believers will have a vision for holistic development, and be able to implement this through both personal transformation and unified teamwork.*

“And I will make you fishers of men.” – Mark 1:17

Did you know?

Betel nut (kounya) is a mildly narcotic nut that comes from the betel palm. The nuts are mixed with tobacco, spices and limestone paste and are chewed and spat out by many people in Myanmar, causing red stained teeth and street pavements.



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