

Resonate

ISSUE 33

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS.
DISTINCTIVE WAYS.
SAME GOSPEL.

the
context
issue



GLOBAL
INTERACTION

Australian Baptists
together in global mission



Hello... from the editor

empowering communities to develop their own distinctive ways of following Jesus

Whenever I speak this mission statement of Global Interaction, I want to emphasis almost every word (I feel like the graphic designer who is told to give everything prominence!). But honestly, every part of it is so crucial! Let's break it down.



- > **Empowering:** Building up and growing self-sustainability rather than dependence.
- > **Communities:** Not extracting individual believers and separating them from their networks, but seeing whole families and communities transformed as believers stay connected and share their faith.
- > **to Develop:** This is a journey and will take time.
- > **Their Own:** Unique to their culture, community and experience, and discerned by them.
- > **Distinctive Ways:** Expression of faith that grows out of the community's culture and makes sense in that place.
- > **of Following Jesus:** At the unchanging core is a community of believers who trust, follow and choose Jesus above all.

This mission statement lays the foundation for this edition of Resonate, 'The Context Issue'. Our cross-cultural teams are passionate about understanding the culture of the communities they are living and serving among. They invest significant time in culture and language lessons with a local language nurturer. Why? Because they know our culture influences so much of who we are, how we behave, what motivates us, what we're afraid of, how we communicate, view the world and express faith.

So it makes sense, then, that for the Gospel to be understood in different contexts, it needs to be communicated in different ways depending on the context. And THIS is the crux of contextualisation.

Someone very qualified to explore this theme of contextualisation, or contextual mission, is Jonno. In his article (pages 3 – 4), Jonno opens up about the black, white and grey of contextualisation that he has witnessed over the past 17 years in Malawi and Mozambique. Also in this edition, Eliza and David, in the Silk Road Area, share memorable moments of 'culture surprise' (page 7) and Luke, in Thailand, digs deep into what it means for a faith community to express their faith in contextual ways (pages 5 - 6). Plus... be challenged and encouraged by the four session Bible study written by Lisa West-Newman, former cross-cultural worker in Cambodia and current QLD Young Adults Consultant (pages 8 – 12).

Now here's the really exciting bit, remember in the last edition when we alluded to Resonate's next step? Well... along with the print magazine you know and love, we are also releasing videos with each edition of Resonate! These videos expand on the theme of the edition and bring in other voices and stories. We are very excited!! View and download them at www.globalinteraction.org.au/ResonateVideos

But first, read on!

Teagan

ADVENTURES WITH THE BARNES

Episode N° 3



Kim lets us in on a secret and uncovers the big cultural importance of a small grain.

In the last edition of 'Adventures with the Barnes', I shared my joy in discovering that I could cook cakes in a rice cooker. Well it's confession time...

After living in Cambodia for nine months, I don't actually know how to cook rice in a rice cooker! Sounds so silly, but it's true. I was always taught that one cup of rice and one and half cups of water in the rice cooker will give you perfect rice every time. Well, in Cambodia, that is not the case! Here cooking rice is an art not a science.

Navigating a new culture is full of so many interesting twists and turns. Learning language doesn't just help you communicate, but it helps you understand the values and emphasis of a culture. In Khmer there is one word that describes so many emotions. Happy, excited, fun, content, fulfilled and almost all positive feelings are frequently summed up in one word, 'Sabay'.

The flip side is true though when talking about rice. In Khmer there are different words for rice in its stages of growth, harvest and cooking. 'Rice time' is used to describe the nap that you take in the middle of the day and greetings often include the question, 'Have you eaten rice?'.

Rice is a central part of life in Khmer culture, and a day without rice is a day you don't eat.

So when I turn to the English translations of the Bible I am confronted by the fact that there is not a single scripture that talks about rice. 'Give us this day our daily bread' was prayed by Jesus in a culture where fresh bread was made every day and considered old as soon as it was no longer warm.

To the Khmer people a prayer that would make sense to them is, 'Give us this day our daily rice'. Could Jesus also be the 'Rice of Life'? Can communion in Cambodia be sharing a bowl of rice together instead of breaking bread?

So why can't I cook perfect rice in Cambodia? In the West we love prescriptive instructions. We love our Thermomixers telling us to mix for eight seconds at speed three, we love our recipe books that tell us to add 125g of butter to 55g of sugar and cook for 15 minutes.

Cooking rice in Cambodia is not like that. There is no measuring tool except for 'knowing' the right amount of water to put in the pot. This amount changes depending on the season (hot or wet), the type of rice, and how long after cooking you want to eat it. It's a skill I am learning and relearning as I live here.

It's the same with learning how to share Jesus in this culture. Slowly, slowly we are learning cultural values, core beliefs and to lay aside our own prescriptive methods in order to share life in a way that makes sense here.

Long-term cross-cultural worker Jonno digs into the black, white and grey of contextual mission and shares how he is witnessing it play out among the Yawo of Malawi and Mozambique.

At its most basic, contextual mission is about taking seriously the context we are in and adapting the way we communicate the message of Jesus so that it is understandable in that cultural context.

Contextualisation is not about changing the Gospel... it is about communicating the Gospel and ONLY the Gospel. It's about communicating the core of what it means to follow Jesus and not all the cultural rituals and traditions that make up our expression of faith. Those rituals, traditions and expressions are *our* distinctive ways of following Jesus, but sometimes we can think they are *the* way to follow Jesus.

Although Jesus preached the most radical teaching in the history of the world, he did it using language the community He was speaking to already knew, with stories they could easily relate to and in clothes they were also wearing. But, he wasn't like a chameleon. He didn't fit in so perfectly with his environment that nobody noticed He was different. He chose to be the same in things that didn't matter, but different on the things that did. We shouldn't underestimate the challenge that being different poses to those in power... it got Jesus killed!

So our challenge, as we try and imitate Jesus' ministry, is telling the difference between what does and doesn't matter, and how to engage with the things that do matter in a way that enables the indigenous faith community to survive and grow.

Since 2002, Heather and my context has been among the Yawo tribe in Malawi and Mozambique. They're predominantly Muslim and also practice African Traditional Religion so the culture is quite (very!) different from our own. Sometimes it's fairly easy to put issues into 'does matter' or 'doesn't matter' categories, but that's not always the case.

Let's start with an easy one. Most men here have more than one wife. However, Heather my wonderful wife of 25 years, is my only wife... and I plan on keeping it that way! In this context, having just one wife is pretty unusual, so Heather and I are just going to look different on this one. ☺

On the other end of the spectrum is how to pray. People here pray with their eyes open, holding their hands open and upward. Although this is different to how we have traditionally prayed, we don't think it matters to pray in the posture of our friends. God loves to hear our prayers whether our eyes are open or closed.

There are lots of other things in the middle though which are harder to figure out. Should we attend or involve ourselves in cultural events like funerals, memorial services or initiation ceremonies? A girl in Mozambique who was a new believer and had been healed of seizures began having them again after attending a memorial service. That points to there being a negative spiritual dimension going on, so should we go or not go? If we do go, should we take precautions like praying for protection beforehand or fasting?

In a village in Malawi recently, the chief told the faith community that they were no longer allowed to attend funerals. The believers felt strongly that they should continue to attend but how could they go against the directive of the chief!? They were stuck. One of the Yawo believers was reading in Genesis and came across the story of Abraham's death.

Genesis 25:9 says, "His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, ..."

This faithful Yawo believer was so excited when he read this passage because he could see something that the average Aussie reader would not see. He saw that Isaac, the ancestor of the family of Jesus, and Ishmael, the ancestor of the family of Muhammad, buried their father together!

If it was acceptable for their ancestors to be at funerals together, surely it would be acceptable for them!? A village meeting was arranged with the chief and sheik in attendance. Upon hearing this story from the word of God, and application humbly presented, the chief reversed his decision and allowed the believers to attend funerals. **This is a beautiful example of Yawo believers, interpreting Scripture contextually and applying it to their own cultural situation.**

These examples might sound foreign to most Australian believers however from our visit back to Australia last year, it looks to me like the church needs to be re-asking itself some of the same questions. What should we be participating in and what should we be challenging in our own culture? Actually, I reckon the church in Australia may have got some of the answers to these questions wrong. Most of us in the church embrace our culture's hyper individualism and materialism which has led to severe social isolation and rampant anxiety and depression.

Maybe it's time for the church in Australia to re-discover its own authentic and distinctive way of following Jesus?

In a world(view) where string is not just string, the emerging Ethnic Thai faith communities are answering the question of what in their culture can they accept, modify or need to reject in order to follow Jesus. Cross-cultural worker Luke shows us the workings.

String Theory



String has a seemingly unlimited amount of uses. You can tie things, bind things, hang things. You can even tie it to a lightweight frame with fabric pulled over it and make a kite that flies. However, despite the many potential uses of string, for the average Australian it doesn't hold any special meaning or value. String is just string.

This is very different in Thailand. For most Thais, a short piece of white string holds significant meaning. String tying is one of the most common spiritual practices amongst Thai Buddhists even though the practice actually predates Buddhism in Thailand. It is used for weddings, travel, arrival, house warmings, dedications and many more occasions. The string is tied around a person's wrist and is accompanied by prayers or chants for luck, protection or blessing. Usually once tied the strings remain on the wrist for up to three days unless, in the case of a wedding, two people have been tied together.

For many Ethnic Thai followers of Jesus string tying remains an important part of their spirituality and to ask a Thai to give this up would be akin to asking Baptist baby boomers to give up post service morning tea. String tying hardly sounds biblical, I hear you say. Well neither is tea and biscuits.

For the Ethnic Thai followers of Jesus, remaining deeply connected to their culture and community is vitally important to the spreading of the Gospel, as it is for all the people groups Global Interaction works among. This however poses a problem. While there is much about the Thai culture that is admirable and even Godly there is also much that is far from it.

For an Ethnic Thai person seeking to be faithful to a new Lord but remain a part of their local community there is a need to accept, modify or reject aspects of their own culture. Some aspects are acceptable for a believer to retain just as they are, some require modification

in their meaning or practice and other aspects must be rejected as they are simply not compatible with a life lived for Jesus.

String tying is a great example of how the Ethnic Thai believers have modified a cultural practice to fit within their new faith. Whenever they tie string together they explain, for the benefit of anyone present who may not know Jesus, that the string has no power to protect or bring luck, but is a representation of God's love and their prayers for one another.

For them it is a significant and meaningful spiritual practice that cannot simply be done away with but instead can be adapted to their new faith. It is not up to the cross-cultural worker to dictate what aspects of culture are accepted, modified or rejected but rather the Holy Spirit's work to lead people to the truth. The cross-cultural worker's job is to point them to Jesus.

So... what can this theory look like in practice?

Location

Accept

Modify

Reject

Thailand

Language - The use of the word satu instead of amen. Christians of the traditional church in Thailand reject this because they see it as a Buddhist word, rather than simply a Thai translation of amen.

Festival - Loy Krathong is a Thai holiday where families come together and release small floats down the river to carry away bad luck and bad karma. Believers participate in this community event but place a cross on their floats in place of incense sticks, signifying that Jesus is the one who has paid for their wrongdoings.

Infidelity - The acceptance of unfaithfulness in romantic relationships. Unfaithfulness is common and even expected in Thailand. This is incompatible with a God-honouring marriage.

Thailand

Honour - The honouring of elders and people in authority is very important in Ethnic Thai culture. The believers retain this part of their culture by honouring church leaders and others older than them in distinctly Thai ways.

Funerals - While the broader community continues to hold traditional funerals, even for believers, the faith communities conduct a modified ceremony without the usual Buddhist elements but with a bible passage and prayer.

Powers - Animistic practices such as making offerings to territorial spirits and divination. Believers must not engage with other spiritual powers.

Australia

Sport - Watching and talking about sport is an important part of Australian culture and many believers enjoy watching sport as a fun and relational activity.

Socialising - Spending time with family and friends is highly valued in Australian culture, however this often revolves around alcohol. While investing in relationships is upheld by believers, the prominence of alcohol and drinking to excess is not God-honouring.

Oversexualisation
Followers of Jesus must reject both the trivialisation of sex (casual sex) and the glorification of sex (prevalence of porn and sexual content in pop culture). We have a completely different story to share.

Your community!

Consider what aspects of your culture you should accept, modify or reject in order to follow Jesus.

Empty box for community reflection (Accept column).

Empty box for community reflection (Modify column).

Empty box for community reflection (Reject column).

Culture Surprise

David and Eliza have been living in the Silk Road Area for three years. Here they pick out some memorable moments that gave them a little case of culture surprise.

Health System



Is the local system as bad as we've heard it is? David decided to try it out when he had a back complaint. The massage was great but the "electro-massage" that followed left a bit to be desired. In fact, the paddles, poorly earthed to the machine, left burn marks up and down his back! At the next session, David took his own electrical tape to repair the wiring himself. We are very thankful for access to international medical centres in the city but this experience gave us an insight into what our local friends are faced with.

Pets



Our children have enjoyed a succession of feathered friends as pets, including hens that we hoped would lay eggs for our breakfast. But a local friend, who was keen to sell us some of his own poultry, was quick to advise us that we needed a rooster if we wanted the hens to lay. David, who grew up on a farm and had sold eggs commercially for a number of years, was at a loss to work out how he could explain that hens didn't need a rooster to lay eggs. Only if we wanted them to have chickens would we need a rooster...

Driving



We feel like we have a reasonable handle on the road rules but last year the one-way street in our village caught David out. He turned right one street too late and the waiting policeman pulled him over to inform him of his misdemeanour. But the officer didn't want to speak the K language, he could only speak the other main language, which David doesn't speak. This confusing conversation attracted the attention of David's mates at the nearby plumbing store, who knew which languages David could speak and which language the policeman should be able to speak. The officer could only take so much of this teasing so he threw the documents back at David, jumped in his car and took off. So much for David driving the wrong way up the one-way street!

Money



Eliza knew homewares were significantly cheaper in the Silk Road Area than in Australia. But even after three years, that difference brought her undone. She wanted to buy a set of 10 tea cups as a gift for her mother. When she asked the vendor the price of the cups, he said, "1000 tenge". No worries, that would mean 10,000 tenge, the equivalent of \$40 for the set. But when she got out a 10,000 note, he quickly corrected her. "No, no, 1000 for the set. The cups are only 100! You be careful with your money, Eliza. Don't wave 10,000 tenge notes around!"

Kinder



Eliza is always keen to get involved at the kinder where their daughter Caitlyn attends whenever she is able, in order to deepen her relationships with the teachers and to get to know the other families. But agreeing to drive a handful of children to the museum on an excursion took her involvement to a new level. Yes, the group visited the museum, but also the fire station, central mosque, police station, a school and the local swimming hole, making up the itinerary en route! All of those visits were packed into an hour-and-a-half. Photos were taken at every site of the children posing in front of buildings, emergency service vehicles, stuffed animals, and later in the day our Whatsapp group was flooded with photos of the excursion. No consent forms required.

FOUR SESSION BIBLE STUDY

Grow
where
you're
planted,
sow where
He calls.

Each of us are planted in a particular place and community. Here, wherever we are, God is calling us to grow in Him and in likeness of Jesus. We are to commit to the community we are planted in, sowing into it and the lives of the people around us. However, this doesn't mean God will keep us planted in the same place forever. As active followers of Jesus, seeking His leading and growing to be more like Him... we may just find ourselves being called elsewhere or to sow into another community.

In this four session series, Lisa West-Newman explores the theme of 'Grow where you're planted, sow where He calls.' This Bible study reflects on passages of scripture alongside a powerful video series that shares the stories of local believers one of our cross-cultural teams is journeying with.

Lisa, and her husband Steve, served with the Global Interaction team in Cambodia for nine years and Lisa is now the QLD Young Adults Consultant.



SESSION ONE

grow

I confess that I am an avid people watcher – I find the incredible diversity of people intriguing. However, it is the similarities between parents and children that I find most delightful. Beyond the “you’ve got your grandmother’s nose” kind of similarities, I love seeing how a young woman and her mother will dress similarly, or a young boy’s haircut will match his father’s. And even more than that, how families will express themselves in the same way or develop the same mannerisms. Whether it is conscious or unconscious, we model ourselves on those we look up to (or at least, spend the most time with).

In the same way, through being a follower of Jesus and spending lots of time with Him, we will naturally become more like Him. And, in a world desperate for Jesus, that is a beautiful thing.

Watch: Episode 1 – Grow Your Heart

 www.globalinteraction.org.au/GrowSow

Discuss:

- > What was it that opened Mae Ran’s heart to Jesus?
- > In what ways has Mae Ran grown since becoming a follower of Jesus?
- > What difficulties does Mae Ran face that make life challenging? How may this impact her growth?
- > Mae Ran now wants all people to know God. What is it that she wants them to know about God?

Luke 6:17-49

Read through the teachings of Jesus found in Luke 6:17-49. As you read, consider what these words might also mean to Mae Ran.

In these verses:

- > Jesus teaches His disciples that the poor, hungry, miserable and insulted are blessed, while woe is coming to the rich, well-fed, happy and respected.
- > Enemies are to be loved as they themselves would like to be loved, doing good to them and even lending to them without expectation of repayment.
- > Instead of judging others, we must learn to forgive and walk humbly ourselves.
- > A life that is being changed by Jesus will produce good fruit (i.e. a student will become like the teacher, if they listen to the teachings of Jesus and put them into practice).

Reflect:

- > In what ways have you seen Jesus grow and change you? Or what kind of person would you be if you had never met Jesus?
- > How do your actions and attitudes impact the people around you who don’t know Jesus?
- > As you read through the teachings, what stood out to you as something that God may want you to continue to grow in?

Act:

- > Take the verse (or verses) that have challenged you, write it down and keep it in a prominent place this week, asking God to help you to live as He desires.
- > Commit to one act that you will do this week as a result of this study (e.g. change your life goal from seeking happiness to being obedient; show kindness to someone you find hard to love; call yourself out when you are judging others; commit to reading the Word).
- > Pray for Mae Ran, that her life and testimony would resonate throughout her village and beyond. Pray also that God would continue to shape and grow her heart.

SESSION TWO

planted

Keen to grow an edible garden, I purchased a number of fruit trees for our backyard that suited our sub-tropical climate. My friend Google told me I needed to prepare the soil for each tree in spots where they had the best chance of thriving. For the citrus trees, I was instructed to make sure the ground didn't retain water and test the location before planting in it. So, I did test the hole and in testing it, found it wasn't suitable.

Others might have seen this as a prompt to reconsider the positioning of the plant... but not I! I ignored the advice, planted my poor lemon tree there and watched it die within the year. I did not take the attributes of soil and the preparation of the tree seriously.

In cross-cultural work, we ignore the context to our own peril. A faith grown under protected, nursery-like conditions, a faith that isn't prepared for the soil of another location, is unlikely to transplant well. Locations like Thailand have been largely resistant to the Gospel for many years with foreign-grown church styles failing to thrive. Global Interaction is seeking to empower communities of Ethnic Thai believers to develop their own distinctive way of following Jesus – in ways that can thrive in the Ethnic Thai context because they have grown out of it.

Watch: Episode 2 – Where you are Planted

 www.globalinteraction.org.au/GrowSow

Discuss:

- > A clear understanding of the differences between Buddha and Jesus was very important for Nan Tong. What distinction between the two led Nan Tong to choose Jesus?
- > What things did Nan Tong mention that he appreciated about his fellowship and why he wanted others to join them?
- > How is Nan Tong's faith community different from your own?

Luke 8:4-15

Read through the parable of the soils and its explanation.

In these verses:

- > The farmer was sowing the seed of the Word of God into many different types of soil.
- > The four soils represent four responses to the Word.
- > Some people will be resistant; some will be open but their faith will wither under testing; others fail to mature in their faith due to distractions; and finally others will persevere and be incredibly fruitful.

Reflect:

- > What are the weeds (distractions) and rocks (obstacles) to the Gospel in the soil of our society? Which of these do you see in your own life and/or community?
- > What contrast between Jesus and the "gods" of our current context might be compelling to someone who is genuinely open to Jesus?
- > How does knowing that some soils will be resistant impact your witness?

Act:

- > Seek God for His direction on how we can better support one another in our faith community so that we can have a greater impact with those around us.
- > Ask God for the courage and wisdom to share His Word with one person this week in a way that is relevant to their lives. Share your experience with the group next week and learn from each other.



SESSION THREE

SOW

**“We come in peace!”
These are the words of a tall grey alien descending from its UFO. It raises its three-fingered hand to the growing crowd of terrified onlookers in a gesture of peace. Incredibly, it can already speak the local language.**

Despite our cringe response to the example of Christian crusaders, colonialists and current day social media warriors... Jesus did instruct His disciples to go out. He told them to express a greeting of peace to prepare the way for His arrival in each village and town. This traditional Jewish greeting, “Shalom”, means more than an absence of war. Rather, it is a blessing for deep wholeness or completeness within that overflows outwards to others.

Watch: Episode 3 – Sow Where He Calls

 www.globalinteraction.org.au/GrowSow

Discuss:

- > What are the similarities between the two faiths mentioned that provide a bridge for developing relationships?
- > In this context, the perception of Christianity is tied to the perception of western society and it's overwhelmingly negative – we are seen as godless, boozing, promiscuous infidels. How is this work of Global Interaction communicating the Gospel more effectively in this potentially hostile environment?

Luke 10:1-24

Read the story of the sending out of the 72 disciples, two by two.

In these verses:

- > The disciples were sent in twos into towns where people were either ripe to hear about Jesus or ready to tear them apart.
- > With a greeting of “peace” they were to find a house where their greeting would be accepted and provide a place where they could heal and share about the Kingdom.
- > The rejection of the disciples by the town was equal to rejecting Jesus and would result in judgement that deeply grieved Jesus.
- > These unnamed disciples were faithful nobodies whom God delighted to minister through, rather than the wise and learned.

Reflect:

- > What evidence of wholistic ministry do you see in this passage (i.e. meeting physical and spiritual needs)?
- > The disciples were instructed not to get distracted along the road. Are there relationships that are distracting you from reaching the people of peace? And, are there potentially hostile people whom you avoid, but God may be preparing?
- > What does it mean for you to be sent out two by two as peace-bearers into your town? What can you learn from this in light of last week's efforts to share Jesus with someone?

Act:

- > As a peace-bearer, be on the look-out for the person of peace who may work alongside you, be waiting for the same bus, or someone you have been friends with for years. Ask for God's courage and wisdom for words that speak life.
- > Consider how you can be more connected with your local community in a way that demonstrates the Kingdom and builds relationships... and find a friend to sign up with! (Tip: find something you both enjoy as that will make all the difference.)



SESSION FOUR

called

My husband Steve and I had a pretty spectacular and somewhat supernatural calling to serve in Cambodia. As such, we could have been tempted to think we were something special. Except that once we were in Cambodia, we found other equally-called workers who had been prompted by nothing more than a desire to be obedient to Jesus' command to "...go make disciples...". It was by God's profound grace (not our awesomeness) that He made our call so clear we had no choice but to obey.

However, our mission or vocation was never our primary calling. Our first and primary calling is the call to follow Jesus.

Watch: Episode 4 – Milestones in Mission

 www.globalinteraction.org.au/GrowSow

Discuss:

- > "There's no retirement in serving my God." How does Paul describe his job? (Tip: it's the very next sentence!) Contrast this with how we might describe his work.
- > What sacrifices have Paul and his fellow believers made in order to follow Jesus? What cultural practices do they retain and redeem in order to express their faith in Jesus in culturally understandable ways?
- > In a context with many barriers to belief in Jesus, what is one way their local community is comfortable to ask for help?

Luke 9:18-27, 44-50, 57-62

Read through these passages where Jesus talks about the call to, and cost of, discipleship.

In these verses:

- > Jesus was correctly identified as the Messiah and warned them that he would be killed and then raised to life.
- > Discipleship would require denying oneself daily... but the disciples fought over who would be greatest.
- > Fitness for service in the kingdom was measured through single-minded obedience at the cost of comfort, wealth and family.

Reflect:

- > How easy (or otherwise) is it to be a follower of Jesus in your context? What sacrifices has Jesus asked of you to in order to follow Him?
- > How does this primary calling to follow Jesus impact your secondary calling to a vocation, place or people group?
- > Asking for prayer is a way the Ethnic Thai community accepts help from the believers. In what ways might your local community be comfortable to accept or seek "help" from your local church?

Act:

- > Ask Jesus to help you to count the cost daily, trust Him fully and encourage one another, so you will not be tempted to say "no" when following Him means going where you are uncomfortable.
- > Take some time out this week to reflect on how your work (or future work) is involved in building God's kingdom. (Check out www.theologyofwork.org for helpful resources in getting a better sense of your vocational calling).
- > Pray for the Ethnic Thai believers to be faithful in the face of opposition and reflectors of the God whom they follow.



Giants AND *Upside down* JUSTICE

Pip Miner, NSW/ACT State Office team member and former cross-cultural worker in Cambodia, draws contextual mission principles from Philemon.

How can Jesus radically change the life of a slave, a slave owner and the message of a Christian leader who appeals for upside-down justice? What implications might this message have for those of us who contend with the reality of having 'giant's strength' but know it is 'tyrannous to use it like a giant'?

In the short letter of Philemon, we see how the cosmic principle of Jesus' turning power dynamics upside-down is outworked in a single household.

A quick plot-review: A slave named Onesimus had escaped his owner, Philemon. He ran from Colossae to Rome - a city where he could more easily disappear into the crowd. In Rome, Onesimus met Paul and became a follower of Jesus. Now, Paul sends him back to Colossae... and to Philemon.

In the letter of Philemon, Paul recognises power dynamics as they stand, as well as how they have been transformed in Christ. He appeals to his 'precious friend' and 'fellow worker' Philemon.

Paul does not use his authority as an apostle to demand justice, instead using phrases such as 'old man' and 'prisoner' to refer to himself! Onesimus isn't a 'slave' but a 'brother in Christ' and a 'son'. With tenderness, Paul says that Onesimus has become his 'very heart'. Paul uses his power to pen a humble, moving letter advocating that a former slave be received based on who he now is in Christ.

When we move from our relaxed Aussie culture that values equality and independence into a more hierarchical culture that values showing respect for those in authority, we may not always be aware of how we are perceived in the new culture. Without knowing, we may be perceived as 'giants'.

In my second month in Cambodia I was invited to a Khmer New Year feast in a village hundreds of kilometres from the Capital. In the early evening, mats were placed around the central house and groups were seated according to their status. As a single in my late twenties, I wondered if I would be placed with married couples who were about my age or with the singles in their teens and early twenties.

When I arrived I was ushered into the main room of the house. On the floor was a single mat and small bowls containing a few mouthfuls of each of the delicacies. I was invited to sit on that mat in the most honoured position in the village to share in the feast... by myself. I felt alone and excluded. But the intention was to honour me. That night, I accepted that it would take time for the Khmer to find where I would fit on one of their mats at the feast.

This was one of many aspects of the Khmer culture I needed to understand to minister contextually. Like Paul, we need to recognise power dynamics as well as how they can be transformed in Christ.

Thinking back on nine years in Cambodia, there were times I let people respectfully call me 'teacher'. (I'm not a qualified teacher!) Most of the time, however, I preferred 'sister' or 'aunty'. While I hoped my skills and hard work in ministry were found useful, the reality was that I needed to hold on to who I was in Christ, a beloved, useful, reclaimed slave like Onesimus.

Having been given a place on the mat, I am now responsible to use my giant strength to invite others to take their seat at the feast.

For more pearls of wisdom from Pip (isn't she great?), watch episode 1 of this edition's videos: www.globalinteraction.org.au/ResonateVideos



Doing LIFE Together

The Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (BTSM) is a locally-led Bible College for believers from Malawi and surrounding countries. These local leaders are built up and equipped to return to their communities and lead their own people. Gary and Shirley have been invited to serve through the BTSM as the Seminary works towards becoming increasingly self-sufficient. This is an exciting and different context for our ministry in Malawi and Mozambique.

Here, Gary and Shirley share about their next adventure together...

Gary Shirley

In 2016, after sixteen years of ministry at Wellington Baptist Church, NSW, we were given four months off as a Sabbatical. We spent eight weeks of it at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi. We were struck by the lack of resources of the seminary... even getting a white board marker was sometimes difficult! However, we were also struck by the hospitality, friendship and oneness in Christ that we experienced with the students and teachers. When we headed back to Australia, there was more than a small part of us that remained there.

In coming home, we were asked to consider returning to BTSM fulltime with Global Interaction. We had good paying jobs and family in Australia. However, God had been challenging me for many years about the great need for development of pastors and church leaders in developing countries. I had received good Bible training in Australia and served as a pastor for nearly thirty years and the question kept coming back to me... "How could I be so selfish as to stay in comfort here and not pass the training on?"

Probably for me the confirmation of God's calling came through the words of one of our Malawian students. He pleaded with me to come back because the needs are so great. I felt humbled and challenged about my own selfishness. I have received so much and now it is my time to share that with others.

After the experience of living in three different countries, extensive travel and three short term mission trips to Myanmar (Burma) – surely I was well prepared for a mission trip to East Africa! However, after 46 hours travelling to Lusaka, Zambia, I was tired and sore from sitting and extremely relieved to catch up with Gary at the airport. The next day our vehicle broke down twice on the two hour trip to the church... And the service went for three hours! All I wanted to do was go home and cry.

But then we met some of the students we would be teaching. Their love for God, desire to know Him more and share this with others challenged me to put things in perspective.

In 2016 we went on our first trip to teach at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi. We were there for eight weeks. Power was only available about 40% of the time, so preparation was often done by candlelight. It was hot, noisy and hard to get a good night's sleep. Plus our house was in the Seminary compound so it felt like we were living in a fish bowl!

So why are we planning to return to BTSM fulltime? Gary and I have a strong sense of God calling us together. When we look back, we can see how He has prepared us for this. We know that it won't be easy, but we also know that we can trust in God's leading and the different but complimentary gifts He has given us for this unique task.





empowering communities to develop their
own distinctive ways of following Jesus

www.globalinteraction.org.au

03 9819 4944

© Copyright 2019: All material appearing
in Resonate is copyright.

Reproduction in whole or part is not
permissible without the written permission
of the publisher. All Bible passages quoted
are from the New International Version (NIV).

Designed by Paul Mah

Edited by Teagan Dwyer-Riviere