

The Yawo people of Malawi and Mozambique

The People Group

There are approximately 3 million Yawo living in Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. They are predominantly agricultural people living in rural villages under traditional headmen. Daily challenges include accessing safe water to drink, food to eat, healthcare and education.

Due to their involvement with the slave and ivory trades with Arab merchants the Yawo are primarily Muslim. Their rituals and practices are heavily influenced by their traditional African and animistic beliefs.

Global Interaction team among the Yawo

For the cross-cultural team living among the Yawo, their main priority is nurturing relationships with local Yawo people. This means being involved in all aspects of Yawo life. From a seemingly simple visit to the local market for groceries, through to the solemn attendance of funerals, the cross-cultural team meet the Yawo in their everyday interactions and their times of great need.

In both Mozambique and Malawi, there are a growing number of people with an openness to hearing the message of Jesus. Our team is working to share the Gospel in culturally appropriate ways with those who are expressing an interest in Jesus for the first time, while encouraging a number of groups of believers through prayer, teaching and leadership training. The team also work with local Yawo to improve their quality of life through health and adult education opportunities. The team continue to develop the Ciyawo translation of the Bible so that the Yawo may have the opportunity to read God's story in their own language.

Prayer Needs

- As the team are invited to share in community life, opportunities would arise to build connections and deepen friendships
- God's wisdom for new Yawo believers as they discern how to live as a follower of Jesus within their Muslim culture
- Yawo people would be open to sharing stories with our team that will give them the opportunity to hear the message of Jesus
- Australian Baptists would respond to God's call and commit to serving among the Yawo

Pray for the Team Members

MALAWI

Adam and Natalie (candidates)
Andrew and Rachel (candidates)
David and Susie (candidates)
Gary and Shirley (candidates)
Ian (based in Australia)
Jean-Claude and Joyce (candidates)
Jonno (team leader) and Heather
Tim and Mel

MOZAMBIQUE

Ben and Sam
Cam and Kath
Sally
Scott and Rebekah
Tobias and Heather

Stories of Hope from Malawi and Mozambique

Invited In

For the Yawo, significant cultural importance is placed on the initiation of girls and boys. For this reason, the team has felt incredibly privileged to be invited to be a part of this deep cultural experience. Last year Bek had the opportunity to spend time with two groups of girls aged between seven and fourteen years during their three to six week initiation period. With the guidance of older Yawo women, the girls learn what it means to be a Yawo woman through stories, proverbs, songs and games.

This year, Bek was again invited to go to the initiation, but this time she was offered the opportunity to share with the girls and input into what they were learning. How amazing! During this incredibly important cultural point in these girls' lives, Bek was able to share about God through Bible stories. The Yawo women present were also engaging with the stories and reiterated certain parts to the girls for emphasis.

Praise God for the mutual trust that is developing between the team and the Yawo community that has allowed Bek to be invited to be a part of these initiations. Pray for deepening relationships and a growing enthusiasm to hear more stories from God's Word.

Witnessing Growth

Ben is developing deep friendships with a group of Yawo men and mutual trust is growing. For the past six months, he has been regularly meeting with a small group to talk about stories from the Bible and pray together. The group is diverse and each brings their own unique perspective and is on their own journey with Jesus. Encouragingly, they have recently asked if they could meet more often to share Bible stories.

Ben and Sam feel honoured to be watching these Yawo men grow in their understanding of God and journey towards Him. They are praying that over time, the Yawo men will start to invite their friends and family to join in and grow in their understanding of God too. Pray that as this fledgling faith community will meet Jesus and experience whole of life transformation.

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The K people of the Silk Road Area

The People Group

K people are warm and hospitable and tightly connected to their family and community. They are strong and resilient people, traditionally nomadic, living in a large country on the ancient Silk Road trade route between the Middle East and China. Their cultural roots are still strongly rural.

K people are predominantly Muslim, while those surrounding them practice Orthodox Christianity. Their Muslim faith is intertwined with traditional animistic beliefs relating to ancestors and shamanism. While the number of believers is growing in the cities, still less than 1% of their ethnic group are Christian. While they are transitioning into a globalised world, the cultural differences make it difficult for K people to connect with Western or Orthodox style churches.

Global Interaction team among the K People

Life among the K people is one of community and relationship. As our cross-cultural team share their lives with the K people, their homes are open to guests and passers-by and many meals are enjoyed in the homes of their friends. The team also enjoy being part of family and national events as they celebrate the important moments of life with the K community.

Our team continues to learn culture and language from local K people and engage with the community more widely through the English Teaching and Community Centre. The Centre offers many natural opportunities to build friendships with students and gives the team a visible presence within the community. The team continues to pray that as friendships grow, so too will the K people's interest in hearing more about the life-giving message of Jesus.

Prayer Needs

- God to be revealing Himself to K people
- K people whose hearts are open to responding to the Good News will connect with our team and explore faith together
- Continued culture and language lessons will enable the team to grow in their ability to share the Gospel in a way that makes sense to their K friends
- Ease in obtaining visas to allow the team to live among the K people
- Those stirred to serve among the K people will act on God's promptings

Pray for the Team Member

Ben and Petra

David and Eliza

Walt (team leader based in USA) and Jeanine

Stories of Hope from the Silk Road Area

Nurturing Seeds

It can take a long time for someone to choose to follow Jesus, especially in least-reached communities where cultural and political barriers work against the understanding and acceptance of the Good News.

In the Silk Road Area, there is a K woman, Ka, who has been connected with our cross-cultural team for many years. While over the years team members have developed good friendships with her and shared the Gospel, it has only been recently that she has been initiating deeper conversations. Team member Petra has had good discussions with Ka about Jesus and the need for Him to die and rise again.

Thank God for the faithful cross-cultural workers who have gone before and planted the seeds that are now slowly growing within Ka. Pray that she will continue to grow closer to God and be increasingly open to conversations about Jesus. Pray also that God would be giving Petra the words to say so she can share the Good News with Ka in a way that makes sense to her.

A Common Thread

Over the past year, a friendship has grown around shared interests and hobbies. Team member Ben and a K man, Ned, initially began getting to know each other through English lessons. As their relationship has developed and trust has grown, more meaningful discussions around family have occurred.

For cross-cultural team members friendships take time, and the small breakthroughs in learning language and culture through friendships make a world of difference. On one occasion Ned caught up with Ben and wanted him to try a local K milk product. Through this simple act, Ben was being invited by Ned to experience, in a small way, more of K culture.

Ben is looking forward to going fishing with Ned over summer. God is working in this friendship. Common interests, shared experiences, time, and the building of trust are forming the foundation of this friendship as opportunities open for them to share life and faith. Jesus is moving...

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The H people of Central Asia

The People Group

The third largest of over 50 people groups in Central Asia are the H people, numbering over 13 million people. They live across the region in rural areas working as farmers and merchants as well as in towns where they work in shops, restaurants and factories. Most H people are direct descendants of Persian and Arab traders who intermarried with locals and converted them to Islam. The H people predominantly identify themselves as Sunni Muslim and their mosques are the centre of their community life. With the influence of Eastern religions there are many expressions of Islam across the region although the more devout followers are found in rural areas.

Only about 500 H people are known to be following Jesus. While the number of believers is growing in many parts of the region very few have the opportunity to hear the Gospel. There are still cultural and geographical challenges impacting the sharing of the Gospel and growth of a sustainable faith community.

Global Interaction team among the H People

Our cross-cultural team continues to form significant friendships within the H community, as we see a growing interest from people wanting to know more about Jesus. Meeting over a hearty meal to discuss matters of life and faith is not only valuable to the H people but a way for cross-cultural workers to help build meaningful and lasting relationships.

The team continue in their commitment to culture and language learning so that they are able to deeply share the message of Jesus in response to the H people's spiritual searching and questions of faith.

Prayer Needs

- God to continue to work in the lives of H people, preparing their hearts to hear the Gospel
- H people seeking knowledge about God will connect with the team or an H believer
- Friendships between H people and the team will deepen and faith conversations will occur
- More people to commit to serving among the H people and learning culture and language so they can effectively communicate the message of Jesus

Pray for the Team Members (secure names used)

Kevin

Pete and Nomes (candidates)

Walt (team leader based in USA) and Jeanine

Stories of Hope from Central Asia

God is Active

As Kevin connects with H people, he is regularly reminded that God is already actively at work in people's lives and preparing hearts to receive the Good News.

When speaking with an official about a business matter, the conversation turned to life and what happens after life, following questions from the officer. After meeting later at a restaurant and reading the Bible, the woman said that when she reads the Bible, '... something is tugging at my heart.' Kevin was reminded of the truth in Hebrews 4:12, where the Word of God is referred to as sharper than a double-edged sword.

At another time, Kevin was the only customer in a restaurant when an H student entered and chose to sit opposite him. The H man explained that he had previously had a foreign friend who had returned home and he hoped Kevin would be his new friend. The H man was familiar with stories from the Old Testament and he and Kevin have read some together.

Both of these new friends are curious to know more about God. Thank God for the way He is actively working in their lives, preparing their hearts to know Him personally and placing Kevin in a position to journey with them.

Communities Transformed

A few years ago, the team in Central Asia was approached to partner in a sheep loan project to support farmers living under the poverty line. As foreigners are rarely allowed into these villages, the team felt privileged to be offered the opportunity and gratefully accepted.

We celebrate the success of this project! Previously, many farmers were unable to generate adequate income through farming and were forced to seek work in the city. Through the project, farmers are lent sheep in order to produce lambs which they can sell. For many, this new income source means they can remain with their families in the villages. One particular farmer, who only had a primary school education, received training and after being lent eight ewes, produced 21 lambs. The income generated was enough to pay for his daughter's university tuition. Through the project, this farmer and others are given the opportunity to upskill and improve their family's situation in a real and long-term way.

Thank God for the transformative impact this project has had on whole communities and pray that this will open more opportunities for the team to engage with people in their need and build meaningful and life-changing relationships.

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B People of South Asia

The People Group

The B people live in one of the most densely populated areas of the world and most people are involved in farming or fishing. They have a rich culture based on the influences of many communities entering the region over the centuries; Sri Lankan, Mediterranean, Arab, Turkish and Persian. Nearly all B people identify as Sunni Muslim with less than 1% following Christ.

While there are places of natural beauty, the region struggles to support such a large population. B people continue to face many political, economic, social and environmental challenges including political instability, poverty, illness and flooding. Low levels of literacy also contribute to the cycle of poverty.

Global Interaction team among the B people

The cross-cultural team are an integral part to the daily running of a locally-led development organisation. Through the work of this organisation, women are accessing income generation projects and local people can participate in vocational training opportunities that endeavour to bring transformation to all aspects of their lives. The organisation also offers B people the opportunity to engage with the message of Jesus for the first time and provides a safe place for them to explore questions of life and faith.

An updated translation of the Bible for B people, using accessible and culturally relevant language, has been completed. The team is now working on making the new translation and discipleship material available online.

Prayer Needs

- The updated translation of the Bible for B people will encourage believers and be read by those in the community who are seeking to know Jesus
- The Holy Spirit to create safe opportunities for B people to hear the Good News and accept Jesus
- Through our partner NGO's projects, B people will experience God's love and want to know more
- Protection over the small faith communities who meet to study the Bible
- More committed people to join the team, sharing their skills and the life-transforming message of Jesus

Pray for the Team Members

Phil

Morris (team leader based in Australia)

Graeme (short-term visitor based in Australia)

Graeme and Pat (short-term visitor based in Australia)

Stories of Hope from South Asia

Engaging with God's Word

On a recent trip to South Asia, Team Leader Morris took part in several Bible studies with local believers. Following the group study, he sat with each person to discuss their own interpretation and personal response to the passage. In the religious background of these believers, it is most common for the religious teacher to tell the group how to interpret the scripture with personal exploration not encouraged.

Understanding this cultural background, Morris was incredibly heartened to hear the B believers enthusiastically and thoughtfully consider the passage and what it means for their lives. He was encouraged to witness them grapple with the meaning of the Scripture and engage with it.

Praise God for these B believers wholehearted engagement with the Bible and what it means for their lives. Pray for strengthened faith and protection.

Believers Brought Together

A B woman connected with our partner NGO in South Asia recently shared with the group something of her spiritual journey. Mrs K grew up in a Muslim family, however as a child she had access to a Bible and began reading it. After some time, she became believer but chose to keep it to herself as she was unsure what the response would be from her family and community. A marriage was arranged for her and she married a man from another Muslim family. Still she kept quiet about her faith in Jesus. After being married for a while, she was amazed to discover a Bible under her husband's pillow! He told her he was a follower of Jesus too.

At the time they married, the country had a population of around 150 million people, with 99% not following Jesus. Praise God that He brought these two secret believers together! Pray that more seekers and believers will connect with each other and grow in faith and courage together.

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The Ethnic Thai of Thailand

The People Group

Thailand continues to be influenced by globalisation, urbanisation and alternative spiritualities. Half of the population lives and works in rural areas but the numbers moving to the cities continue to grow. While the majority of Ethnic Thai people identify as Buddhist their religious practices are influenced by animism, Thai folklore and Hinduism. Christianity is growing among Thailand's minority people but is yet to significantly impact the ethnically Thai.

Global Interaction team among the Ethnic Thai

The Ethnic Thai people enjoy good food, a good laugh and time with family and friends. Our cross-cultural team walk alongside the Ethnic Thai in daily life, building meaningful and lasting friendships. It is in these friendships, and through ongoing culture and language learning, that our team endeavour to live out the message of Jesus in both their words and actions.

There are now four growing faith communities who are exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in a way that reflects their culture and heritage. Our cross-cultural team are working to empower these groups as they look to develop their own identity within the broader community and equip future leaders through training opportunities.

Prayer Needs

- Ethnic Thai people to come to know the power of Jesus and His offer of freedom from fear
- As the team looks for new ways to connect with the community, pray that they will encounter people who are open to exploring faith in Jesus
- Faith communities to be a good witness to their communities, prompting curiosity and interest from those around them
- Ethnic Thai leaders will be well equipped to lead the faith communities
- More people to commit to long-term cross-cultural work among the Ethnic Thai

Pray for the Team Members

Muana (team leader) and Villy
Dema and Carolyn
Glenn and Liz
Luke and Belle
Petina

Stories of Hope from Thailand

A New Person

The team's first contact with Nan T was through former cross-cultural workers Larry and Jan. When they first knew him, he was very shy and didn't like to participate in gatherings. Larry and Jan developed a good friendship with Nan T and journeyed with him through his spiritual exploration. Over years, his knowledge of Jesus grew through conversations and reading the Bible.

The change in Nan T's life and behaviour from when the team first met him to now, has greatly amazed them. After he gave his life to Jesus, he became a new person! From being someone who didn't even like having a meal at someone's home, to someone who loves the fellowship of others and the faith community and uses his skills to support others. He has also become one of the faith community leaders and confidently teaches from the Bible and actively shares the love of God with others through acts of service.

The team celebrates that earlier this year, Nan T declared his faith in Jesus and was baptised. Praise God for the work He has done and continues to do in Nan T's life and how He is using the team to share the Good News among the Ethnic Thai.

New Way, New Hope and New Life

We pray that hearts will be open to receiving the Good News; and that a new way, a new hope and a new life will be revealed to them.

Mae Phan is a local Ethnic Thai believer. Together with Glenn and Liz, Mae Phan attends regular fellowship and has recently invited her son to join them. Nong A is a novice monk, he knows his mother has a heart for Jesus and he has accepted the invitation to join her and others to learn more. During a recent fellowship, to our delight, he has shared a passage that he has been reading in the Bible. These are early days in his exploration and understanding of who Jesus may be for him.

We ask all of our prayer partners to keep Mae Phan and Nong A in your prayers. We rejoice that Mae Phan will bear witness to her son, and that he will continue to seek understanding of the Bible as he reads it and the fellowship of our team. We pray that his heart will be open to receiving the Good News; and that a new way, a new hope and a new life will be revealed to him.

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The Khmer of Cambodia

The People Group

Cambodia is the second poorest South East Asian country, with 80% of the 15 million Khmer people living in rural regions, primarily as subsistence farmers. Nearly three decades of war and genocide have left the nation broken and economically stagnant, with the resulting population being predominantly under 30 years of age. However, this emerging youthful generation is beginning to engage with the modern world and as a result is finding a voice as it seeks to construct a better future.

Today the Khmer people hold to a culturally Buddhist worldview but within that remains many animistic beliefs that influence their daily life. Less than 1% of the population profess to follow Jesus and those that do live with a constant tension of maintaining traditional responsibilities to their parents along with being influenced by a rising Western influence.

Global Interaction team among the Khmer

The Khmer cross-cultural team live and minister in the North-West region of Cambodia. While the country of Cambodia is experiencing rapid change, it still grapples with issues of poor health, low literacy rates and high underemployment. The sports ministry, which the team began, is growing and providing valuable opportunities to build relationships with Khmer coaches, players and families. The team also spend time visiting nearby rural areas where many have never heard the message of Jesus. The team is building strong friendships with people in these rural villages. They are increasingly being able to share their faith and some have chosen to follow Jesus.

Excitingly, the team will grow rapidly this year as a number of new families arrive and begin culture and language learning.

Prayer Needs

- God's Spirit to be prompting Khmer people to seek an understanding of Jesus and God's plan for humanity
- The team's visits to rural villages will deepen connections and open opportunities to share faith
- Bible studies with Khmer tennis coaches would spark deep spiritual conversations
- Strong partnership teams to form to support the candidates preparing to serve with the team

Pray for the Team Members

Andy and Cathie (candidates)

Catherine

Craig and Kim

Luke and Rachel

Rob and Deb

Scott and Janelle

Tristan and Megan

Stories of Hope from Cambodia

On the Journey

For just over 2 years, team member Scott and a Khmer friend and follower of Jesus, have been travelling along a northern road. On these journeys, opportunities naturally arise to connect with people. In God's timing both have found ways to share the Gospel. Mr D, a father who lives about 1 hour's drive away has deeply engaged with these conversations and over time has received Jesus. Scott has been discipling him and rejoices in Mr D's witness to others.

As God works through Mr D his faith is clearly evident as he shares the living God. The Khmer worldview is very spiritual and Scott is often 'awestruck' by Mr D's response to the Holy Spirit during their prayers. Please pray for Mr D and his family and give thanks for Scott's faithfulness.

Where is the Grass Greener?

While grass around homes is a common choice in Australia, it is very rare in Cambodia and many Khmer remove every blade of grass near their home. This meant that Rob and Deb's decision to grow a lawn, prompted much discussion and interest from their neighbours.

Deb and Rob have been living in Cambodia since the end of 2016 and know that, unlike the rapid growing tropical grass, relationships take time to grow. In Cambodia, there are added cultural layers such as 'saving face' and the giving of respect and honour that Rob and Deb have encountered as they interact with Khmer people. Often they are given, and expected to use, the best chairs in the room while others are sitting on the floor. As westerners, there are cultural expectations on them and the relationship can shift into that of a client and patron. In order to grow meaningful relationships, Deb and Rob must navigate this dynamic. Praise God that as they dedicate time to developing their cultural understanding and language skills, these complex dynamics are becoming easier to navigate.

Deep relationships take time and intentional investment to build patterns of trust and understanding. While sometimes it's easy to think the grass is greener on the other side, it doesn't take much experience to learn that the grass is greener where you water, fertilise and nurture it. Pray for Rob and Deb as, day by day, they seek to grow and nurture deep relationships within their community.

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The B.I, R.I and S.I people of South East Asia

The People Groups

The B.I people are scattered over a number of small islands, many of which are accessible only by small boats. They have a strong cultural identity which binds them together in highly communal societies that are resistant to change. While they are overwhelmingly Muslim, their animistic beliefs remain influential in daily life. Entrenched spiritual allegiances keep them blinded to the Good News. Only a handful of the B.I are followers of Jesus.

The R.I people live on the picturesque and cool slopes of a mountain range that runs along the coast of a large island. They number around 3 million but there are few known followers of Jesus. The overwhelming majority of R.I people profess to follow Islam. However, animism is an integral part of their daily lives and beliefs.

Around 45 million **S.I people** live in one of the most densely populated regions on earth. Almost all S.I people are Muslims. They comprise one of the largest least-reached people groups on Earth. Their communal solidarity and strict social codes have served as barriers to the Good News. Followers of Jesus are a small minority but there is a growing openness and willingness to learn about Him.

Global Interaction team among the B.I and S.I people

The team serving among the **B.I people**, live and work on a remote tropical island. The cross-cultural team has established an Education Foundation that provides skills training for the local people, greatly improving their level of education and employment opportunities. The Education Foundation is also a safe place for the local people to ask questions about Jesus, as the cross-cultural team share their faith with local staff members and students.

The cross-cultural team working among the **S.I people** have a strong focus on hospitality and creation care. They are engaging in creative and wholistic activities that look to respond to the physical, environmental and spiritual needs of the people. The local people also have access to the Education Foundation where they can learn new skills to assist them to find work in the area. The S.I people are open to conversations with the cross-cultural workers about the spirit world as this is an important part of their culture. God often communicates with the S.I through dreams and visions which prompt good discussions with the cross-cultural team about Jesus.

Prayer Needs for the B.I, R.I and S.I people

- God would continue to use dreams and visions to point R.I people to Jesus
- The hearts of R.I people to be softened to hear the message of Jesus
- God's Spirit to be opening the hearts of S.I people who come into contact with the team, to hear the Gospel and respond
- Sensitivity to the Spirit's leading for the team as they build friendships and seek to share the Good News through the Education Foundation, Cafe and Creation Care initiatives
- Protection over S.I believers and courage as they fear opposition from their families and communities
- Doors to open enabling the team to receive their necessary visas in a smooth and timely manner
- Spiritual breakthroughs within the communities we serve among
- Deep cultural understanding and good language skills for the team, enabling them to effectively communicate the Gospel with B.I neighbours and friends

Pray for the Team Members (secure names used)

S.I PEOPLE

Ally (candidate)

Ando (candidate)

Andy and Wanda (medical leave)

Daz and Bee

Dave (Team Leader) and Caz

Pat and Joy (candidates)

B.I PEOPLE

Dave (Team Leader) and Caz

Dave and Edwina

Max and Ezzie

Mick and Tara (leave of absence)

Stories of Hope from South East Asia

Finding Treasure

In Matthew chapter 13, there are two short parables that Jesus uses to illustrate what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. He tells of two people finding treasure. The first person unexpectedly finds treasure in a field, then sells their possessions in order to purchase the field and in turn, own the treasure. The second person is a merchant seeking out fine pearls. In finding one of great value, the merchant sells their possessions and buys the pearl. These two different people illustrate how some find the treasure of the Kingdom after a period of searching and seeking, and others find it unexpectedly, without even looking for it. However, upon finding it, both kinds of people must choose to respond.

In South East Asia, Dave and Caz have had the joy of witnessing local people meeting Jesus in the two different ways outlined in the passage. They write “Mr H had been on a search for years. His soul hungered for more. When he found the treasure of the Kingdom, he gladly surrendered his past goals to commit himself to that Kingdom. Mrs I in contrast was just trying to make it through life one day at a time when the Spirit unexpectedly compelled her to engage in a conversation with Caz, which led to her finding a treasure she didn’t know existed. With great joy she has embraced this treasure, along with the cost.”

Small Steps of Faith

Mr A is a young B.I man and a devout Muslim. Dave and Edwina met him through the Education Foundation where Mr A has been both a student and a tutor. Initially, Mr A made it clear to Dave and Edwina that he was not interested in any conversation about their faith. However, as their friendship grew and Dave and Edwina showed genuine interest in his culture and faith, Mr A slowly became open to learning about their faith too.

They began introducing each other to their Holy Books and discussing the similarities and differences between their beliefs. Mr A now recognises Jesus as a prophet, however is challenged with how to respond to the revelation of Jesus in the Bible compared with his Holy Book.

Dave and Edwina continue to journey with Mr A in his faith. Pray that Mr A will recognise Jesus as more than a prophet, but as ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life’. Pray also that he will understand that if he chooses to follow Jesus, he can still remain within his culture and community.

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