

Love Your Neighbour

In Mark 12:31, Jesus places loving your neighbour right up there with loving God. Villy, cross-cultural worker of 19 years, shares what this looks like among the Ethnic Thai.

Working among the least-reached, cross-cultural workers become an expression of Jesus' love. In 2001 Global Interaction sent Muana and I to become loving neighbours among the Ethnic Thai. Our team is now serving in numerous communities where the people would otherwise have little chance of having a neighbour, friend or family member who could love them in the name of Jesus.

Drawing on Mark 21:31, I want to share with you some of the stories that have taken place as my family and I have become loving neighbours in the place God has called us to serve Him.

We know that it is by God's grace that people come to know Jesus. As we act in faith, we follow God's commands and as we become loving neighbours, we see lives transformed. As you read through these brief stories, please pray for the nation of Thailand. The population is 69 million and less than 1% of the people identify

as followers of Jesus. So many are yet to hear the Good News in a way that makes sense to them. We need more loving neighbours among the Ethnic Thai, those who will love as Jesus commanded us to.

Loving your neighbour means being compassionate. As we love our neighbours, God prompts compassion and equips us to respond. We grew to know Ja and Wood and as our friendship developed, we observed the struggles in their lives. They had ongoing health issues and just trying to make ends meet each day was a challenge. We soon realised that by simply collecting our recycling for them, they could generate income. Selling recyclable goods over the past seven years has provided some income for them, but more than that, we have seen God move in their lives.

Loving your neighbour means being hospitable. Loong G is one of Muana's English students and our community secretary.



Since his wife left him, he has lived alone and is estranged from his children. Sensing his sadness, God placed it on our hearts to invite him to share meals with us. He misses his family and has told us how much he loves eating together. We have joy in knowing God's heart for him, we are thankful for the opportunity to share with him and we give thanks to God that Loong G is now seeking to know Jesus as Lord. As we love our neighbour, God is stirring his heart toward Jesus.

Loving your neighbour means building genuine friendships.

One day my friend came crying to me. She had huge debts and to make matters worse, she had been fired from her job as a house helper. God used me to be the mediator in this situation. Both my friend and I witnessed God's faithfulness that night. The family released her of the debt of 50,000 baht (AUD\$ 2,400) and she was invited to go back to work as usual. Our God is a gracious God who nurtures genuine friendships and equips us to become a genuine friend.

Loving your neighbour means serving them. We serve our community through teaching English and providing a free hair and beauty salon. The beauty ministry opens wonderful opportunity for conversation and bonding with the local women. It's a time of listening to their life journey and looking

out for natural openings to share my faith. Recently one woman shared how her son was depressed and had attempted to take his life. Tearfully she expressed her lost hope. In that space, I was able to share the hope that we have in Jesus.

Loving your neighbour means investing in the community.

Being active in our community often involves attending community events. This is a way of expressing our interest and care for our community and we support local business where we can. Over seven years in this location we have come to know our local taxi driver. We have developed a friendship with him and he has bonded very well with some of the local believers and even comes to worship with us to catch up with them.

Loving your neighbour means having no expectations. At some point you will be hurt for

being kind. There have been times when I felt betrayed, taken advantage of, not cared for but in these times... God reminds me from Colossians 3.23, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord rather than for people." This verse really helps me to love when loving my neighbour seems hard.

As I reflect on these experiences, I realise that God uses us here to extend His hospitality among our neighbours, that our ministry allows me to give my time, an empathic ear, prayers and words of encouragement. **Loving our neighbour invites people to meet Jesus through His love in us. Our team members Luke and Belle have recently moved to another location. As our team's ministry expands to reach other communities, we pray that God will use us as loving neighbours.**

*Top: Harvest in Thailand. Photo taken by Christoph Ziegenhardt.
Middle: Ethnic Thai believer. Photo taken by Christoph Ziegenhardt.
Bottom: Muana and Villy gathering with Ethnic Thai friends.*

