

Appendix B

Association of Free Churches in Thailand Biblical Church Planting Methodology

Written by: Dwight Martin, President of the AFT

What we know (through research) about Thailand and its people:

1. 94% of the villages in Thailand do not have any Christians. In fact, most Thai people have never heard of Jesus.
2. Thai people are not interested in another religion, they already have one. Thai people say, “To be Thai is to be Buddhist.”
3. Thai people are looking for answers to life’s problems. They have not found the answer in all the gods they worship. What they are looking for is the one true God. Jesus is that God.

Personal note: When I returned to Thailand in 2006, leaders of the Thai national church (TEC) asked me to be the research coordinator for the Thai church. They had a vision to reach all of Thailand for Christ and passed that vision on to me. They tasked me to help answer two questions. 1. Where are the Christians in Thailand? 2. Help us find the key to the Thai heart to be open to the Gospel.

The first question I answered by creating the Thailand Harvest church database documenting where all the churches in Thailand are located. This database can be viewed at (<http://thaichurches.org>.) The second question was more difficult. I did not find the answer until 2017 when I discovered a national group that understood Thai culture and were able to communicate the Gospel in a way Thai people understand. This group had an effective method at making disciples of Jesus and developing church planters/leaders.

Biblical principles that guide AFT’s church planting:

1. The Great Commission commands us to GO and make DISCIPLES - not converts. (Matt 28:19) Sanctification is a process not a one-time event. (John 8:31) However, the first step of sanctification is to believe in Jesus. (John 3:36, Acts 16:31)
2. Jesus sent the apostles to villages as teams looking for persons of peace with a follow up plan. (Luke 10:1, Luke 10:5-6, Luke 4:43, Mark 1:38)
3. The apostles did not bring religion; they brought a relationship with Jesus. (Matt 11:28-30, Acts 4:12)
4. The Bible teaches that new believers are babies spiritually. We need to gradually disciple these babies until they are mature, and their “roots” grow deep. (John 3:6-7, 1 Cor 3:2)
5. We must let the Holy Spirit convict, sanctify, and transform the believers; we cannot “convert” them. (John 3:6-8, John 6:63)
6. Jesus is building his “ECCLESIA.” The AFT ecclesia are house churches, much like the early church (Matt 16:18, Acts 9:31 and many more verses in the book of Acts).
7. To build the church we collect contact and spiritual growth data on those who believe so we can do effective discipleship and so that none are “lost.” (Matt 18:12-14)

How these Biblical principles work out in practice: (View Data Driven Discipleship graph)

1. Find a location (district) where the Holy Spirit is leading us to bring people to Christ.
2. Create teams to GO. Each team can go to twenty or more villages per week.
3. GO to our assigned villages. GO down every street and lane praying that the Holy Spirit will lead us to a person of peace. Our experience is that persons of peace are on every street and lane in Thailand waiting for someone to bring them the Good News.

Personal Note: It is my opinion the biggest failure of the Thai church and the Christian church in general is that we do not GO. We do not physically make the effort to GO and find persons of peace. We give the Great Commission “lip service” but very few GO. Instead, we invite non-believers to church or an event. If we all made the effort to GO, there would be more believers in Jesus in Thailand and around the world.

4. Do not bring religion but instead invite them to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

Note: For a Thai person to believe in Jesus the gospel needs to be shared in a way that resonates with their heart so the Holy Spirit can “ignite a flame” in it. It is this “flame” that allows the AFT church planter to return every week to continue the sanctification (discipleship) process. Research shows “traditional” methods fail because Thais are brought a “Christian” religion. These methods rarely “open their heart” or allow the evangelist to return and disciple them. It is a big reason Thailand is less than 1% Christian.

Thailand is a combination of a “shame/fear” culture where personal sin (guilt) is not the primary issue (as it is in the western world.) If you bring up their personal sin first, it is offensive to them because you are shaming them. Most will not listen to you. This video clearly explains the importance of understanding different worldviews (cultures): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2XNoAFtqOw&t=440s>

The AFT’s method of sharing Jesus with someone is based on the following principles and scriptures. (This text is translated directly from the AFT church planter’s handbook)

When we first meet a person, we introduce ourselves, tell them who we are and where we are from and build a relationship with them. As humans are prone to do, once we develop a relationship, they will share their problems and struggles. Then we ask them “Have you ever heard of the true God? He is the Savior of the world. His name is Jesus. He is the God who created the heavens and the earth and created us. He loves us very much. But because of humans’ sin, we are separated from Him, and we suffer the consequences of our sinful actions. (Thai’s call this karma - กรรม). As a result, we have problems, suffering, sorrow, and illness.

We ask this person if we can share our life’s experiences (testimony) with them (choosing someone who has had similar problems in life, i.e. alcoholism, family dysfunction, drug addiction, etc. If they agree (most do) we share using this outline:

- a) Introduce yourself, your name and where you are from.
- b) Share **about your life before believing in Jesus. What life was like?** Tell about the problems you had and how you were suffering, and no god seemed to help.
- c) Next **tell them “How you came to believe in Jesus?”** Someone told you, or you heard someone preach or had a Christian care for you, and you decided to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- d) Next share **“How your life has changed after believing in Jesus?”** i.e. I have a peace and joy I have never experienced before. Or Jesus healed me/freed me/helped me with the struggles or problems I had.
- e) Then state: **If Jesus can help me, he can help you too.** Just decide today to welcome Jesus into your life. Video example: <https://youtu.be/9Cj8eXo9agk>

This next part is important because it brings the Gospel into what you just shared. Without scripture there would be no “saving power” in your testimony. (Romans 1:16)

- f) State: **“Jesus did this for me because he loves me, and he loves you as well.”**
The principle behind this statement is John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, so that he gave his one and only Son, in order that everyone who believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life.”* God loves all people and does not want us to live in condemnation, so He sent his only begotten Son to save those who will put their trust in Him.

- g) Next state: **“Do you know why we must welcome Jesus into our life? Because we cannot save ourselves.”**
The principle behind this statement comes from John 8:34 *“Jesus replied to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.’”*
- h) Next state: **“The good news is that Jesus is the solution to this problem.”**
The scriptural principle comes from John 1:29 *“On the next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”* He died on the cross to pay for our sinful debts so that we may receive a new life and be freed from sin and karma. (เวรกรรม)
- i) Next state: **“How can you get help from Jesus? Open your heart and welcome Jesus Christ into your life. When you do, he gives you the right to be His child.”**
The scriptural principle is John 1:12 *“But as many as received him—to those who believe in his name—he gave to them authority to become children of God.”*
- j) Next state: **“When you believe in Jesus, He promises to never leave you or abandon you. He will always be with you. Would you like to believe in Him right now?”** This promise of God is found in John 6:37 *“Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never throw out.”*
- k) Finally **lead those who want to believe in Jesus in a prayer like this.**
Ask them to sincerely believe as they repeat the prayer after you.

“Thank you, Jesus that today I heard the gospel message. I believe you are the most high God that created heaven and earth and that you provide salvation to sinners. I know I have sinned, and I am not able to help myself escape from my sin. I now confess the sins I have committed to you. Please forgive me of these sins I have committed, both those I can remember and cannot remember. Those that I have done either intentionally or unintentionally. Thank you for paying the debt for my sins and all the evil deeds I have done. Make my life clean and pure without blemish. Now I desire a new life. I ask you Lord to open the door of my heart to welcome you Jesus into my life. I now know you are the only God that can help me and guide my life. I ask you be Lord to be the only God in my life and to write my name in the book of life that is heaven. I promise to follow you from now on. Please bless this new life of mine and help me live according to your will. I pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

5. Immediately begin the discipleship process by teaching the new believer to pray so they develop a relationship with Jesus. Give them a copy of the prayer booklet

Note: From my subjective research when I have asked people who just prayed to believe in Jesus how they feel, many state “I feel different.” I have come to recognize this as the “flame” (manifestation) that the Holy Spirit has lit in their heart. It is this “flame” that keeps their heart open to welcome us back week after week to continue the sanctification (discipleship) process.

6. Enter their data into the database so we know when they prayed to believe in Jesus and can keep track of their spiritual growth to make sure no one is left behind or lost.
7. Schedule a time to follow up with them the next week to continue the discipleship process.
8. Return to their house each week with additional discipleship lessons.

- a) Week 0-1: Teach them to pray using the prayer book to have them develop a personal **Relationship** with Jesus. Prayer is emphasized every week from now on.

Note: When they pray, many times God does miracles in their lives. If you visit AFT house churches or discipleship meetings, you will hear many stories of the miracles that God has done in their lives. They are praising God for the amazing work He has done in their lives and are excited about it and want to share it with others. When they do this, it encourages and strengthens that person which makes them want to continue to share the good news with others. It also encourages and strengthens fellow believers who hear their story. Finally, it opens the heart of those who have come to see what God is doing but not yet believed in Him.

- b) Week 1-4: Teach the Plan of Jesus – so they have a **Foundational** understanding of the Creation to Christ story.

- c) Week 4-7: Start studying the Gospel of John to get them into God's word. Teach and have them memorize verses. God's Word gives them **Confidence** in their new faith.
- d) Week 7-26: Teach basic doctrine using the Abundant Life course. This gives them **Knowledge** in what they believe.

Note: More people are joining this body of believers over the weeks so lessons may be repeated so the new people can be brought "up to speed" with everyone else.

- 9. Around week 26 a house church is started where the leader continues to disciple them.
- 10. Baptize those who understand what baptism means and desire to be baptized. (Lesson 11 in the Abundant Life book)
- 11. Start a district church.
- 12. Start the whole process over with the new district church.

Note: To start a district church, you need Christians. That is why AFT church planters go to every village sharing about Jesus and forming house churches. Once every village has Christians, we open a district church. When the district church is opened it is full because believers in the nearby villages come. The district church, in turn, continues the sanctification (discipleship) process in the house churches so they continue to grow so even more people will come to know Jesus. Our prayer is that many will grow to become a "sub-district" church in the future.

