



*by Justin Caudill<sup>1</sup>*

My missionary team and I live and work with a Buddhist people group of almost thirty-three million people spread out over an area the size of Texas. Like most Buddhists, our people are very proud of their religious heritage. They claim to be the first and most pure Buddhists, and they have no problem interchanging their ethnic and religious identities. In other words, to be a member of their people group is to be a Buddhist.

Cross-culturally engaging and reaching any people group requires a lot of work. So, prior to our move overseas, my wife and I worked hard to prepare. We studied all the right books. We read all the relevant articles from all the right professional thinkers. We spoke with all the right people. However, our initial experiences overseas quickly revealed that what we had studied in books didn't necessarily translate well with the Buddhists we were sent to serve.

We found that most methods for reaching Buddhists fail with our people. C2C (Creation-to-Christ storying) works in many places, but in this area, it's too logical and linear and seems to rob our experiences of personal connection more than anything else. Linear presentations often fail because our people don't process information linearly. Only on rare occasions does it seem that God uses logic to free a Buddhist from Buddhism. However, our experiences also taught us several positive lessons that shaped how we engage Buddhists with the gospel.

Reaching a Buddhist begins long before our feet ever enter his or her village. In fact, it would be accurate to say that every attempt to reach our people that hasn't been wholly saturated in prayer has failed. So we devoted ourselves to prayer, and God guided us to pray in three specific ways.

### **We pray for hearts differently**

Praying for a Buddhist's heart means rightly understanding his or her heart. Paul told the Ephesians that prior to faith, they were dead (Eph. 2:1). The Buddhist's heart is not struggling to stay afloat. It's not searching. The Buddhist, like all without Christ, is dead and there is only one who can make dead hearts come alive. We ask God to stir the hearts of our people and give them life. We plead for him to deliver them from the domain of darkness and transfer them into the kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.imb.org/2016/09/28/proclaiming-god-among-buddhist-peoples/>

## **We pray for guidance**

We ask God to take us to those whom he is stirring and who are ready to respond. This changes everything. Random conversations are no longer random. Every situation is filled with purpose as we go out. We walk paths and speak to people with confidence that God has purposed every step and every word.

One morning, after spending time asking for stirred hearts and clear guidance, we set out down familiar dirt paths toward a village. Before we arrived at the village, our national partner stopped beside a house we had passed many times before. “We are supposed to share here today,” he said. We walked toward the house and a young family greeted us. They invited us to sit and sip tea. Not long into our conversation, we were able to share the gospel. The husband responded, “My wife and I have heard this before. We watched a cartoon movie that told this same story, but we did not understand it. Today we understand. This is good and true. We believe.” God answers prayers for guidance.

## **We pray for power**

We ask God to empower our words and bring conviction, and we ask him to move in power just as he did throughout Scripture. God used signs and wonders to validate and verify the message being spoken, and we ask him to do that for our people.

The Western mind often is skeptical of God moving in power. But as we pray, he moves. We ask that Buddhists have dreams, and as we share the gospel, people tell of previous dreams they’ve had that believe confirm our message. One Buddhist farmer asked, “If your God is strong enough to forgive my sins, can he make it rain?” We prayed and it rained nonstop for two weeks. God is not afraid to powerfully verify the message he sends us to proclaim.

## **We learned the importance of testimonies and genuine relationship**

We learned how to share in the context of relationships. Some assume that days, weeks, or even years must be spent cultivating relationship before the gospel can be shared. That assumption is false and potentially damning. No Buddhist is guaranteed a next breath so therefore, withholding the gospel is irresponsible. We want to simultaneously have genuine relationships and share the gospel. We believe this is possible, and, following the examples of Scripture, we use our testimonies as our primary mode of both relationship building and gospel sharing.

Our testimonies work when other methods fail with Buddhists, and we believe this is true for several reasons. Testimonies are effective because they are stories, and story is the true heart language of Buddhists. When we sit in homes, we ask real, honest questions about their lives. We want to hear their stories. Buddhists share their struggles and sin and heartache. They tell of family and culture. And when they see that we are listening and that we care, they ask us to share as well. They want to hear our stories.

Testimonies are effective because they put the work of conviction on the Holy Spirit. Many methods are designed to convince Buddhists that Buddha is wrong and Jesus is right. Although there is truth in this approach, our testimonies allow us simply to herald the gospel and God’s

