

## The History of the Work with Hmong Refugees

We went to Thailand in January 2004. We spent our first year in language school in Chiang Mai. We then moved to Bangkok in early 2005. We put together a strategy to reach Thailand and the Thai Buddhist people in particular for Christ. In July 2005, just as we were to put our strategy into action, we heard about the situation with a group of Lao Hmong that entered Thailand illegally seeking refugee status. They settled at a makeshift refugee camp on the edge of a Thai Hmong village called Huay Nam Khao in Petchabun Province in North Central Thailand.

We took a survey trip to see what ministry possibilities existed in the camp. The Christian leaders asked us if we could provide Hmong Bibles and other Christian literature. To tell you the truth, I only had small interest in the refugees and really just “tagged” along to serve as a translator for the other missionaries. I had this attitude that God called us to Thailand to reach the Thai people. These Lao Hmong refugees were not on my “radar screen”. They were not Thai and they were not Buddhist. After all, I thought, that is why God brought me all the way to Thailand.

On our second trip to the village, I was asked to provide Bible training to a group of about 15 young Lao Hmong men. Now, I was in a dilemma. In my heart, I did not want to be “distracted” and take time away from what I thought was my “real” mission to the Thai people. I half-heartedly agreed to do it thinking that it probably would not last very long anyways. My family began making regular trips to the village so I could teach the Bible. Then, something began to happen that I did not expect to. In Lamentations 3:51, Jeremiah says “Mine eye affecteth mine heart”. Soon, my heart began to change toward the Hmong and the work among them. We soon rented a house on the edge of the camp so that we could spend more time with them. By September 2005, we were spending more time in the village than at our “headquarters” in Bangkok. Our small missionary team was not only teaching but also evangelizing the Lao Hmong. As a result, Lao Hmong families were coming to Christ frequently. Over 100 families came to Christ that month. Later that month, the older Christian leaders asked if we could start a church. At the end of September 2005, Pastor Scheving came and organized the Nam Khao Baptist Church (NKBC). They had their first official service on the first Sunday of October 2005. The church leaders took over the administration and oversight of the church from its inception. Since NKBC was organized until now, we have continued to mentor/disciple the church leaders while the young church learned to function free of foreign leadership.

NKBC currently has around 400 baptized church members with an additional 1,200 or so who consider NKBC to be their home church. They have now built two separate church buildings with their own money and without help of Western churches/missionaries. Besides having the church oversight, the leaders have trained an additional 40 men to be leaders/house church pastors in the event they are deported back to Laos. Laos is a closed communist country and traditional missions would not be able to be practiced. We taught them to do ministry like our Christian brethren in China have done so effectively already. The church has also ordained one man to be a missionary to China. China has the largest portion of Hmong speakers of any country. Two other men have heard the missionary call to return to Laos and one man says God has called him to Vietnam.

So, sometimes God brings situations or people into our lives that are unpleasant, uncomfortable or not interested in like the Hmong with me. And in the end, God changes the situation from one of the worst to be the greatest blessing in your life.