

A Two-Year Adventure

by Rusty Bennett

It is times like now when I sit sweating in 90 degree weather, that I ask the Lord, "Why did you send me to Taiwan? Don't you need me in Alaska right now?" It is the same question that I ask myself when I am riding my bike and a gravel truck almost hits me. Of course, that happens almost everyday. The drivers always warn you about three feet behind you by blasting their horns. I figure I have three options: 1) die of a heart attack from the surprise of the situation, 2) get run over, or 3) move out of the way! My favorite is the later one.

Then, of course, there is the matter of eating. Every foreign country has their own methods and customs of eating. Here in Taiwan, since this is China, we eat with chopsticks. It took my hands a good three months to develop the muscles needed to operate these wonderful eating utensils. In the process, I lost a staggering 7 pounds. What a weight loss system!

Then there is the issue of language. I have had many conversations with the Lord about my learning of the language. Language is the basic building block of every society. Without it there is no unity, no community and no corporation. I can not understand that if the Lord wanted me here, why did He not give me a sudden revelation of the Chinese language. But, He since doesn't work that way, I continue to struggle to learn a little everyday.

Now after saying all this, let me say emphatically that I love Taiwan. I have been here for seven months and each day has brought a new adventure. A year ago, I would never have thought I would be here now as a short term missionary through the journeyman program of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. As a matter of fact, a year ago I was in my senior year in college and the thought that was invading my mind was, "What next?"

At Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama, I was heavily involved in the Baptist Campus Ministry. I learned first hand through short term mission trips and a summer mission experience in Spain, what missions was all about. I was able to meet and work with people of all types of backgrounds, cultures and languages. I was able to see a little of what God is doing throughout our world. I was able to play just a little part in it. Coming back from Spain, I was on a spiritual high. I thought that after my senior year I would go somewhere and do short term missions for two years. But, as the year progressed, I looked more and more at graduate schools. My mind and heart wondered if missions right now was the thing to do. Two years is such a long time! Some of my friends could have their master's degrees by then! I started to look at seminary and, then again, at other institutions, but nothing really seemed right. So, I decided as a last resort to apply through the Foreign Mission Board to be a short term missionary. On the last possible day to turn the information in, I sent it off and thus began the process. After that, it was all down hill. Within four months, I was in Taiwan and I was sure it was the right thing to do.

My assignment in Taiwan is to work with the Mandarin Baptist Church in Ping Tung teaching English to students. It is ironic that I really did not want to do student work.

Now I am! And what a joy it is! The Lord has opened up a host of opportunities for the sharing of the gospel through the classes and students He has brought to me. I must admit I was a bit overwhelmed when 95 students showed up for my first class. Everyone asked me, "What are you going to do?" I replied, "Pray!" Through the English classes the Lord has opened up a Bible study class for high school students in my home. *They* came to *me* and asked me to teach it. We have a good group of 15 students coming every week. Out of the group, only one of the students is a Christian. God is moving here in Ping Tung among the students! It overwhelms me with joy to think that he has allowed me to be a part of it! I am thankful that I committed myself to do what He wanted me to do.

Through these classes I have started to develop some wonderful relationships. Friendships that are now forming are a direct result of the ministry God has given me.

As a short-term missionary, sometimes I am limited in the things I can do. For example, with my language limitations all my work is in English, but this frees up the career missionaries to do more work using their Chinese language. Often, the relationships that I have been able to form are because of my ability to speak English. What is exciting is when that relationship turns into a good friendship as we learn about each other and accept each other for who we are. Building these types of friendships opens natural doors of opportunity to share the Gospel and to show the love of Christ.

Along with the relationships with the nationals, as a short-termer I have been blessed by a wonderful mission family. To work along side them and to be a team player, is both rewarding and educational. I realized that my own view of missionaries was distorted. It was a view that churches back home display, that missionaries are *Super Christians* with a *Super Call* from God to evangelize the world. Actually, missionaries are just people like you and me stepping forward in obedience to a call from God. They are people like me struggling to understand, watch faithfully and follow our Master.

As I laugh at the things that happen to me, I remind myself how fortunate I am. Also, I think how fortunate all dedicated Christians are. For when we say "YES!" to the Lord, suddenly there is freedom in our lives. No longer are we doing what we want to do, but what He wants us to do. We can not begin to imagine the incredible things God will bring into our lives when we finally submit totally to him and to the following of His will.

Finally, I have learned that whatever my situation is, I must not lose focus of the God that makes my paths. Focusing on His love makes my relationship with Him the most important thing. My short term missions experience has opened my world to what God is doing. Together, we have faced fears, adventures and new situations. God has allowed me to play a role for just a little while through short-term missions. The incredible thing is the rewards are eternal!