



30 days of prayer for the

Shan

About this Prayer Guide

WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

James 5:16b-18 says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.” Through Elijah’s prayers the people were shown that God is the one true God (1 Kings 18:24, 37).

The majority of the Shan do not know about Jesus. Many live in places difficult to reach. Other Shan, who have heard about God, usually have other kinds of barriers to overcome before they can follow Jesus. Through our prayers, we trust that our Lord Almighty will remove anything that prevents the Shan from believing in Christ and reach those who seem unreachable. We trust that God will reveal Himself to the Shan as the one true God.

This guide provides a glimpse into the culture and daily life of the Shan people, so they will become names and faces to you. We hope you will begin to understand more about the Shan and know how better to pray for them.

30 Days of Prayer for the Shan

Ask God to touch your heart as you pray for the Shan.

Continue this powerful ministry of prayer by joining with others in praying for specific needs and celebrating God’s work as He brings the Shan to Himself. Sign up to receive prayer updates and praises at: shanprayer@gmail.com

If you would like more copies of this prayer guide, please contact: shanprayer@gmail.com

Cover design, and prayer guide design and layout by: Philip Carlson philcdesign@gmail.com



HOW CAN IT BE USED?

This prayer guide is a resource for you and can be used in many different ways. Here are just a few ideas:

- *Personally devote one month to pray for the Shan, reading a new entry each day and meditating on the verses provided.*
- *During Sunday school, small group, or family devotion have a time of reading an entry and praying together.*
- *Meet with a friend or co-worker over lunch once a week and pray for the Shan during that time.*
- *Exercise by going on a walk with a friend or spouse, reading one entry before going, then praying for the Shan as you walk together.*

Our desire and prayer is that the Shan will be saved (Romans 10:1), and we hope this will become your desire and prayer, too. We want to wrestle in prayer for the Shan believers as well, that they “may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Colossians 4:12). We also pray that if you choose to use this guide and really begin interceding for the Shan, God will show you more of His heart - a heart for all people to know, love and worship Him.

Join us now in praying for the Shan, who will one day also be a part of that great multitude, worshiping our God who sits upon the throne (Revelation 7:9-10).

All Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical photocopy, recording, or other) without obtaining prior permission from: shanprayer@gmail.com

All photographs in this prayer guide are used with the permission of the photographers. All rights reserved.



Elderly Shan villagers gather at the temple to make merit and recite Buddhist prayers.

*Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.' -John 14:6*

1

BORDERLINE BUDDHIST

“To be Shan is to be Buddhist,” or so the saying goes. Bi Mwe has been a Buddhist her whole life. She visits the village temple regularly. Yet, even as she does, she also attends the fledgling church that meets in her house. Bi Mwe has been open to Christ since her son, Sai Sam, became a believer last year.

It was a struggle for Sai Sam to accept Christ because Christians do not have physical idols to worship. Since believing in Jesus, he is no longer consumed with worry. He knows the God he now worships will provide. The past year, Bi Mwe has seen many changes in her son’s life that have drawn her closer to faith.

When asked about her beliefs, Bi Mwe says, “Sometimes I’m Christian and sometimes I’m Buddhist.” She believes in the power of God, though she herself has never prayed to him. She has seen the Lord answer prayers on behalf of her son and other believers. She even says she understands the Bible and believes that it is the truth. Yet because her identity lies with her culture, she is unwilling to leave Buddhism. Clinging to what she knows, she has simply added Christ to her collection.

PRAY FOR:

- God to reveal the exclusivity of the Gospel to those, like Bi Mwe, who see Christ as one among many gods (Josh. 24:15, Isa. 45:18,19).
- Those who are culturally Buddhist to be willing to leave everything behind in order to follow Christ (Luke 9:23,24).



Shan radio broadcasts reach into areas where there are no churches and missionaries cannot go.

OVER THE AIRWAVES

A monk, Wisuta, was learning English through Bible stories. He was on the verge of following Jesus just before the protests in Burma. Even though innocent, he was arrested. He spent seven days in a one-room jail cell with no toilet, wearing only the robe on his back and receiving rice once a day. Upon his release, he fled to his hometown in Shan State. Before he arrived, he asked a missionary friend to meet him in a nearby city. When they met they shared a heartfelt reunion. The missionary gave Wisuta a small radio and told him to listen to a radio broadcast that aired every morning sharing Bible stories in the Shan language. Wisuta later told his friend that while he was in the village he listened to this broadcast every day. Wisuta has now come to follow Jesus.

Another Shan man, Sai Song, also now follows Jesus. He lives in a village many miles from the nearest church. It is not often that he can meet with other believers, as the other villagers are Buddhist. Sai Song listens to the radio broadcasts though. Through these broadcasts believers in villages with no church can receive encouragement and the Gospel is also able to reach every household in Shan State. Lives are being changed through the faithful preaching of the Word of God!

PRAY FOR:

- God to use the broadcasts to reach the Shan people with the truth of Jesus (Rom. 10:14).
- Believers in villages with no church to be encouraged by these broadcasts and share with others around them (Eph. 6:19).



*A Free Burma Ranger medic treats a Shan boy inside Shan State, where access to health care and medication is extremely limited. *Photo courtesy of Free Burma Rangers*

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. -Matthew 4:23

3

GOD BECAME MORE REAL

Sai Leng had followed Christ at the age of 13, but then drifted away under the pressure of his peers and community. At 16, Sai Leng suffered two types of malaria at the same time. The disease devastated his kidneys and he spent two weeks in the intensive care unit in his local hospital. His family did not have the money for the dialysis that the doctors wanted to do. Many Shan die as a result of malaria because they do not have enough money to cover the medical costs.

God became more real as Sai Leng drew closer to death. The leader of the church prepared two sermons to be preached at Sai Leng's funeral, but the leaders also prayed for healing and anointed him with oil. They committed the entire balance of the church account to help Sai Leng, donating about 30% of the money needed for the medical treatment. Then a non-government organization contacted by the doctors covered the rest of the cost.

As he witnessed answered prayers and God healed his body, Sai Leng rededicated his life to the Lord following his recovery. After attending Bible College for one year, he began serving in the local church as a preacher and Sunday School teacher.

PRAY FOR:

- God's healing mercy to work among the Shan who are sick (Matt. 4:23).
- Local churches to be eager and confident in reaching out in love to the needy community (Tit. 2:13b-14).



A Shan migrant worker rests from work on an tangerine orchard near the Burma border. Many lonely Shan men seek comfort in alcohol and drugs.

...Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst. -John 4:13-14a

4

MY ONLY FRIEND

Sai Tip is unlike most of his friends. He does not drink. He lost his father and uncle to alcohol. Both died of liver disease. Sai Tip has seen first-hand the effects of alcohol and chooses never to drink.

Sai Lao, another young man, goes to the bar several times a week. One rainy night, he was drinking with some friends. When asked how he felt when it rained he said, "It makes me feel lonely, but I always have this friend." He was referring to his beer glass.

Sai Kham is a well-known singer among the Shan. He has performed in many places, including other countries. Many people see him as a role model. This past year people began to see his strength was failing. His concerts were held less and less. At his last concert, the people could see Sai Kham was clearly dying. He could barely sing and hold his guitar. His energy had all but left him. After only a few more weeks, he was dead. Cause of death: liver disease. People thought Sai Kham had everything. He and many others try to escape the loneliness, sorrow, and difficult reality of daily life through alcohol. They think alcohol makes them stronger and will never fail. Unfortunately, this friend kills them.

PRAY FOR:

- Those who find solace in drinking to choose to turn from alcohol and drink from the fountain of life (Psa. 36:8-9).
- The Shan to see that they can have abundant life in Jesus, the life-giving and faithful Friend (John 15:15).



A simple Shan church struggles to survive in Shan State.

CHOPPED UP AND CLAMPED DOWN

Curious about God, Nang Mae decided to attend a Bible study in her neighbor's house. Furious with his wife's newfound interest in God, her husband stormed into the middle of the meeting with a gun. Although no one was hurt, Nang Mae never went again. She remains at home with the chopped up remains of her Bible, which her husband ripped to shreds.

Faced with interrogation from the local authorities, threats to his church building, and the inability to get permission to repair damage from vandalism, a pastor in Burma does not evangelize much anymore. His church members, also harassed by the authorities and discriminated against by other villagers, feel too oppressed to offer any hope to others. The neighbors, afraid of what conversion would mean for their own safety and livelihood, remain leery of this strange religion.

Although the government allows this church to exist, it has refused church growth. Its membership cannot expand beyond its original size or the government will “clamp down” in a powerful way.

Despite persecution that growing churches face in Burma, some, encouraged by the Word of God and the example set by the early church, remember to “pray a lot and go out in faith.”

PRAY FOR:

- Divine strength and endurance for the believers as they experience persecution from threatening communities (Acts 12:3-11).
- God to grant boldness to believers to speak and act upon their faith with conviction (Acts 4:29-31).



Trapped between Thailand and Burma, this stateless orphan has nowhere to go and little hope for the future.

...even though he did not know where he was going... he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. -Hebrews 11:8b, 10

6

WHERE DO I BELONG?

“The Thai say I am Burmese, but the Burmese say that I am Shan. So where do I go?” You could see the frustration in Sao’s face. Most of the Shan living in this border village arrived after the Burma army confiscated their land. They now live in Thailand, a new country and a new place, trying to “start life all over again.”

Still, there have not been any sure prospects in Thailand, “the land of the free.” The Thai government refuses to afford these aliens with refugee or resident status, which precludes them from owning land or receiving a public education. There are also many difficulties in getting health care. These Shan are essentially stateless people and one misstep (or one displeased employer) can lead to forced deportation.

Even so, the hardships associated with life in Thailand are far less than those in Burma. As Sao puts it, “My land has been seized and my buffalo killed. If I went back to Burma now, the army will rape my wife and force me into hard labor.”

PRAY FOR:

- The government in Burma to cease its oppressive policies toward the Shan (Psa. 140:1, Isa. 60:18, Matt. 5:44).
- Thailand to extend compassion and provide basic assistance to the Shan who cross its borders (Lev. 19:33-34).
- The Shan to seek citizenship status in the Kingdom of God (Heb. 11:8-10).



This dried floral arrangement was blessed by the spirit doctor and now hangs in this doorway to keep bad spirits away.

PLEASING AND APPEASING

“There are spirits everywhere,” explained Phai-lin, a Shan woman living in Thailand. To exemplify this, she pointed all around the room – near the door, on the shelves, and even upstairs. Fortunately for her, not all spirits are evil. It is the evil spirits that “can make a person not well,” she says.

Phai-lin noted that many things could be done to ward off these evil spirits. For example, one can offer small bowls of rice along with a small candle all around the home – in the corners, near the gate or on a shelf – to win their favor with food. In April and May, each household may also gather a floral arrangement and take it to the spirit doctor. Once it is blessed, it is hung upside down above the doorway to dry. It remains there until the next year to keep anything bad out of the house.

Some Shan, when they buy a new vehicle, will take it to the main spirit house and offer incense to the spirits. Once finished, they tie on red and white strings to protect themselves from danger. Sai Win has been driving his motorbike for three years now with his red ribbon attached to the front. He says it has kept him safe all these years. Many Shan believe that their health and safety depends on appeasing the spirits.

PRAY FOR:

- Freedom for the Shan from having to appease the spirits; that they would instead live lives of courage and peace through God’s Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7).
- The Shan to know Jesus, who alone has power over spirits (Col. 1:15,16).



Most Shan children grow up without ever having the chance to learn to read and write their own language.

TEACH TO SURVIVE

Yom is unlike his other friends in that he has learned the Shan script. Since government schools would never provide the opportunity to learn Shan, every summer vacation his parents sent him to the monastery. There he was able to learn from monks and visiting teachers who would teach the Shan script and other subjects. Although very tired some nights, Yom enjoyed every moment in the classroom. He never regrets learning his heart language.

Yom has now become a Shan language teacher. He travels throughout Burma, Thailand, China and sometimes India to teach. When asked why he does this he says, "If the Shan are to survive and their culture preserved, we must learn our language. We need to keep it and use it." Yom's vision is to see Shan State prosper and his people's knowledge to grow.

Illiteracy is high among the Shan and obstacles to overcome this issue differ in each place. Currently, discipleship is generally done through literary means, as are many evangelism efforts. The church must consider the Shan people's oral culture in addition to the problem of illiteracy in order for true growth to take place in the body of Christ.

PRAY FOR:

- Opportunities for Shan to learn and preserve their language, and for God to use these things to advance His Kingdom (Col. 3:23).
- Those ministering among the Shan to make necessary changes in communicating the Gospel and in discipleship so as to meet the needs of this oral people (Deut. 6:6-9, 31:19).



Steeped in a culture of religion, it is hard for many Shan to make the change to a relationship with the living God.

RELIGION OR RELATIONSHIP?

A widowed mother lives with her eight children in an urban area in Burma. Although the mother used to be a Christian, when she met her husband she decided to become Buddhist. Since her wedding day she has learned the ways of Buddha and has thus raised her children to be Buddhists.

Nang Seing is a young girl attending college. When asked about her religion she says, "I am Buddhist and Christian. My father is Buddhist and my mother is Christian." Nang Seing celebrates the holidays of both faiths. When she graduated from high school she had the monks from the monastery and the pastors from her church come to her house. They both prayed and offered blessings to the household. Nang Seing has no problem saying she follows both faiths.

As most Shan equate their culture and heritage with Buddhism, it is apparent that this worldview is affecting the already existing Shan Christian community. The weak congregations easily adopt unbiblical customs and beliefs. Unfortunately, faith for some Shan Christians is mere religion rather than a relationship with Jesus Christ.

PRAY FOR:

- Revival among the existing Shan church, that they would seek Christ with their whole lives and teach their children to also seek Christ (Rev. 3:16).
- The Shan to realize the real inheritance they have in Christ when they believe and follow Him alone (1 Cor. 3).



Boi Sang Long, like most Shan festivals, is full of celebration, dancing and good food.

“Happy New Year!” is heard miles away as the Shan welcome the new year according to the Shan lunar calendar. With much singing, dancing and laughter, Shan can be seen celebrating together from place to place. Stage shows are set up for traditional dancing, singing and acting. In Burma, it is the one time of year when the Shan are allowed to gather in such large groups.

April arrives with Boi Sang Long - a festival for boys entering the monastery as novices. The entire community participates in the festivities. Adults take turns carrying the boys on their shoulders as they parade around the village. Finally, the boys are brought before the abbot who becomes their guide in the monkhood, whether it is for a few days or many years. Water Festival immediately follows and much rejoicing is heard in the streets as people throw water over each other in an effort to wash away previous sins.

Several months later, the Shan enter a special time of abstention and consecration for Buddhist Lent. For roughly three months, the Shan will refrain from certain activities but will spend extra time gathered in the temples to offer gifts, recite Buddhist scriptures, repeat prayers and listen to monks preaching. To mark the end of Buddhist Lent, there is a time to ask for forgiveness from elders, who in turn will give a blessing.

PRAY FOR:

- The Shan to rejoice in the everlasting joy of the Lord (Neh. 12:43).
- God to redeem the festivals of the Shan for His glory as He did for Judah (Zech. 8:18-23).



Makeshift camps such as these are found all over northern Thailand where Shan construction workers make their temporary homes.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. -Psalm 139:7-8

11

ON THE MOVE

“Our house church is always in flux,” said the house church leader. “We meet Shan that come from the village looking for more education or work. Then they move to either another city or country searching for money to send home. Some weeks our house church is full and then the next time there are just a few. We often do not know when a friend has moved or where!”

Nam took the six-hour bus ride from her village to a larger city to study English and other subjects. Nam met with several foreign believers that came to her English school and she told them she was interested in hearing more about Jesus. They invited her to study the Bible but she was called back to her village to help in the rice fields before having a chance to hear the Gospel. Local believers tried to follow up on Nam but were unable to contact her as she had already moved again.

As the Shan search for work and education, which are not readily available in Shan State, they travel around Burma and often to other countries. With many Shan constantly on the move the church faces great challenges regarding evangelism and discipleship.

PRAY FOR:

- The Shan to come into contact with believers as they travel (Acts 8:35).
- Praise God for His presence in all the world (Psa. 139:7-8).
- Those who hear about Jesus to believe in Him and stay strong in their faith when far away from other believers (Acts 18:26-28).



Forced by poverty and oppression to leave their traditional homes and lifestyles, many Shan face challenges and temptations in adjusting to a new life in the modern world.

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. -Philippians 3:8

CHALLENGE TO TRADITION

For thousands of years, the Shan have lived in the isolated mountain valleys of Shan State in rice-growing villages undisturbed by the modern world. Many of these villages now lie deserted. Some are left with only the very old and very young as others go in search of jobs or education. The Shan Diaspora is huge and spread out over many nations. As they travel and learn new modern ways, a clash of worlds occurs.

Many Shan in foreign countries are open to the Gospel because they are already in the process of change, but in Shan State traditions often run very deep. This can be a hindrance to the Gospel, but so can many so-called “modern” ways. Many Shan are exposed to drugs, alcohol, prostitution, materialism, and more. Being away from their support system, encountering these alluring yet harmful ways, they often give in to them.

Some families from Shan State are forced to flee to Thailand and face a completely different world. They may feel their identity is threatened, causing some to cling even more strongly to their traditions. Going to other countries forces the Shan to face many challenges to their traditional ways.

PRAY FOR:

- Openness to the Gospel among the elderly and those in Shan State (Mark 4:20).
- The Shan, as they encounter new modern ways, to encounter God and desire Him more than the pleasures of this world (Phil. 3:8).



Many Shan children grow up without knowing the love of their parents.

LEFT THE GIRLS BEHIND

Their drunken and drug-addicted father often abused their mother, who worked to support the family. He regularly demanded money for his drug and alcohol addiction. When the mother could not give him any money one day, he ran after her with a large kitchen knife threatening to kill her. She ran and “did not look back,” leaving her three young daughters behind.

A neighbor found the three-year old twins, Nang Nim and Nang Aye, along with their younger sister of eight months, Nang Kham, at home alone sometime later. Filled with compassion for them but unable to care for them herself, she took them to an orphanage nearby.

Unable to find a way out of poverty, hopelessness, and desperation, Shan families of all faiths suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, and broken homes. Heroin, methamphetamines, and alcohol are readily available and cheap. Jobs, especially legal ones and even meagerly paying jobs, are scarcely available. The local church, reeling with the same problems itself, tries to reach out with love and hope through orphanages, boarding homes for students, and after-school programs for children.

PRAY FOR:

- Churches to show compassion and active support of neighboring orphanages and street children (Matt. 10:42).
- God to be with those broken families who are unwilling or unable to provide for their children (Deut. 10:18).



AIDS can spread quickly among migrant workers who live in poor conditions away from their families, like in this camp in Thailand.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. -Isaiah 53:5

14

JUST DIAGNOSED

The Shan are very industrious and creative in finding work but often it means they must be away from their families for long periods of time. While traveling and working away from home, Sai Aung, a young married man, contracted HIV while injecting heroin with a contaminated needle. Once he was home, he unknowingly passed it to his wife, who gave birth a year later to their first child, a son. In their village, there are at least six other families with one or more family members who have contracted HIV/AIDS while traveling for work.

Three years after contracting HIV, Sai Aung died from pneumonia. Shortly after his death, Sai Aung's wife passed away from severe diarrhea; her body, being weakened from HIV, was unable to fight this common health problem. Depending on where the Shan live, HIV medicine can be hard to find and also expensive. An HIV positive person living in certain areas may not live longer than three or four years.

Sai Aung's relatives are now caring for his three-year-old son. He has just been diagnosed as HIV positive.

PRAY FOR:

- The Shan to be faithful to their spouses and make wise decisions as they travel and work far away from home (Heb. 13:4).
- Available and affordable medicine and for Christian doctors to share about Jesus as they treat their patients (Luke 5:31).
- Believers to show love to those who are HIV positive (Matt. 25:42-46).

15

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust
in the name of the LORD our God. -Psalm 20:7*

FIGHTING FOR WHAT?

Shan State has many different ethnic militias and armies. The Burmese army is largely viewed as an army of occupation and controls the main towns. In the countryside, different armed groups control the land, depending on ethnic grouping, like the Wa, or business interests such as timber or drugs. Some groups have ceasefire agreements with the Burmese military government. Of the two main Shan State army groupings, which have grown up with entirely separate ideological backgrounds, it is the Shan State Army South SSA (S) which is still in conflict with the Burmese.

Some Shan are clearly fighting for independence; others have been displaced and have nowhere else to go. Many Shan leave Shan State in order to leave a situation where they are taxed by the Burmese military, in addition to whichever other military grouping holds sway in their particular area.

“If a Shan State Army soldier becomes a Christian he will be punished,” the SSA officer stated with stern conviction. Ten years later the situation has changed and many have started to show an interest in the Gospel. Several men who have SSA military backgrounds have come to Christ.

PRAY FOR:

- God to do a deep work in the lives of all those who have taken up arms (Prov. 11:3).
- Christians within the various military groupings to have integrity and wisdom (Phil. 2:15).
- Those in authority to show mercy as they carry out their duties (Hos. 6:6).



Shan soldiers prepare for battle during their daily drills.

GOD'S WORD TO US

Nang Mwe is a Shan Buddhist who attends a Bible study with other Shan Buddhists. They meet every week to sing songs, learn about God, and read the Bible. When it comes time to read the Bible in Shan she cannot understand because she has never learned the Shan script. Her friends try to help, but she is not literate in Shan.

Sai Mao attends the same Bible study as Nang Mwe. He can read and write both in Shan and English. Reading the Bible in Shan is done slowly and with many mistakes; his comprehension is quite limited. If he reads the Bible in English, however, he reads with excitement and great understanding. When asked why this is so, he says, “Oh, I like the English Bible; it’s easy to understand. The Shan Bible is too difficult to read.”

Nang Mwe and Sai Mao are like many Shan who try to read the Shan Bible. They may be very interested in reading it, but have great difficulty in understanding what is being said. The wording is often long and complicated, the language is outdated, and the sentences are usually far too complex. Many of the words used are known only to those from a church background and not geared toward searching Buddhists.

PRAY FOR:

- The Shan church and missionaries to work together in unity and holiness as they develop a more understandable Bible (1 Pet. 1:22-2:2).
- Interested Buddhists to continue to be transformed by the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17,18).



Like this boy looking in from the outside, some Shan can read the Bible but not understand it. The Shan need a Bible which is written in a form that Buddhists can understand.

17

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. -Psalm 139:9-10

BUT THEN THEY LEFT

Many students in Burma are eager to learn English in order to go abroad. It is not difficult to start a class. Find a few Shan students learning English and tell them English will be taught for free; they will bring more of their Shan friends and then the class begins. Many are even interested in learning about the Bible through English.

Sai Bi and Sai Sai were two young men like this. They were faithful in coming to learn, and when a special English Bible class began, they fervently attended. They were eager to learn and quickly began to improve. One day Sai Bi was asked, "Do you believe in Jesus?" His response was, "Yes, I believe, but I can't follow just yet." Sai Sai's heart was also open. But then they left. Opportunities arose for them to go abroad and they went - one went to Singapore and the other Dubai.

Often, just when students are beginning to respond to the Gospel, they end up moving away. Some go to Thailand but many others go elsewhere and they never come back. In Singapore, Dubai, and other places, those with a heart for the Shan are few to none.

PRAY FOR:

- God to continue to reach these students, even if it seems they have been lost, and call them back to Burma to serve Him (Jer. 1:4-8).
- God to call people to specific countries to reach the Shan (Matt. 9:37-38).



Many young Shan are interested in the Gospel but never have the chance to really understand it. Dressed in traditional costume, these young men prepare for a performance.

SHE CANNOT CONTROL HER OWN BODY

When the spirit is in her, she is unaware of her surroundings; she cannot control her own body. Her heart pulsates and she experiences a sensation of dying before and after the spirit enters her. Seng Merng's story began when a spirit came to her and called her, an ordinary woman, to be a medium. Since she was in good health at that time, she did not want a spirit to overtake her body. In response, she challenged the spirit to take her car away from her. A few days later, she was in a car accident and temporarily paralyzed. When the paralysis was gone she surrendered her body and mind to the spirit.

To worship the spirit and maintain her power as a medium, Seng Merng must follow the precepts of Buddhism, which includes abstinence from drugs, sex, lying and stealing. Additional rules blur the lines between Buddhism and animism, both of which submit to idolatry.

Shan people go to mediums to learn about their health and future. The cost is that the spirit demands to be worshiped. As a medium, Seng Merng not only has a way to make some money but she is also feared and respected by her community. Her dependence on the spirit continues to grow and she feels that she cannot live without it.

PRAY FOR:

- The Lord to bring freedom to those enslaved to evil spirits (Mark 3:11).
- God to show Himself as sovereign so the Shan will no longer live in fear of evil spirits (Acts 16:16-18).



A spirit doctor reads a chant during a spirit-appeasement ceremony.

SALVATION BY WORKS

“Making merit is like a business. In a business, you have to make money in order to spend money. Merit is the same. If you run out of merit, you have to make more,” said a highly respected monk in Shan State.

There are many ways a person can make merit: bringing food to monks, sweeping leaves from temple grounds, becoming a monk, reciting prayers before the Buddha shrine, giving to beggars, and doing other good deeds. What is this merit good for? It determines if one can reach nirvana, the place of non-existence. If a person does not have enough merit to make it to nirvana, they must come back again to earth in another life and make more merit.

Merit not only can be made for oneself but also for others. Many monks join the monkhood because of their parents. One very young monk explained, “I became a monk so that when I die my parents can hold my robe and go to ‘heaven.’ My father can gain merit himself by becoming a monk, but my mother cannot become a monk, so she will hold onto my robe.” By spending time at the monastery as a monk, he believes he can make merit for his mother.

PRAY FOR:

- God to reveal the concept of His grace to the Shan (Heb. 7:26-27, Rom. 11:5-6).
- The Shan to realize that no amount of merit can ever amount to salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).
- The Shan to know the hope of salvation that is found only in Christ (Acts 4:12).



Shan boys prepare for the monkhood by dressing up as princes and renouncing all to join the monastery. This is a rite of passage and a way to gain merit.

BETWEEN THE LINES

I had never been in a situation like this before: hiking with an armed guard through a hostile jungle, separated from everything familiar. I did not know my way home and I was not sure where I was headed.

“We’re almost there,” my escort whispered. After four hours of hiking, the path turned. Below on the neighboring hilltop my destination was revealed: a camp of 1,500 Shan IDPs (Internally Displaced People) who lived between the lines. Forced out of Burma and not granted access into Thailand, they had no other place to go.

Over the next few days, I had many conversations. One young man retold the story of being separated from his parents when his village was attacked. He now studies with other boys at a makeshift school in the camp. Another young soldier had enlisted with a small resistance force that trained daily to defend the camp. His parents had died and this was his new family. Forging a new home from nothing is a difficult reality, yet it is an increasing problem for Shan who continue to be forcibly relocated or internally displaced by the Burmese army.

PRAY FOR:

- The Lord to reach those between the lines by sending the hope of the Gospel through Shan Christians (2 Cor. 10:15-16).
- Shan families to make the Lord their trust as they face many injustices and hardships (Psa. 40:1-4).



Shan IDPs (Internally Displaced People) walk the narrow ridges of a camp set up to safe-guard Shan who fled from the Burma Army, leaving their homes in Shan State.

21

For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. -Acts 17:23

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH?

“We love to follow Jesus here in Thailand, but in our home village we can’t,” said a family who was returning to Shan State. They knew of no other believers in their village in Burma, and it was clear the pressure to follow Buddhist rituals would be great. Many Shan perceive Christianity negatively, as they understand it to be a foreign religion. To overcome this difficulty, Shan believers must learn to express their faith in a distinctly Shan way, redeeming Shan culture to Christ by identifying and utilizing the keys God has put there.

An example is the Kan Taw festival - a time when young people seek forgiveness and blessing from their elders. The practice of restoring relationship and blessing could be used by the church to share with Buddhist Shan that these concepts are also important to believers. Following Christ needs to be presented without all the Western cultural baggage that clings to existing churches, and in a way that expresses Shan culture. Communicating the Gospel and planting churches in this way would be very effective in bringing Shan to Christ.

PRAY FOR:

- Believers to be bold in embracing their culture in a way that is faithful to Christ (Heb. 3:5-6).
- Festivals and traditions such as Kan Taw to be door openers for people to come to faith (John 7:38).



Their culture and festivals are very important to the Shan, such as the Kan Taw festival being celebrated here. The Gospel needs to be communicated in a way that keeps Shan culture alive.

WHAT TIME IS CHURCH?

Kher came to Thailand to find work and came to the Lord through a relative. In Shan State, his family owned a farm. Now landless, Kher works very hard, seven days a week, in a rice mill to support his wife and daughter. Sometimes he gets a break when the weather is bad and they cannot dry the rice in the sun. Because of his long and unpredictable hours he rarely has a chance to interact with the Thai community he lives in, and therefore has not learned to speak Thai. His older sister Kham lives with them and is also a believer, attending a Thai church many miles away. She encourages Kher to go too, but how can he when he works nearly every Sunday and does not understand Thai?

Kher loves the Lord and since putting his trust in Him experiences much joy and peace. Many new Shan believers find themselves in the same position as Kher, isolated from the Christian community by geography, language, social status, culture and occupation. They desperately need a form of church that is able to adapt to their lifestyle and needs. Lay-led evening house churches in the Shan language could help accomplish this.

PRAY FOR:

- Local non-Shan believers who are reaching out to the Shan, to understand their situation and be willing to adapt their model of church to suit the needs of the Shan in those areas (Rom. 14:13).
- Believing Shan who are not a part of any kind of church to be empowered to start one in their house with their family and neighbors (Heb. 10:24-25).



*A Shan man take a short break during the long hours
in a tangerine orchard near the Burma border.*

A COSTLY DECISION

He knew there would be a price to pay. But he had to do it. As he sat there with pounding heart, he knew following Jesus with his whole life was the only way to find what he had been looking for all these years. The missionaries asked him, “Are you prepared for your family to be angry with you? Will you stand by your faith when they reject you?” Jai was able to answer yes.

Jai had lived in a monastery as a monk to seek for and satisfy his longing for spiritual truth and enlightenment. He came to Thailand desperate for a job, and fell in love with a young Shan woman who loved Jesus. After they married he told her he did not want to talk about anything religious, but he watched her life. He was later baptized.

A week after being baptized, Jai went back to his family. They were even angrier than he had anticipated. They yelled at his wife and chased her away, telling her to never come back. They took away his phone and locked him in a room for weeks. They threatened him and told him he had to renounce his faith or they would never forgive him.

Eventually Jai escaped and was reunited with his wife. He stands firm in his faith.

PRAY FOR:

- New Shan believers to stand firm as they face persecution and threats (Phil. 1:27-30).
- Persecutors to see Christ’s light in the lives of Christians and be changed by it (Matt. 5:16).



Many Shan pay a high price for their faith, such as this former spirit doctor who came to faith many years ago.

CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

The road to the village of Loi Faa is nearly impassable in rainy season and still difficult during the rest of the year. To get there you either ride a motorbike for an hour then walk through the jungle for another hour, or walk three hours through mud. The Shan in Loi Faa are just some of the hundreds of thousands of IDPs (Internally Displaced People) within Burma. They fled various villages due to armed conflict, were forced off their land by the Burmese Army, or were kicked out because they believe in Christ.

More Shan villages beyond Loi Faa wait to hear about Jesus, but with no roads and still being within the fighting area, foreigners are not allowed to go there. Local believers are also hesitant about hiking through the jungle into armed conflict and through areas planted with land mines.

There are many people in the world who have never heard about Jesus at all because it is physically difficult to reach them. Many Shan have never heard of Jesus because they live in hard to reach, and often war-torn, places.

PRAY FOR:

- More people to be willing to take risks, doing whatever it takes to bring the Good News to those who have not heard in difficult to reach places. Praise God for those who are already doing this (Rom. 10:14-15).
- Peace and infrastructure to reach the Shan (John 16:33).



Lush jungles, high mountains and poor infrastructure make isolated areas of Shan State nearly impossible to reach.

25

The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you.' -Luke 2:10-11

A REASON TO CELEBRATE

“Is Christmas the American New Year?” Kham asked. She and some other Shan had been invited to a Christmas party. They had all heard of the holiday but had no idea why it was celebrated and had never heard of Jesus. They were excited to learn carols, read the Christmas story and watch a drama showing why Jesus came to earth.

As people who love festivals, many Shan are curious about Christmas and how it is celebrated. Most who live in larger cities have heard carols, seen Christmas trees in movies or stores, and watched Christians celebrate. This makes Christmas time a great opportunity to throw a party to explain the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“We invited 15 people to our Christmas party,” said one missionary, “but 35 showed up! We had an awesome time singing, talking and eating together. They all enjoyed reading about Christmas in their own language after hearing so much English. Afterwards, we invited all who wanted to hear more about Jesus to a Bible study. Lots of our friends came and ten months later three Shan were baptized.”

PRAY FOR:

- The Shan to realize this “good news of great joy” is for them, too (Luke 2:10).
- Creative, meaningful Christmas outreaches and effective follow-up to all who hear the story of Christ's birth (1 Thess. 3:2).
- The Holy Spirit to guide the Shan to accept God's offer of salvation (1 Thess. 1:4-5a).



Shan children dress up as angels in a Christmas celebration, where many hear the Gospel for the first time.

HOPE OF A BETTER LIFE

Sai Fa was a bright young man with many dreams for his future. But living in Shan State with few opportunities encouraged him to cross the border into Thailand. He left all he had in Burma for hope of a better life. He crossed the border with relative ease, but others are not as fortunate.

Some Shan walk for days through the jungle without food or water, only to find that life on the other side is not always what they heard it would be. Unable to get legal work permits and arriving with nothing, the Shan are often exploited and abused. If they do not pay off the police they may face deportation back to Burma.

There are thousands of Shan who dream of life on the other side of the border. Stories of endless job opportunities and freedoms abound. Many families separate in order to look for work. Some may send money back and others are not heard from again. Even if they find salvation in this new place, often they do not return home.

“Recent estimates indicate that up to two million people from Burma currently reside in Thailand, reflecting one of the largest migration flows in Southeast Asia.”²

PRAY FOR:

- The Shan to look to the Lord to meet and fulfill their hearts' desires (Psa. 37:4).
- Shan families to proclaim God as Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6-7).

² Caouette, T.M. and Pack, M.E. “Refugees International.” December 2002. Aug. 9, 2007.
<http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Caouette&Pack.htm>



Shan refugees flee through the jungle to Thailand, hoping to find a better life.

SHAN SHORTS

Kite is a typical Shan man. At a young age, his father gave him his first tattoo for the purpose of keeping evil spirits from entering his body. Since then, he has received a number of other tattoos. One he has recently received is to keep knives from cutting him. Years ago, just before entering the army, he received a tattoo to keep bullets from leaving the gun that was aimed at him. He believes the one on his back protects him from poison. Some men are almost completely covered with tattoos. From a distance, and when wearing the right clothing, their tattoos provide the illusion that they are wearing shorts.

With the influence of Western culture and modernization, fewer Shan men are seeking this painful practice that Kite has experienced. Even when he was growing up, some of his friends only got them because they wanted to fit in. Today, fewer men are found wearing these dark ink “shorts,” but some still get tattoos to protect them from evil spirits or danger. It is common to see a few marks upon the forehands or arms to ensure such safety.

PRAY FOR:

- Shan to realize that the power for protection only comes from Christ (Psa. 91:14-16).
- The Lord to answer the cries of Shan in distress and for Shan to take refuge, spiritually as well as physically, in the Lord (Psa. 7:1-2).



Covered from head to toe, this man believes his tattoos will protect him from all kinds of evil.

DISTINCTLY SHAN

Nang is a young Shan girl who professes to be a Christian. Weekly, she attends a very formal and traditional Burmese church. When attending these services, Nang joins the congregation in the usual rituals, going through the motions and reciting the words of the liturgy and prayers with no sentiment and then leaves. Nang also participates in Shan festivals on Shan holidays. When she is around other Shan, who are generally Buddhist, she is a very different person. She becomes a vibrant and joyful young woman. She acts as who she really is inside - a Shan.

Over the years, many ethnic groups have reached out to the Shan. Although these groups faithfully preach that God is Lord of all ethnicities, including the Shan, they unfortunately often end up planting churches in accordance with their own culture. Thus, there is a continual need for a distinctly Shan church.

Many Shan believers, like Nang, attend a church that is not in their mother tongue and does not incorporate traditional Shan customs. The result is that believers often leave their culture at the doorsteps of the church. Maintaining their "Shan-ness" is obviously a concern and many Shan worry that if they follow Christ they will no longer be Shan.

PRAY FOR:

- God to show the Shan that they too can worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).
- The Gospel to be presented in culturally appropriate ways so the Shan will realize they can believe in Jesus and still continue to be who God created them to be (Mark 10:45).



There are many beautiful and ancient Shan traditions, such as the bird dance shown here, which could be redeemed for Christ.

29

The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. -2 Timothy 2:2

MOVEMENT POSSIBLE

The excitement was so real you could almost touch it. In the dim light of the single florescent bulb, the circled faces were turned toward Suay, their young relative. She told about God and the gift of His Son. He changed her life and could change theirs too. That night, five Shan prayed to receive Christ. Joy was on their faces and in their hearts. During the next few days they spent time in the Word, in prayer and song and were baptized by Suay.

Three years earlier, Suay had gone to Thailand looking for work. There she came to know Christ. As she grew in her faith, she sensed the Lord calling her to return home to Shan State and share the good news. The Lord then led her to someone whose ministry included the training of Shan in Thailand to go back to their home villages and plant churches. The hope is that these small groups will sustain themselves and spread the good news, planting more house churches leading to a Church Planting Movement (CPM)³.

PRAY FOR:

- The Lord to raise up more Shan who will be trained and sent to plant multiplying house churches in Shan State (Acts 13:2).
- Existing groups to meet faithfully and multiply their witness boldly without the need for an outside pastor (2 Tim. 4:5).

³ A CPM is "a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment." <http://www.imb.org/CPM/Chapter1.htm>



Shan lay believers can be trained to teach their own people, leading to a more effective witness and greater number of believers and churches.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE BODY?

One of their church members had died and the question was, “What should be done with the body?” Fighting and fear from within had brought the small, new village church to virtual extinction and the elders did not know how to deal with the situation.

In Buddhist culture, the deceased remains are cremated. Crowds of people attend the funeral and cremation service. The larger the number in attendance, the better the person was in life, which is a key indicator of their chances of entering nirvana.

The church, not wanting to follow Buddhist practices, decided not to cremate its deceased member. Instead of providing a culturally appropriate alternative, some men of the church took the body, wrapped it in a bamboo mat and lowered it into the ground. Word soon spread that Christians bury people like dogs. By the following Sunday, a majority of the members left the church, fearing that their bodies would be buried in a similar way.

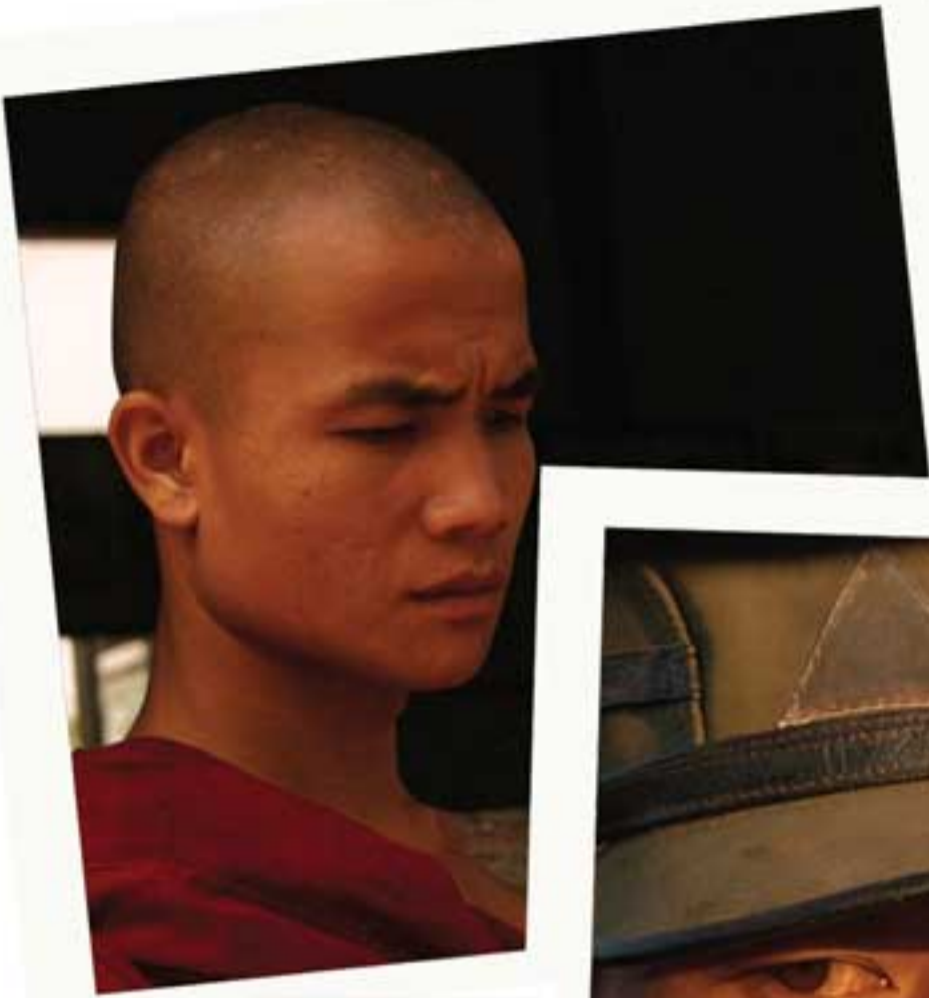
After careful mentorship the church has grown back to its original size a generation later. This village has learned how to conduct a God-honoring and culturally sensitive funeral. They are now able to mentor other churches in how to do this.

PRAY FOR:

- Shan Christians’ primary identity to lie with Christ and not their culture (1 Cor. 5:17).
- The church to be sensitive to Shan social norms as it reaches out to the Shan with the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:22).



A Christian funeral procession for a young boy who died of a brain tumor. Shan believers are learning how to bring honor in a Shan way.



Over the



Church?



Fighting for what?



Teach to su'



My only friend

THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR THE SHAN!