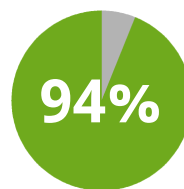


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## Lost in Bangkok - Lessons in Discipleship



DEBBY & KYLE WITMER



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Towards the beginning of August, our family was involved in a conference in Cha-am, which is south of Bangkok. On the way, we spent 2 nights in Bangkok at an Airbnb as we collected our daughter and her friend from the U.S., made preparations for the trip, and spent a “down-time” day before leading worship and participating in the conference.

The trek to the Airbnb was an eye-opening experience for all of us. It was my kind of adventure – set loose in a city to find a new place, with a determination not to get into a taxi. The taxi would have been slower – air conditioned, but slower. The drawback? We were carrying baggage. A lot of baggage.

As I reflect on our adventure, it occurs to me that there were several lessons in the experience that correlate to our journey of discipleship. And therein lies the first lesson: it’s a journey. Most of us want it to be instantaneous. We love Jesus today, we’re just like Him tomorrow. For most of us, however, that’s not how this works. It’s a process. A long process. If we take the time to look, we’ll see this in ourselves. But often, we don’t really want to allow for it in others. We expect immediate change, and instantaneous holiness. During the course of our conference, we were reminded that the community of believers we call the church is supposed to be a safe place that helps us grow. And it often is. However, in my experience, there is very little vulnerability when it comes to sharing our struggles. Let me explain.

So, we took a train to a station that was supposed to be a 22-minute walk from our place to stay. We exited the train, we looked around and didn’t know just which way to go, and had a hard time finding anyone to direct us. But, here’s thing number one: we had to ask for directions. This meant that we had to admit that we didn’t know which way to go – and put ourselves at the mercy of the one giving directions. **Lesson #1:** admit your need for help. **Lesson #2:** ask for directions. Got it.

We followed the directions of the nice guard-person, and wandered out onto the streets of Bangkok. We followed the maps on our phone, and eventually found ourselves – wandering out in the streets of Bangkok! **Lesson #3:** make sure your source for direction is accurate. Follow the right One. We went south, and then north, and then south again, and then north again. Each time getting “help” from someone new, and always getting conflicting opinions. The problem? The map on the phone was directing us to a path that didn’t exist. It would take us exactly where we wanted to go – but only in our minds; only on paper. It was a “shortcut” to get where we needed to be. **Lesson #4:** there are no shortcuts in your journey with Jesus. Our north/south/north/south route reminded me that often this is the way of discipleship. We take 2 steps forward, and one step back (or 1 forward and 2 back, depending on the day). All the while, we were together, and that, for me, was important. We were on the adventure!

**Lesson #5:** It is OK to adjust your thinking. We stopped into a Subway shop – air conditioning! We grabbed some sandwiches for our impending arrival at our destination, and asked – again – for directions. This time it clicked. We understood why we needed to go where we needed to go, and we got a mental picture of where our destination was located. Once again, we headed off. We made a turn, and trekked around to where the owner sent us. The problem with that? The street was under construction, and was a complete mess – flooded in spots, muddy in others with constant traffic making it difficult to get through (no sidewalks). **Lesson #6:** discipleship is messy. Sometimes you get stuck in the mud. At other times, you don’t see a clear path, and find yourself staring at a few bad options because the path you chose earlier led to a bad spot. Don’t be afraid to turn around!

We did end up arriving and settling in, grabbing a shower before heading back to the airport to collect Hannah. It wasn't pretty, but we got there. What we discovered on the way out? A path that wasn't filled with muck. Isn't that just the thing? **Lesson #7:** hindsight is 20/20. You will always be able to look back and say, "I wish I'd done that differently." On this road of discipleship, you have to allow grace for yourself, just as much as you allow it for others (unless you're a person who likes to be the Holy Spirit for others, and really don't have any grace at all towards others...then you need more).

**Lesson #8:** It's easier without the baggage. We left our things at the room, and headed back out to the airport to collect our guests. The trip was long, but it wasn't nearly as difficult because we left our baggage behind. I think all of us need to do this more often. What's done is done. If Christ has made you right with God, what can separate us from God's love? Answer? NOTHING. It is God who justifies – who then is the one who condemns? (remove yourself from that job – it's easier without the baggage.)

**Lesson #9:** There's usually a better way – and people who've been on the journey longer can help you find it. The guard at the gate of the place we stayed was able to help us find a different way out – without the mud and muck – he'd been there, he'd done that – he knew a better way. Too often, one of our problems is that we either don't ask, or we don't listen to people who've been on the journey longer than we have. Or those who've been down paths and have seen where they lead. We made the trek out (not to the airport, but to other places) several times over the next days, and found that knowing the right path made things much more accurate, easy, and pleasant.

I don't know if we saw anything terrific during our time in Bangkok, but I hope I don't ever forget these reminders of the lessons each of us need to learn about discipleship – our own, and those of the people in our community.

Finally, **Lesson #10:** The path you're on takes you to where that path goes – not to where you want to be. Without adjustment and "grace," we may still be wandering the streets of Bangkok. If you see that you're headed in the wrong direction – make an adjustment! Find some people to help you on the journey, and make sure they are helping you go in the right direction.

Thanks for all you do to help us on our journey here. We're grateful for the people who, monthly, make sure that we know we're supported. We're grateful for the people who, yearly, send a contribution to IM to help us do what we're doing. We're grateful for the people who, on a regular basis pray for our language acquisition, our ministry among the Karen people, and our children's continued discipleship. Knowing the people behind us in community makes this journey one worth walking. And we thank you.

Grace and peace,

Kyle