

Thailand: God of this city

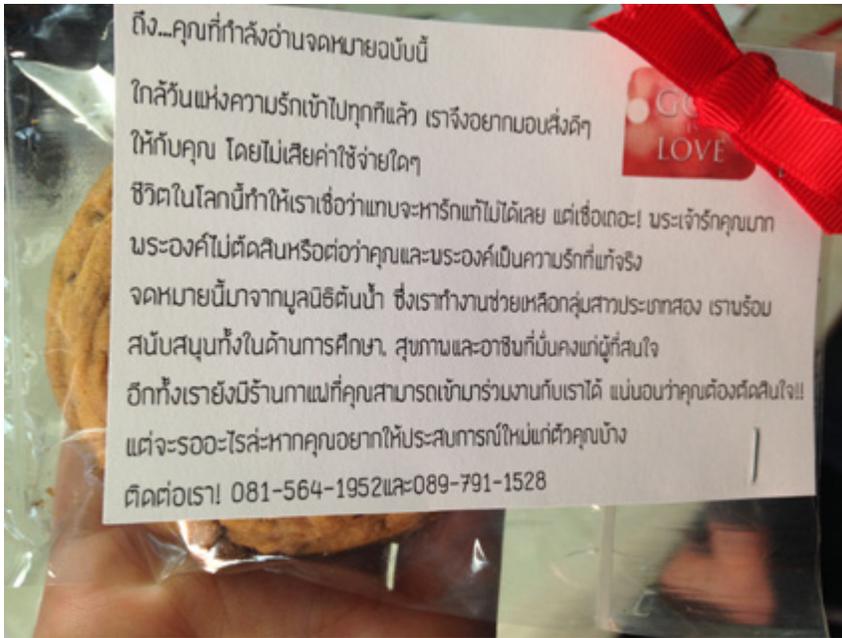
March 4, 2015

Every single day here feels like a new season of life, and I am always learning—about the culture, the people, not just in Thailand but all around the world. But mostly, I am learning more about who God is through it all.



Stacie Aguilar One of the hardest things that I have had to deal with here is realizing the depth of the human trafficking issues we face here. Just a couple days ago, a few of us on staff attended a counter-trafficking conference in Pattaya, Thailand. We wanted to learn ways we can help fight human trafficking here, which also involves working with cases in the bordering countries of Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. Human trafficking does not just involve sex, but also labor trafficking, child labor and forced begging.

Pattaya is one of the most open cities involved in the sex tourism industry. We walked down a street filled with bars and clubs and saw girls standing all along its edge, waiting to be bought for the night. They stand there like items on display, and no one blinks an eye. Foreigners marvel at the lights on the signs and smile and point at all the costumes, not even stopping to realize these are human beings selling themselves. People are being exploited daily, and it isn't given a second thought. No one should be subjected to that kind of life.



On Valentine's Day, Christian anti-trafficking ministries went into red-light districts to distribute to "ladyboys" small plastic gift bags filled with cookies. Each gift packet included a message that God's love is real, and Christians want to help them. The Christian band Bluetree wrote their song "God of this City" while they were in Pattaya. The song says: "You're the light in this darkness; you're the hope to the hopeless." I have seen the darkness and seen the face of the hopeless. We need God in this city, and we most certainly need God in this nation.

It's interesting, though. Being in a nation where love has been so perverted and distorted, I have never seen the love of God more clearly. Several ministries here went out into the red-light districts on Valentine's Day to deliver little gifts to the girls and transgender "ladyboys" working that night in the bars. When it comes to ladyboys, I have learned how hard it is for them to find love. Their confused gender identity can sometimes really make it difficult. Some of them don't think true love will ever find them. The thing is, it already has.

We read verses and sing songs about God's love, how deep and wide it is, how it is vast beyond all measure, but do we understand what that really

means? Love does not just reach the well-behaved, church-going Christian. It goes as far as to enter into the darkest parts of the world—into bars and clubs to give hope to transgender individuals trapped in prostitution. It's pretty much everything Christians nowadays seem to be afraid of. And yet God's love goes deeper than that.

1 Samuel 16:7 says, "For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." I cannot judge, because I do not know the heart, but I know the One who created it. If there is to be any change in these people's lives, I want it to be through Christ and not through me. My job here is to show them the love of Christ and allow God to do his own work in these hearts.

Some people may have problems with Western Christians like us being here in this country. They think all we want is to throw our religion into this mess, but that is not true at all. We have not come to conquer the culture or impose our way of life onto these people in any way. However, we have seen the heart of the people, the brokenness and the pain of this nation, and I strongly believe that only God can fix it. My God has the power to save and heal, to rescue and restore hurting hearts. If I know that to be true where I am from, why wouldn't it be true in Southeast Asia as well? If I have a chance to give someone a cure for their illness, why would I withhold it from them?

I've learned a lot about the suffering that goes on in Thailand. At first, it was overwhelming. It still can be sometimes, but I'm learning more and more that I need to give these burdens over to God. As humans, we were never made to bear that kind of load all by ourselves. When I do, I feel myself quickly crushed under the weight of it all. We were never made to carry these burdens alone, and we certainly can't bring healing to this world without Christ. After all, who knows more about suffering than Jesus? It is by his wounds we have been healed (Isaiah 53:5).

Please pray for the boys we are teaching at the massage parlor, that we can continue to build relationships with them and learn more about who they are. Most are from Laos, so we want to know more about how and why they are here. Pray for the ladyboys we have met on more than one occasion who all have their own difficult stories. Pray for another friend, whose mother has cancer now, making it difficult for her to leave the bar where she works. Pray for our boys. We have five who are with us full-time right now, and they all need care in different ways. Pray that we can love them in every way that they need love.

Stacie Aguilar, a recent graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso, is serving with an anti-trafficking ministry in Thailand through Go Now Missions.