

# **And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not,**

*Gal 6:9*

Greetings Friends and Family,

Griffin Mongolian Newsletter – Summer 2009

Our home assignment period in the states is nearing an end. We have spoke at many places and spent time in the states of ME, IN, IL, MN, VT, and NY. It has really been a blessing and has passed quickly. We plan to return to Mongolia on August 25. While traveling around, I've had a little time to think about missions and wanted to share some thoughts, not to show that I know any more than the next guy, but hopefully to encourage.

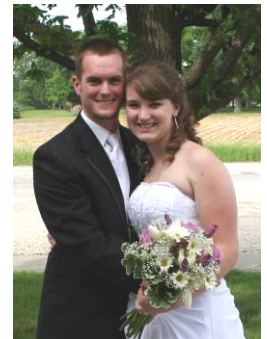
**Contextualization** is all the rage in Christian missions these days. *How to tell about God in ways people in different cultures can understand?* It's a real issue. In the book of Acts, Paul used the Athenian temple to the 'un-known god' to point to the true God of the Bible. This was contextualization. He made the 'unknown', known. Modern contextualization methods have the same goal, but problems can happen when we take short cuts in order to be 'more efficient'. One example is when we try to adapt native spiritual words and phrases to Christian usage. Borrowed spiritual terms are not easily separated from traditional meanings. Many linguists would say they can not be separated. So, borrowed terms can result in syncretism where the end product becomes a diluted and blurred combination of original and new meanings. This has happened in Mongolia. Buddhist and shamanist terms are being mixed into the Christian vocabulary. (See more on page 2...)

I should clarify that failures are man made. God does not fail. Sometimes failures come from mistakes, and sometimes from sin. Thankfully the Lord allows us to learn from our failures. Syncretism is a man made problem in Mongolia. Thankfully, God will not be defeated.

Our family got bigger this year. Our son Ben married Rochele (her family also served in Mongolia). Ben will be



heading to boot camp soon with the Air Force. Zack married Libby (they met at University in Indiana). Zack and Libby are planning to come teach English in Mongolia for a year, while they continue working on their degrees. Please remember them all in your prayers. We are thrilled to have these Christian gals join the Griffin clan. It's still hard to believe our little boys have grown up.



We are still thanking God for our daughter Grace's adoption, and now she is also a US citizen. Thank you for your prayers.

Lisa, Grace and I have been on the road this summer in the US speaking about Mongolia and spending time with family and friends. Time is passing too quickly. We have enjoyed fellowship with many and also enjoyed things like fudge popsicles, strawberries, roller coasters, the ocean, forest covered mountains, Maine lobster and cook outs. Grace also now likes cats and dogs, and is no longer afraid of grass. (She's our little city girl in Mongolia.) It's been a good summer, even though the rain almost never stopped in Maine.

Soon we will be on a plane heading back to Mongolia. Regrettably, we might not see everyone before we leave, but we will try. Our team leader, Tom Suchy and his family begin home assignment in August, so I will take over some duties in Mongolia while he is gone. I will also work with our translators on discipleship materials, and will help with our team's American food store. Our home Bible study group will resume, and we look forward to reestablishing contact with Mongolian friends at Root of Blessing church in Ulaanbaatar.

Our friend Bathuu continues his fight with PNH (Post Nocturnal Hemoglobinuria), which may be approaching the Aplastic Anemia state. He is a believer, and we have heard that his spirits are high and his faith is strong. But we know what this disease can do. My mom passed away from this several years ago. Bathuu does not have a bone marrow match in his family, and he is getting blood transfusions more frequently. Please pray for him and his family. His wife Bor, who is a new believer, is very concerned for her husband.

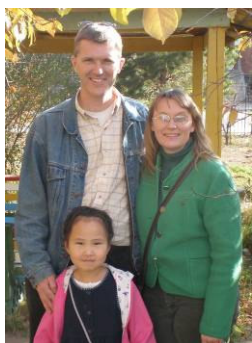
Our friend Davajaa, who has worked at our team's ministry center for many years, is declining in health rapidly. He has Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS). (I mis-stated his condition in the past.) He is losing the ability to control his muscular systems and speech has become difficult, so his time on this world may be growing short. He has heard the Gospel many times but has always rejected God. Some of the older Mongolian believers at Root of Blessing church have asked his permission to help minister to him during this time. He agreed. We are praying for Jaa and his family. One of those ministering to him is Bathuu (the same one mentioned above).

*How can Mongolians understand the God of the Bible?* Monotheistic cultures recognize or at least comprehend a single, supreme, all powerful, creator deity. Pantheistic cultures (believing in many gods) can learn that there is one true God, who is supreme and higher than all other gods. But, Buddhism is not monotheistic or pantheistic; it has no supreme God concept. It focuses on self enlightenment. In Mongolia some mistakenly treat it like a pantheistic system and try to introduce the 'God of gods'. However, without great care, this approach can lead to a critical misunderstanding that can corrupt the entire message.

Buddhism teaches that people can be reincarnated into a transitional 'god state' in their quest for nirvana. So Buddhists can easily consider a 'God of gods' to be one of these imperfect, intermediate beings. They believe fully enlightened beings can first choose to become a Buddhist teacher (*burhan bagsh* in Mongolian), like the Dalai Lama, and compassionately remaining earthbound for a time to help others cross over. Then, when they enter the void (nirvana) they are set free from suffering and individual existence to become a Buddha. So it is natural for people in Buddhist cultures to have an internal conflict when trying to understand the God of the Bible. Is he a powerful 'god' being who is still flawed and inferior? Is he a Buddha teacher (*burhan bagsh*) who is choosing to interact with and help those in the physical world? Is he a Buddha (*burhan* in Mongolia) who no longer exists in body or spirit, but has passed over into the void? It is believed that each Buddha (*burhan*) leaves behind holy writings. Could the Bible be a newly found collection of this kind of holy writings?

Questions like these become barriers for people in Buddhist cultures when they consider – Who is God? We need to help them understand that God is not dead, like Buddha (*burhan*). He is not a Buddhist teacher (*burhan bagsh*), helping others enter the void. He is not an inferior god trapped in an illusionary world. He is the Lord of the entire universe, the creator, the Lord of all that is. He is complete, three-in-one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We must not define him with Buddhist words. Thankfully, we do not have to.



For news and updates about the Mongolian Bible Society's work on the full Bible see [www.goforchrist.org](http://www.goforchrist.org) – Mongolian Bibles project page.

Lisa's back surgery fixed her pinched sciatic nerve, and the pain is gone, Praise God! We are so thankful and continue to pray for good health so we may continue serving among the Mongols.

Joyfully in Christ - Steve, Lisa and Grace

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