

# HOW WILL WE REACH THE WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE OF TAIWAN?

Amy Gibson

This question in itself belies a common misconception when talking about reaching the grassroots people with the gospel. By asking “how” we are really asking, what programs, what structures, etc. would be most effective in reaching them? And yet this does not even come close to hitting the mark. Perhaps a more pertinent question

## What is so different about working class lifestyle?

should be: Who do we, the missionary community and local Christians, need to become to reach the working class people.

Current figures from a workshop in Malaysia on

reaching the working class throughout Asia show that less than 0.3% of the working class in Taiwan are reached with the gospel of Christ despite the fact that the working class are the majority of the population (60-70%) of Taiwan. When talking with area pastors, we found that many were aware of these figures and knew that there was a huge gap between the church and the working class people. Why? The church in Taiwan is growing. Fabulous work is being done among students and professionals. There are even mega-churches in some of the larger cities. Why hasn't the church seen the same success in reaching the working class? When

pressed with this question, the pastors we talked to openly admitted that their church style is simply not adaptable



to the working class lifestyle. Moreover, their church style attracts professionals and the highly educated, like teachers and doctors. They agree that a new model must be introduced in order to reach the working class.

This begs the question: What is so different about the working class lifestyle that makes current church structures not effective? First of all, let's remember that the working class are not highly educated. They are junior high or high school educated, at the most. Moreover, most working class people, after completing their education, do not continue to read books, thereby losing much of their character recognition. Education is highly valued in Taiwanese culture, yet the working class know that they have failed miserably in this area. Men often call themselves, “Taiwanese bulls”, meaning they have no brains

*Comparing working-class lifestyle and typical church atmosphere.*

<b>Working Class Lifestyle</b>	<b>Church Atmosphere</b>
Loud (Lāu-jia't)	Somber, quiet
Haphazard (Chhìn-chhái)	Program driven, structured, rigid
Flexible time	Rigid time (schedule)
Everyone talks	Listen to one person talking
Sit around teapot	Sit silently in pews
Work clothes	Dress-up clothes
Open temple court	Closed door church
Children present	Children in separate room
Talk	Read (Bible hymnal, church bulletin)
Relationships central	Liturgy central

to offer society, only brawn. Failure in the educational system gives rise to very low self-esteem.

**Men often call themselves “Taiwanese bulls”.**

Now imagine a working class guy, say a mechanic with a junior high education and vocational training, entering church for the first time. He walks in and is handed what? Three pieces of material to read: a Bible, a hymnal, and the church bulletin. He takes his reading material and enters further into the sanctuary where he sees lines of pews with people sitting in rows. He sits down and sees what? The back of their heads. Then the pastor comes out to give the message. All eyes are on the one person standing in the front speaking. What does this remind our mechanic friend of? School! What has our mechanic friend failed at? School! How can he feel welcomed and comfortable in such an environment?

Given these differences, what do we need to change in order to reach the working class? Do we continue to try to fit them into the current structure or do we change the structure? What if we had no structure? If you were to follow around one of the Chiayi



missionaries on our team, you might come to this conclusion.

We don't use programs and structures, meetings and schedules to win the working class. We use time. We use friendship. We build trust.

We don't ask them to schedule a time to meet with us. We don't do "visitations". We do what the Taiwanese do: we visit our friends on their down time at their jobs, spending time with them, getting to know them and their needs. We gain their trust and the right to speak about Our God and His desire to know them. Often this is done through Bible storying. Sometimes, it is through prayer, as needs arise. But always it is done through relationship building. One of the greatest assets we can give the working class is our time and friendship. They are lonely, and they are bored. But, they are also very distrustful of others. We must win their trust even if it is time consuming. If they do not trust us, they will not trust the God we represent. And they will only trust us as we spend time with them, showing them the real love and concern that Christ showed throughout His life and ministry.

Investing time? Seems easy enough, doesn't it? Unfortunately, it may not be so easy for many of us. What does a typical

Taiwanese working class man do on his downtime? Well, he smokes cigarettes, chews betel nut, and maybe even drinks beer and alcohol, especially at night. Also at night, he likes to sing karaoke. He uses lewd language and frequents brothels. How many Christian men can tolerate being around men like this? Probably not many. Perhaps it requires a fresh look at Jesus' life and ministry.

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 9, after calling the tax-gatherer Matthew as one of



His disciples, Jesus has dinner with some of His friends. The Pharisees are furious when they see that most of the people there are "tax-collectors and sinners" (vv. 11). Jesus' response? *"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

**Jesus was not a drunkard but he gained that reputation.**

Jesus earned the title, “a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Luke 7:34). Of course, we know that Jesus was not a gluttonous man nor a drunkard, but He gained that reputation simply by being associated with people who were. And to be associated with people like that, one must spend time with them. Are you willing to earn such a title as well?



How about the typical working class woman? Although she may not drink and smoke like her male counterpart, she also has some serious shortcomings. Many have had abortions, often more than one, and talk about them as if they’ve had a hang-nail removed. Many have been abused, sexually and physically, by fathers, uncles, brothers, etc. She is often abu-

sive to her own children, physically and verbally. Due to her past experiences she is deeply distrustful of outsiders and reluctant to share about her life, her needs, her struggles. Even more time is required to win the trust of a working class woman. How many of us are willing to invest months, even years just building a relationship with a woman like this so that the door may be opened for the gospel?

The Apostle Paul understood the importance of patience and of identifying with those he wanted to reach. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, he says,

*“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win*

*the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”*

**Even more time is required to win the trust of a working class woman.**

How much do we identify with our Taiwanese working class friends? Why is it difficult for us to relate to them?

Are we too immersed in our own Christian sub-culture? Or is it that since we relate better to the educated and professionals, people like us, we naturally gravitate towards them? I don't know, but it certainly takes much more effort to be with the working class. How easy do you think it was for Jesus, the Sinless One, to be around sinners day and night?

**Are we too immersed in our own Christian sub-culture?**

Yet here we are, just as much a sinner as our Taiwanese friends. We must endeavor to befriend them in order to open doors for the gospel. They are the Lord’s image-bearers, as are we. They’ve just never had the opportunity to hear that fantastic news.



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## A-KOAN'S STORY

Seann Gibson

A-koan is a married man in his late 30's. He and his wife have 3 kids. In his younger years, A-koan was involved with the mafia. Even after leaving the mafia, he was involved in many shady dealings. He is currently unemployed.

I became acquainted with A-koan through a mutual friend. I found him to be a very charismatic, sharp guy. We enjoyed talking together and quickly became friends. I was often invited to his house for tea, usually late at night, and our two families began to spend time together on the weekends, having meals together, going swimming, etc.

After about 6 months of this, A-koan asked me if I would give him a Bible. A-koan is a little bit different from the typical working class man in that he is willing to read, probably because he has a lot of time on his hands due to the fact that he has no job. After I gave him the Bible, he became a voracious reader, often reading at night until the sun came up. One night, while drinking tea at his house with some of his friends, one of his friends noticed the bible on the table. When his friend asked about it, A-koan's response was, "My buddy Seann here is willing to be my friend, even when I'm drinking and smoking and chewing betel nut. I figured it might be worth it to look into his Bible." A couple of months after that, A-koan became a believer in Christ. For a man

of his past who was heavily burdened by the deep knowledge of his sin, forgiveness has meant everything to him, and he is eager to tell his friends, some of whom come from the same background as he, about the great forgiveness he's found in the Lord.

Probably most enjoyable to watch, though, has been the healing that has begun in his relationship with his wife. Whereas before, he and his wife would fight anytime they were together, he has begun to realize that the forgiveness he has been given from the Lord must result in his forgiveness of others, including his wife.

**"My buddy Seann here is willing to be my friend, even when I'm drinking and smoking and chewing betel nut."**

He is sharing his faith, and he is being transformed into the image of Christ. He wants to begin a house church in his own home that is more adapted to the working class lifestyle. For example, sitting around the tea-pot telling Bible stories. In the meantime, he is being trained and disciplined as his love for the Word grows.

As one listens to A-koan tell his own testimony, one can see how the Lord, throughout A-koan's life, had been pursuing him. Yet he continually rejected the Lord. It just took a simple friendship for him to move forward in his response to the Lord's pursuit. The working class CAN be reached. Are we willing to do what it takes?

