



SERVANTS IN TRAINING

The Rain was bouncing off the street as the little motorbikes made their way to our secret location; everyone arrived soaked through to the skin. But none had stopped for shelter. Was time of such importance? Time was not the issue; security was. Many others had stopped for shelter, including the local secret police, who weren't so enthusiastic as to get wet for it.

Nobody can plan the rain, but it's strange how it so often falls just at the times when we most need the security of getting in or out of our study place. Does our God not answer prayer? Does he not control the elements?

Students travel in at various times, by bus and train (some 4 days and 3 nights), some by motorbike or river boat. They quickly make their way to the prepared location. Monday is always the worst day as they arrive road-weary from their travels, in need of a wash and sleep, but that is far from their minds.

One priority stands out beyond their physical needs – they have come to study God's Word and prepare themselves for service. Bible Colleges are strictly forbidden by the Government so nothing is going to stand in the way of this important God-given opportunity. They may be hungry in body when they arrive but even that fades into the background when compared to their hunger for God's Word.

They come to class well prepared (4 classes and a total of 140 men and women), all their assignments very efficiently completed, and well read up on their next study - not only a few chapters of the Bible book they're working on, but they will have already studied the *whole* book.

During private study preparation, they are advised to jot down their questions – if I don't cover it in class they are quick to ask. So before they enter the door they have a good handle on what we will deal with. They see that the more they put in, the more they get out.

The 10 Courses are similar to the basic studies any Bible College student would do in the West, except we cannot do it every day, (much as we would like to) but only for 1 week x 4 times a year (160 – 200 hrs maximum per year). We can't bring them out to the West to study in Bible College – so the only other way is to take the Courses in to them.

Many ask, "Why are they so diligent?" and "What is their background?" Theirs is not a life of ease or spiritual comfort, but one of severe persecution. It costs them dearly to stand up and be counted for Jesus Christ, a price which has already taken most of them inside prison, and many of their loved ones severely beaten, tortured and even murdered before their eyes. Wives are raped and little children beaten and tortured to tell where Daddy is, but they usually don't exactly know where he has gone. What they don't know they cannot tell, to reveal the "secrets" will put others at risk.

One young single evangelist – they severely beat his mother and smashed up their home, dragged them around the streets of the villages as criminals, warning others not to listen to them. In 2003 over 600 believers had their homes burned down. This year, hundreds of families have been burned out of their homes, their children put out of school, refused medical treatment, and their lands confiscated by the government. Why? Because they love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ!

All of these young students, both men and women, are already full-time workers, some carrying pastoral responsibility for several underground church groups of 30-40 believers, while others are responsible for 600-700 believers scattered in different secret locations. Do they pray for the persecution to stop? They pray for revival to continue and liberty to preach the gospel so that others will come to know the Saviour they love and serve.

These are the type of believers the writer of Hebrews spoke of when he said "*Of whom the world was not worthy*" (Heb.11:38). Your love, prayer and support for these "servants in training" is deeply appreciated. ■

