



## A Report of Village Outreach and Following Detainment

### Vision Beyond Borders

Monday, April 8th - Thursday April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**04/08/19**

Wayne, Joseph, and Autumn left Luang Namtha headed towards Muang Sing in a rental truck. Their goal was to reach some of the outlying villages in the Sing District. As they left the guesthouse that morning one of them had a small and sure premonition that something wasn't going to go well, as if they might not return to their hotel that night.

The drive to the villages was really, really rough. They had a straight route there and only one road to reach their destination. They drove to a remote village and began there, stopping at different villages as they headed back towards Luang Namtha. The villagers were very surprised and excited by the team's visit to the villages. As they gave them a few items the locals seemed receptive, but the team didn't stick around long.

While they continued onto the next few villages they saw some kids in a very poor, underdeveloped area. They interacted with the children and were able to distribute some materials to them. They didn't take long...simply gave all the children a tract, gave some other gifts, took a couple of snapshots and left the village. The team left this village with a really good feeling! Everything went smoothly and a lot of tracts were distributed without noticing anything amiss.

In the next few villages the team members had similar interactions with the local people as they did the same style of distribution there. There were really excited children, eager to receive gifts, and other villagers who were curious about the arrival of foreigners into their village. Towards the end of their interaction the team started feeling a need to speed things up and move on, as one individual they visited didn't seem especially delighted to have them. As quickly as they could finish and excuse themselves, they were out of there.



The final village they visited that day was short, and not necessarily sweet. First of all, as they drove through the village, they didn't see a very good place to get out and interact with people. When they finally decided to get out of the truck, the people weren't immediately friendly or welcoming. As usual, they began interacting with eager children.

After a few minutes one team member saw a man dressed in a blue coat approaching. Their first impression was that he looked Chinese and he was definitely watching them with a big scowl. The team quickly decided to hold back on the tracts. One team member gave an MP3 player to the people with whom he was already talking with, and one team member handed an MP3 player to the Chinese man, hoping it would please or distract him. They then made their exit...The team definitely did not have a very good feeling when they left this village, but they made it out and were on the road again.

After driving awhile, the team suddenly came upon a truck that was pulled across the road and had several police officers waving them into their station on the right. It wasn't a big surprise to see that the scowling man in blue from their previous village was there along with the police officers. They were told to get out of the vehicle and proceed into the police station where they were seated in a room. After being seated they were requested to give the officers their passports, which they did.

The first order of business was to photocopy their passports. It was 3:15 PM. After finishing the passport copies, the officials began to ask the team a few questions.....The time at this station was a weird mix of waiting, sitting around, standing around, and checking over their belongings. At one point they were given a paper to fill out that they had handwritten three questions on.

1. What was the purpose of your visit?
2. What did you distribute?
3. What was the meaning of these materials?



They were next transported to Muang Sing police headquarters. It was at this point that the officials took all of the rental vehicle information and also held the keys for the team's rental truck. Their time here included a lot more waiting and a separate time of questioning for each of them. Each questioning lasted approximately an hour. They also signed and thumb printed several different documents affirming the information they had provided.

Here's a sampling of the questions they were asked:

"What was the purpose of your visit?"

"Where did you get these materials?"

"How many materials did you bring?"

"Which places did you visit?"

"How many days have been in Laos?"

"What is your home address?"

"What is your religion?"

"What are you parents' names and ages? Siblings names and ages?"

"What is your job?"

"How many times have you been to Laos?"

It wasn't until approximately 11:30 pm. that the police finished with their questioning and dropped the team off at a nearby guesthouse for the night. They told the team they would pick them up the next morning at 8:00 am.

**04/09/19**

The police came to pick up the team from their guesthouse sometime around 9:30 am and were actually driving the teams own rental vehicle. Once they reached the station, they had the team sit in chairs outside of their office. They sat in those chairs for several hours with almost zero interaction with any of the police. Around lunch time they told them they we were going to be



transported from this station in Muang Sing to Luang Namtha.

For the transport a team member drove the rental vehicle, along with one other team member and two other officers; while the other team member rode in a police truck. Before leaving town they stopped somewhere so everyone could have lunch. The team paid for their own of course.

Once they reached the Luang Namtha station they sat and waited for a long time again.....Sometime in late afternoon they began to question the team members separately again. Not a whole lot of different questions were asked, mostly the same. They also had to sign, and thumb print more documents.

By evening it was beginning to get frustrating, as it had been 24 hours already and the team members were now going to be missing their original flights out of the country. Around supper time the team was released to go find themselves a guesthouse to stay in for the night. The police told them to report back to the station at 9:30 am the next morning. The team was never told what they could or couldn't do around town. It was simply assumed they wouldn't go far without their passports, documentation, and vehicle.

#### **04/10/19**

The team reported back to the station at 9:30 am and besides a lunch break from 11:30-2:00pm, they spent the majority of the day sitting in the police office waiting for them to give more information about the progress of the situation.

Sometime before lunch break, the officers asked for the team's phones and also asked for the team to unlock them. They refused and the officers didn't press the point. The officers seemed reluctant to return the team's cellphones to them over lunch break, but the foreign affairs official intervened on the team's behalf. Praise the Lord they returned the phones!

The officers gave no indication as to whether the team would be released, deported, or imprisoned. They also never asked for any bribe or indicated any need for money from them. In the



evening they again let them go back to the guesthouse and told the team that it wasn't necessary to return to their station until they gave further notice. The team was free to roam about town and stay wherever they wanted.

#### **04/11-12/19**

These were the last two business days before the Laos New Year. Although the officers hadn't asked the team to return to their office they still went several times each day to check and see if there was any news on the situation. Each time their answer was that it was no longer the officers' decision. They had sent the case up the ladder to Vientiane and they were waiting for word from their commander.

#### **04/12-17/19**

These days were the Laos New Year and the team had absolutely no contact with the officers. They didn't ever see any officers visit their guesthouse and they didn't have anyone following them, at least that they were aware of. They were free to pedal bike around town, hike up to a temple and beyond into a rubber tree grove, eat wherever they wanted, visit whatever stores that they wanted, etc. It was basically, very boring and somewhat stressful at the same time!

#### **04/18/19**

This was the first day government had reopened. Joseph visited the police station at 10:30 am. to see if there was any news. They told him nothing, same old answer about waiting for news from Vientiane. At about 2:00 pm. The team was in a restaurant down the street a bit from their guesthouse and they noticed uniformed officers visiting the guesthouse.

After a few minutes some officers in plain clothes approached them at the restaurant. They asked them to please visit the station and left. A few minutes later they walked over to the station and once again waited a couple of hours in the same seats as before.



It was around 4:30 pm when everyone at the station finally gathered to give the team the verdict. There were nine different officers and officials in the room: A Foreign Affairs Official, a Home Affairs Official, a Tourism Department Official, and the Tourist Police as well.

During the meeting the team was informed of all the different laws and decrees that they had broken. (They included the number of the law and the date it was decreed.) It was made very clear that because of what the team had done, the normal punishment would be either three months in prison or a fine of 5 million kip (\$580 USD). Thankfully, they decided not to give them either one! They were told that their case had taken so long because of the Laos New Year. The officers made sure to ask the team to not say anything bad about them when they returned home. (Just for clarification sake the team was also informed that they had not been “detained”, but their passports had simply been held.)

To wrap it all up the officials said they would be deported and had 24 hours to get out of the country. The police would drive the team to the Northwestern Border crossing with Thailand, they would not be allowed to return the rental vehicle and would not be allowed to fly out of Luang Prabang. Furthermore, they owed them a \$349.00 USD bill for the official’s expenses.

Throughout the whole ordeal the team was treated relatively well. They were never hollered at, the officials never laid a hand on them, and they even provided bottled water when the team was at the station.

Once dropped off at the Laos/Thailand border the rest went very smoothly. God miraculously provided the right transportation for each leg of the journey and the team all made it safely home!

**Please note, although this American team was released and returned safely to their homes and families, the persecution has not stopped in Laos. Over the past several years we have seen an increase in the persecution against Christians and churches across SE Asia. As China is gaining more and more influence in Laos and other neighboring countries, we have seen an increase in a push for Communism and Governmental Control. Please pray for Believers in Southern Laos as they too are now facing punishment for simply having Church meetings in their homes and being threatened with**





the constraint of meeting with other Christians or travelling to other areas. Many strict regulations are being put into effect and we must pray for and boldly stand with our brothers and sisters in these places.

