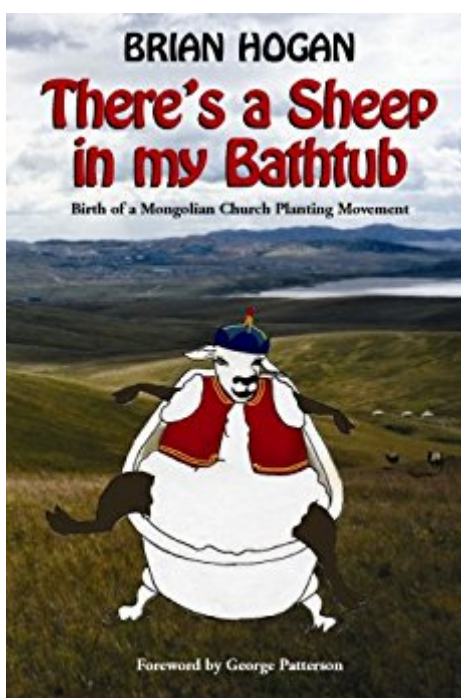


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# There's A Sheep In My Bathtub: Birth Of A Mongolian Church Planting Movement



## Synopsis

There's a Sheep in my Bathtub is the story of an American family (the author's) as they survive and even thrive in the bizarre and topsy-turvy world of post-communist Mongolia from 1992-96. The Hogan family served as English teachers and worked in Asia largest copper mine in addition to helping start Mongolia's first movement of multiplying fellowships of Jesus followers (now numbering over 40,000). Replete with photo illustrations, this humorous and, at times, heart-wrenching memoir chronicles an intensely personal bird's eye view of the cataclysmic changes that sweep Mongolia after the fall of totalitarianism. You will laugh, you will cry, but you will not be able to put down this adventure at the ends of the earth.

## Book Information

File Size: 2929 KB

Print Length: 274 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0979905605

Publisher: Asteroidea Books; 1st edition (September 29, 2007)

Publication Date: September 29, 2007

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0010B8VHW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #197,277 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #15

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Travel > Asia > Far East #29 in Kindle Store >

Kindle eBooks > History > Asia > Central Asia #87 in Books > History > Asia > Central Asia

## Customer Reviews

What an eye opener! My son has recently become a missionary and it has been very hard with him and his family being gone from my life! I miss my grandsons, son and daughter-in-law tremendously! But through the story of Brian Hogan and his family, the Holy Spirit has opened my eyes and heart to a whole new world of missionaries and what they are all about. It's not about me.

It's about those precious lost people in the world who need to know Jesus. God bless the missionaries who are willing to give up their comfort and go for the sake of the kingdom! This true story brought laughter, tears, and much awareness into my "tunnel vision" mind. I even found myself praying for the Hogan Family as I read of their struggles in Mongolia. I had to remind myself several times that these struggles are long gone as the book was set in the 1990's. However, I feel like I know them and still want to pray for them as they work for The Lord here in the states. May God bless their current work and continue to bless the Mongolians they served 2 decades ago. Great story, great book!

The amazing growth of a church planting movement in Mongolia is recounted in this amazing study of starting and growing not just a church but multiplying churches. George Patterson, who is a missionary that God used to multiply churches in Honduras writes the preface and explains one of the reasons this Mongolian movement was effective. "Many church planters follow such a long list of things to do to start a church that they fail to give top priority to the few essential activities, and end up doing so many things that the key, pivotal elements of church planting are buried in the plethora of work items." This simplicity of church was a key to the growth and multiplication of house churches in this difficult area. The author, Brian Hogan, shares the two reasons why church planting movements do not take place: "One, what we are doing is too complex" and "Two, we don't trust the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer" (251). This prioritizing of the basics is seen throughout the book. Here are some examples: First, they effectively disciplined the new believers which led to growth by multiplication. Second, they trained leaders in the local church and thus avoided separating them from ministry in an ivory tower academic context (210). Third, they passed the baton to Mongolian leadership at just the right time. Some would say that they should have never passed the baton but let the locals carry the baton from the beginning. However, this did lead to solid growth both in doctrine and life. Part of their problem was the fact that the initial conversions were among teen-age girls (95). Fourth, they were able to transition from the teen-age girl substance of the beginning church to whole families in a way that made the church much more reflective of the Mongolian culture as a whole. Fifth, they understood the importance of small holistic small groups for solid growth rather than large "celebration" type gatherings. They learned the importance of contextualization and avoiding cultural baggage from the Western approach to church. This led to the multiplication of churches rather than one large church and penetrated the culture and made discipleship more effective (124-126). As a missionary family they went through some very difficult situations including the sudden death of a new born son. Even this terrible suffering was used by

God as they modeled for the Mongolians "Grieving with Hope" (title of the epilogue 247-50). I would recommend that all church planters read this book even if they are planting a church in a more urban or western context. Lessons learned through real life history are a powerful means of church planter training.

I enjoyed this book on several levels. It offers a fascinating, and often funny, view of life in Mongolia. In addition, it is inspiring to read how God is working there. I loved seeing the New Testament principles of church planting being successfully implemented in such a foreign culture.

Are you nuts? What are you thinking? You have only been there three years--no way is that long enough to plant a church! This is one of the criticisms from the nearby mission community when the author's team announced they felt they were nearly ready to pull out of Erdenet, Mongolia. But for the church planting team described in Brian Hogan's "There's a Sheep in My Bathtub" located in Erdenet, Mongolia, three and a half years was all the time it took (I somehow missed from the book that Erdenet is Mongolia's second largest city, a fact I picked up afterward). While I still believe there is warrant for sticking around longer than that, you have to give them credit. Breakthroughs included miraculous healings and other signs and wonders from God's Holy Spirit, and came most conclusively in a way that missiologists would not have planned-- Mongolians observing how Christians experience grief over the loss of a loved one. God's ways are truly higher than our ways! The emphasis in this story on short-cycle church planting is admirable. Cross-cultural church planters working overseas have to guard against sticking around longer than we should. That's because as human beings, we like to feel needed. We have left our homes to make the places we work our new homes. We work hard to learn the language(s), pick up the culture, and establish ourselves in our jobs in the community. So leaving can be hard. Although this book is about church planting in Mongolia, it is a story and not a church planting manual. So please excuse me as I limit this review to observations made from the perspective of a cross-cultural church planter in a rural setting in another Asian country. Eight points stick out particularly to me: 1. Successful church planters work with whoever is responding to God and seek to join the Father in what He is doing (105). 2. The author talks about teaching disciples to "begin obeying the simple and clear commands of Christ in the New Testament. Things like: 1. Loving God and other people 2. Repenting, believing, and receiving the Holy Spirit. 3. Getting baptized and baptizing others 4. Celebrating the Lord's Supper 5. Praying 6. Giving generously 7. Making disciples (page 22). This concentrating on the basics - doing church the simple way--is what I'm asking God to help us do in our local small

group. May God be glorified!<sup>3</sup> At times I wondered if the author had received enough training and if some of the predicaments he encountered early in the book (being stranded with his wife and kids in the middle of winter in China and then again in Mongolia without housing during major holidays) might have been the result of insufficient planning and training (although the author seems to say he knew what he was doing because of his background teaching the Prospectives Missions Course). Whenever we try to do anything in an overseas/cross-cultural setting (learn the language, get a house, pay taxes, you name it!) it can sometimes seem to take forever before we succeed (if we ever do). Proper planning beforehand is important, as long as it does not turn into an idol.<sup>4</sup>

Criticisms of coworkers in various places inserted periodically throughout the book lead me to wonder if perhaps the author might not always have been the easiest teammate to get along with and that maybe he should have taken a look in the mirror too, as we all should do when we encounter difficulties in interpersonal relationships. I wondered what stories those mentioned in the book might have shared from their perspective about the events he related. We can sometimes be a little inflexible when it comes to working with others (this may go along with the territory of being "pioneers"), so perhaps the author's experience was merely illustrating this aspect of his own unique pioneering personality.<sup>5</sup>

**Cells and Celebrations:** After going to weekly celebrations on top of the foundational house church small group meetings, the author's team noticed a puzzling trend: the house churches stopped growing and multiplying. They all hit plateaus. But the big Celebration meeting continued to grow with new people choosing it as their connection to the church. No matter how much the missionary team stressed that participation in the house groups was the "only way to be a real part of the Body", they were sending a contradictory non-verbal message every Sunday morning, into which 90% of their resources were being poured. So they made the painful decision to cancel the Sunday Celebrations. After a couple of months, they resumed them just once a month. But they gradually moved back to bi-monthly and then again to weekly. Unfortunately, they experienced the same result: "the house churches were not sustainable at the center of the church's life when the big meetings were weekly." Years later the author found an answer to this dilemma: Whenever there was a real reason, such as a visiting apostle (in this book, the same as "missionary" or "international worker"), prophet, teacher, worship group, or testimonies about miracles, they could gather all the churches in a large Celebration. The reason they had always prioritized--the calendar--was the only reason which wasn't valid or biblical. (126)<sup>6</sup>

**Spiritual Resistance:** In less than a week they went from working completely unopposed as the only church in the city to contending with four groups, three of which were cults! All four targeted the believers of their particular church. For a while it felt as if their team was playing the "whack-a-mole" arcade

game. When demoralization hit, the author realized they were experiencing spiritual attacks, not a human crisis. And the occurrence that would bring the deepest despair was still yet to come (the death of their baby due to SID syndrome).<sup>7</sup> Demographic Fit: In spite of how the work began in the beginning (mostly with school age girls), as God's Spirit continued to work the team noticed how older people were responding to the Good News. Their church movement had just about matched the age and gender demographics of the city! Soon the local believers were doing virtually everything for themselves and it would be time to dismantle the scaffolding (i.e. remove the foreign apostles) and allow God's glorious construction to stand on its own (p. 221)<sup>8</sup>. Uncomfortable with the Finished Product: If cross-cultural church planters are successful, the churches that result will make the church planters uncomfortable. If a church takes on an indigenous character, then it will be outside the comfort zone of the apostolic (missionary) messengers. (p. 229)

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