

A LETTER FROM THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE KINGDOM OF

CAMBODIA



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: TROY ZIEL

Qualitative Leadership Growth *by Jonathan Edwards*

The past few months have been a great time of maturity for our work. The collaboration between brothers Vanny, Bradley, and myself is paying off. We meet twice a month to plan the provincial Bible study trips and the various works we do in Phnom Penh. One meeting is the pre-trip meeting, and one is a post-trip meeting. These are valuable opportunities for us all to share ideas, set goals, and plan out the month.

We have been gently pushing brother Vanny to take a more active role with us in decision making. While he is a young man who is just starting out in his Christian journey, time is of the essence, and there will come a time when his leadership will be vital in our absence. We do our best to phrase every question or plan by first asking Vanny's opinion or take on the situation. As the Cambodian brother, his life experience and cultural awareness help Bradley and me make decisions for the work that are in line with the word of God, while still enabling us to connect with the Khmer people.

Brother Vanny gave his first lesson this month. He and I have studied together on Friday afternoons. First, he spends about 45 minutes leading a study in Khmer so that I can gain some practice with the

language. Next, I lead a study on a topic that is helpful to ground his faith. For example, he has recently come to see what the Bible teaches about music in the church, and he now believes it is wrong to use instruments in the worship service. For the past few weeks we have studied how to organize a lesson, and the pedagogy behind what a preacher or teacher does in order to be effective.

Vanny's lesson was entitled "Trust in the Lord," and we give God the glory for what he was able to teach, concerning the Scriptures. He used several examples of people who put their faith in God, no matter the odds. Vanny also used his own life story about coming out of extreme poverty, and overcoming great obstacles by trusting in God.

He taught the lesson here in Phnom Penh, and on our provincial trip at the congregation in Steung Trang. I am very proud of him for his willing heart. On several occasions, he has spoken of how much he loves his job. He had prayed for years to be able to do something he loves while serving the Lord, and now he is living that dream. We are both fortunate in that regard; two brothers in Christ who have waited for years to be able to work for the Lord. May God continue to bless the work here in Cambodia!

PRAYER NEEDS IN CAMBODIA

Please consider the following in your prayers.
(B)=Ballard's request; (C)=Chan's request; (E) Edward's request

- ◆ our tudor, Sokcheat: he has said he is seeking (B)
- ◆ Vick, who has come to worship, and is seeking (B)
- ◆ patience for all of us, in our individual ways (B)
- ◆ sister Phoung: alone in her faith and life (B)
- ◆ better health for Vanny's mom (C)
- ◆ Sopeak to have the desire to worship regularly (C)
- ◆ the people effected by the earthquake in Nepal (C)
- ◆ the poor people of Cambodia (C)
- ◆ our children's health to improve (E)
- ◆ acquisition of the language (E)
- ◆ retain strength and peace as we share the gospel (E)

THE FERVENT AND EFFECTIVE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN AVAILS MUCH.

A Staircase to Nowhere

by Bradley Ballard

On one of our trips to a place called Baray, I spotted a small lonely plot of land tucked under some tall palm trees. It seemed to have been abandoned long enough to have almost been forgotten. The site likely would never have stuck out to me, except for one striking feature: standing in the middle of the little lot was a staircase. Nothing was attached to it. It simply stood there, alone and unused.

A later trip to the area afforded me a second glimpse at this almost-imposing structure. It occurred to me that our lives are like a climb up the stairs. As humans we struggle towards a goal; towards meaning; towards understanding. Religion offers another staircase to climb. However, even in religion we can find ourselves climbing a route that

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sowing AND WATERING



Provincial Trip: Friday-Sunday, April 24-26, 2015

Jonathan on the work in Cambodia

One of the difficulties we found when we came here, was that some Christians are such babes in the Lord that exercising virtues such as hospitality, sacrificing time for Bible study, etc. are often not natural for them. For example, if I ask you for your availability for a Bible study, and you agree to Thursday at 7:30PM, I would assume that you would mark that on your calendar. Here, many times, we arrive to find that people are not expecting us, or are not prepared to study.

We have spent several months building relationships, and have now begun to push these new Christians a little harder than we once did. This is not to say that we are forcing them to study the Bible, but rather we are explaining that we have a certain amount of time, and that time should be used effectively. I say all that to say that our monthly trips are starting to find a good routine and groove for both our expectations of what should happen, and the reality of what actually happens.

Friday, April 24th: Our travel team consisted of Bradley, Vanny, Bradley's elderly landlord Mack, and myself. Mack wanted to come along to see what we did on these trips, and we saw it as an opportunity to share the gospel with him. Car troubles got us out a little later than expected, but we made it to our first stop: Phum Leo with Mr. Lim Haeng, a denominational preacher who has studied with us for about five months, and about twenty Buddhist villagers. We began by tag teaming a simple gospel story for our audience. It consisted of: *the creation of the world; sin; redemption;* and *faith through Jesus Christ.* Then we focused on our host, Mr. Haeng. He had asked what he should name this denomination, and we

decided to use the opportunity to teach about the name of the Lord's church. Emphasizing the church's relationship with Christ, we endeavored to show him that 1) the church belongs to Jesus; 2) denominations take their name and authority from men; and 3) the Lord's church is one that obeys the Bible fully.

After the group studies, I had a private conversation with Mr. Haeng about his denominational conversion, and how it was not one done in obedience to the gospel. He has also borrowed a solar mp3 player from us that has Bible studies on what baptism is, and what baptism is not. He said he will consider what we have studied.

Next we drove to the fledgling congregation in Kampong Sdaach, where we heard they had suffered a blow. Brother Ang's wife and children were in a moto accident. We decided to stop by for a visit in order to show our support for them during this time. For several months, they have been evasive and unwilling to get together to study the bible. So, getting to spend time in conversation with this small group was very nice. Since they are close to brother Michael Bolton, we told them about his coming here next month, and used the opportunity to set up some Bible studies. May God bless them with a spirit like the Bereans.

Finally, we drove to the Kampong Cham province to stay with the Ken family, the small congregation at Steung Trang village. Always a warm welcome, and the only place we are hugged (hugs are a cultural faux pas), we enjoyed rest after a long day.

Saturday, April 25th: A late night rain led to a cool morning for our group. After breakfast, Bradley led a Bible study on 1 Corinthians 3 concerning the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God. This is one of the short expository studies that we have

begun to do in our down time with brother Ken Theara. His education is limited, so when we spend time in one passage, breaking down the meaning/purpose, he is able to see its importance.

After the study, we drove Bradley and Mack to Kampong Cham city to catch a mini-bus back to Phnom Penh so Bradley could lead worship at the Phnom Penh congregation. In the afternoon, we led two studies for the Ken family, Theara's elderly mother, along with a neighbor who was interested joined us. Our studies were about the problem of suffering; the Christian response to a world of suffering; and trusting in the Lord (Vanny's study that he wrote himself).

After the studies, Theara's sons Thearit and Seyla invited Vanny and I to play volleyball with some friends. Rolling up my slacks, I descended into the sand pit to make a fool of myself in an effort to appear human and not so much of a robo-evangelist. After being the target of as many Khmer spikes as possible, I was humbled further and spent the evening with the family.

Sunday, April 26th: Another late night rain blessed us with cool weather and a beautiful sunrise. Our worship began at 7:30AM. It's always a pleasure to have brothers Theara, Thearit, and Seyla lead the worship. Here, Vanny and I are guests who participate instead of leading every item of worship. I was invited to preach, and so we studied on how God wants every Christian to share the good news. It is always exciting to get to share the gospel with new people. To be able to encourage Christians regarding what the gospel is, why it is important, and how to share it is equally exciting. After our worship and goodbyes, it was time to head back to Phnom Penh where we will plan for the next month's trip as well as continue to sow the seed in the capital city.

My Work for the Kingdom by Chan Vanny

April is one of the long vacation months that we have in Cambodia. This month we have Khmer New Year. We took day off for the holiday from 14th -16th. This month also as last month, we worked at home and have a meeting before the trip to the provinces. But this month is my first month that I never have. I have to lead the study that I had prepared by myself. We had a meeting at the end of March for April plans. Mr. Bradley and Jonathan encouraged me to lead the bible study by myself and prepare it with the help of Mr. Jonathan. I love it so much. But the first time it kind of nervous for me. I will try to do it better next time. We had record the lesson for the mp3 on Tuesday night at bong Jonathan's house. Those lessons are, life is a vapor prepared by Bong Bradley, Job bible study, and Jesus and Church name by bong Jonathan, and Trust prepared by me. I led the bible study at Church and at the province. We went to the provinces on 24th -26th. We went to have bible study at Phum liev with Mr. Lim Heng and shared the gospel with the people over there. And had lunch at Sontok district and drop off the Mp3 with my friends. I encouraged them to

listen if they have any question they can call me any time. If they want to become a Christian they can call us at any time and we will be there to help them how to become a Christian. They said they learn about Christianity first. After that we went to Kompong sdaac to visit sister Sitha and brother Ang. They said that we can have bible study on May when Mr. Michael come. From there we had leaved to Stuong Trang in Kompong Cham province, and spent two nights there have some bible study with them and worship with them. The family at Stuong Trang is the encouragement to all of us they are faithful and very strong. They never give up even other people try to mock on them. They always like to learn more about God. Mr. Theara always have the bible mp3 turn on and listen to it. that is all we do in this month. At home sometime I chat with friends and tell them about God.



Phuem Leo

The Ken Family



travels w/ Mack

AMERICAN HANDS IN CAMBODIAN SOIL

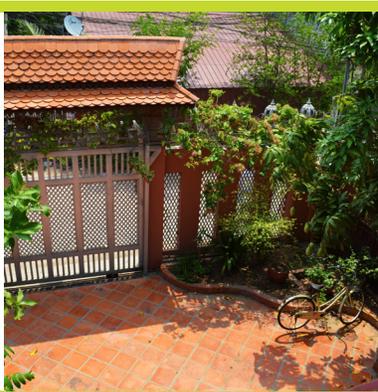
Home Sweet Home

by Marissa Edwards

While we have been in our new home for about two months now, it feels like it has only been a couple of days. Each morning I am excited to live and work in a house that takes care of us as much as we take care of it. Our brother in Christ, Vanny Chan worked hard to help us hunt down this treasure. He drove me all over town to look at house after house until he came across this place. A huge thanks to our dear friend. This house has become our haven, and brought us the feeling of peace that you can only get from being in your own home.

After a short, squirrely drive through the neighborhood of Boeng Tompun, we pull up to our front gate adorned with Rangoon Creeper: a flowering vine covered in blooms that smell like a cross between honeysuckle and jasmine. Step through the gate, and you enter the courtyard. I cannot tell you what a huge blessing it is to have a space outside for the kids to run and play in the sunshine, and to not have to worry about speeding motos getting too close, or cars coming around the blind corner too quickly. The flowering plants and fruit trees keep the area shaded, cool and trick you into forgetting that you are living in a city that seems to be obsessed with covering everything in concrete. Our first home served us well but it was so compartmentalized, it felt like we were living in an apartment building rather than a house. Now, we feel

comfortable and can easily say we feel like this is our home. Day to day events happen with ease instead of having to go on a man-hunt through 4 floors just so we can all sit down to have a meal together, or track down Gabriel to have school time. Having a space that we love, really makes every day better. In the end, what really matters is that Jonathan is able to do his work, and that everyone is happy. Our family has hit a stride since moving here that we would not have been able to achieve in our previous home. Blessings come in all shapes and sizes. Like countless times before, our Father knows what we need, and in what kind of dosage it needs to be delivered. As a wife and mother, anything that brings peace to my family will be accepted with open and thankful arms. I thank God for our home sweet home.



Celebrating the Khmer New Year

by Jonathan Edwards

One of the “joys” of living in a different country is learning about the celebrations of the people by experiencing them first-hand. April 14-16 is the Khmer New Year celebration, and we were told that it is the three most important days in the Khmer year. It is a time of family, games, and taking it easy. What we didn't expect was that there is a two week build up to Khmer New Year and a week of post celebration that lingers! There is no holiday in America that matches the Khmer New Year for the depth by which it is celebrated. Imagine if you can that the whole country just stopped for three days and up to three weeks in certain places!

During the first week of April, our neighbors began blasting music from the early afternoon until late at night. Every day, with little exception we were graced with the crooning

Khmer voices of both traditional and pop music. With tile floors and concrete walls, there is nowhere to hide. We thought it would last one day, then two, and then resigned ourselves to the fact that April would be a very loud month. You would be amazed at how difficult it is to concentrate with ten hours of thumping music blaring in your ears!

This almost month-long celebration effectively shuts down the country. I found that a lot of the build-up that we were working towards, as far as bible studies go, was to be postponed, as our friends were going to their provincial home districts to celebrate with family. I had not anticipated this sort of loss, but came to appreciate that if we are to be “all things to all people” then we will respect this celebration as it is deeply important to the people.

A Staircase to Nowhere continued

will ultimately drop us off a dismal ledge of disappointment and sorrow. There is only one staircase we can trust to lead us to a home.¹ The builder of the house is God. The author of the way is God. The one who invites us to come in is God. It is only in looking to His word and following Him that we can find ourselves on the right path. There are countless questions to ask: *where are we climbing?*; *what is the point?*; or *what happens when we fall down the stairs?* Regardless of the questions that some may pose, the word of God offers certain assurances which encourage me in my own climb:

- *God Himself laid the foundation.*^{2,3}
- *He has given us a clear and definite way.*⁴
- *I am not climbing alone.*⁵
- *There is something for me at the end, if I climb faithfully.*⁶
- *Anyone can choose to jump onto the right staircase.*⁷

Just as any climber experiences fatigue, a Christian will tire in their climb from time to time. One may even stumble, and lose a step here or there. The Christian climber, however, has a benefit that no other religion or belief can afford its' followers: we can trust and know that our obedience and faithfulness to the Father will gain us entrance into our wonderful eternal home at the top of the stairs.⁸

Footnotes: 1) Matthew 7:13-14; 2) Matthew 25:34; 3) 1 Corinthians 3:11; 4) 1 Corinthians 14:33; 5) 1 Corinthians 10:13; 6) Colossians 3:23-24; 7) 1 Corinthians 6:11; 8) 2 Timothy 4:8