

A LETTER FROM THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE KINGDOM OF

# CAMBODIA



PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT: TROY ZIEL

## A Shift Into Phnom Penh by Jonathan Edwards

The churches and denominations that we study with in the provinces have settled into the routine of Bible study as best as they can. Most of our time has been spent on trying to stabilize these provincial churches and give them resources that will help them grow while preaching the truth to denominations willing to listen.

While the church of Christ in Steung Trang has matured and grows with each passing month, others are showing signs of weakness, worldliness, or immaturity. Without judging hearts, we can observe their fruits. Some Christians do not invite us to study and make excuses when we call to set up times. Others did not count the cost and have gone back into the world.

While the churches in Phnom Sampov, Baray, and Kampong Sdaach are not healthy, they have taught us valuable lessons about how to reach out to the Cambodians. Preaching baptism without building a gospel foundation leads to wet sinners. We find that true conversions take more time than expected.

The church in Phnom Penh has experienced ups and downs as well. We have seen visitors come, but also seen many go. In order to help ground our friends we study with, I began a new initiative for Phnom Penh. I spent hours in the office writing two study series for personal use with two different types of person in mind:

The New Believer Study Series: A 5-part study series for those who have no prior

knowledge of Jesus, the gospel, the Bible, or any tenants of the Christian faith.

The Truth Study Series: (This is a working title.) A 5-part study series meant for those with a denominational background who understand the gospel, but may not recognize or obey the authority of God as written in the Bible.

The steps in the process of writing material is arduous, as follows:

1. Create English rough draft
2. Draft revision: add scripture citations; questions; discussion points
3. Brandi creates and cleans design
4. Translate English document into Khmer
5. Enter Khmer into doc -this is tricky
6. Third Party Khmer proof read
7. Khmer Revision
8. Print draft
9. Edit printed version of both translations
10. Final print

We hope to start using the studies in the month of April. We have studied with people in the past, but putting something in their hand and getting together regularly has not happened. We hope these short study series will be a step in the right direction.

For the church to succeed here, we feel strongly about the congregation here in Phnom Penh. This is where brother Vanny lives, as well as sisters Seyha and Thida. Their family and friends are here. If we are to reach out into the provinces, we will do better in the long run by growing, discipling, and maturing this congregation so that they can send their own brethren to the brethren in the provinces.

## PRAYER NEEDS IN CAMBODIA

Please consider the following in your prayers.

Our friend Mr. Haeng requests prayers for:

- ◆ his wife who is not a believer
  - ◆ the family with the "demon-possessed" child
  - ◆ all Christians in Cambodia
  - ◆ the country of Cambodia itself
  - ◆ finding a job that allows a stable means of support
  - ◆ the surrounding villages of T'Baeng, Sankrua, Lui to open their hearts to the gospel
- (Our personal prayer request is that Mr. Haeng will study the Word, and obey the gospel. We believe he has a good heart.)

Brother Song Seng requests prayers for:

- ◆ their stability due to possible loss of home and land
- ◆ success as he begins his agriculture business
- ◆ financial help with his business
- ◆ conversion of daughter's boyfriend
- ◆ peace of mind for his wife, Sister Tai as she cares for her family during uncertainty

The Edwards request prayers for:

- ◆ our children as they continue to adjust to life here
- ◆ us, as parents, to train our kids in the Lord's Way
- ◆ our resolve and strength to walk with the Lord daily, showing His compassion and mercy to our friends and neighbors

The believers here request prayers for:

- ◆ Sister Puong, whose husband has left her
- ◆ success as we continue studies with our friends
- ◆ the churches in Phnom Penh, Steung Trang, Baray, Phnom Sampov, and Kampong Sdaach
- ◆ the religious-minded groups we have studied with in Phuum Leu and Patrock

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

Part One: Jonathan on Phuum Leu

We left Phnom Penh at 5:15AM with a four hour drive ahead of us. Our first stop was to study with a denominational preacher named Mr. Haeng Lim. Along with him, about four women and twenty children from the community waited. With twenty children viewing us like circus acts, the noise was out of control. The study pressed on, but the concentration of the adults was broken. It looks like if these studies continue, one may have to lesson plan some kid activities outside while the other leads the Bible study!

After this, Mr. Haeng wanted us to visit a neighbor who (in his words) struggles with an evil spirit. Mr. Haeng wanted us to share the gospel in hopes that the Christian message would drive the spirit out.

Upon arrival, we were met by a young man, probably in his late teens or early twenties. Over the course of the discussion, we learned that he defecated in a pot, escaped from being tied up, and most importantly seemed to have an intellectual deficiency. This was no demon possessed man. He was a man-child crying out for attention in very unhealthy ways. The members of his family, instead of being educated about his disability, were left to cook up a story that he had a demon. This is what Buddhism does. It destroys absolutes, then breeds superstition by not replacing absolutes with any tangible replacement. People are left to make up things in order to explain reality around them.

After sharing the gospel, they promised to consider the Word. Then we went to Mr. Haeng's house where

we shared the gospel with his non-believing wife. She also said she would consider what we had said.

We spent time in conversation about Mr. Haeng's conversion. In his own words, he accepted the Lord Jesus into his heart, and then months (or a year, I'm not exactly sure) later he was baptized to wash away his sins. Like so many, he is confused about baptism based off of incorrect denominational teaching. With encouragement to study, we left him with a solar mp3 that had two Bible studies on baptism. We pray for a sincere heart that will hear the truth.

A late lunch was had with some old friends of Vanny. We were able to lend them some mp3s with the gospel story and the Christian way of life; including the plan of salvation. We sow, we water, and God provides the increase.



Part Two: Vanny on Baray

On Thursday evening when arrived in Baray, we set and got to know some information that they will not lose their house until after Khmer New Year. All the Church building the court will decide at the end of July. After each bible study we had the discussion about the work and the lesson. I've got many suggestions from Mr. Seng on how to put the word and tab in after each title or subtitle.

He has told me to tell Mr. Jonathan and Mr. Bradley that anywhere that we went for the bible study we should bring some snack too. He picks Gandhi's quote that "When people have no food the food become their god." He said that if we have any snack after the study many people will come. Some may be just come for food and some may come for the study. While they come for food some day they may be change. He said that some people they went to church only for food but later on God work in their heart and they became a true Christian. He also said that they look at the Chinese religion. They never go out and share their religion but people follow them a lot. He said that it all about the money. The Chinese people they always offer to their god and they prosper a lot of wealth. That is the reasons many people follow the Chinese god. When people see that the Chinese people offer to their god they became rich and rich.

The day after which is Friday morning after we have the second study we had the discussion about Psalm 23. We chose some verse to discussed Mr.Seng ask us to explain about verse 1-3. He ask that in verse 1 the bible said that "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." What is the thing that God gives us in the life time? He said to me that how can you explain to non Christian when they ask about this verses, what will I answer to them when they says you not even have the house to stay how can you tell me your God provide to you. And he also said that in verse 3-4 said then God will strengthen us, what is the strength that God gives us?

After we try to explain the answer to him, he said that we should not answer to people only what is in the bible. But we should find something from the world to explain them so that all the people can understand. He said that this chapter (Psalm 23) is the about the life after this. All this is not for now because in Heaven will have no pain, suffering, and death we will not need anything. That what we did March 2015. May God bless us and all the Christian around the world and His will may be done.

*\*Notes from Jonathan: 'In Baray, Vanny led studies #1 and #2 in a series called "The Bible Series". These studies are titled "Authority for Religion" and "Authority for the Bible." "Brother Song's advice about money is based on worldly wisdom, and we do not plan to implement it. Also, we do not agree with his interpretation of Psalm 23. Brother Song struggles to see the value of trusting in God during times of adversity. Please pray for him and his family.*

Part Three: Bradley on Steung Trang

It was a privilege to once again see our dear brethren at Steung Trang. We have had great success here with the 'poster' system. The Ken family stays focused and attentive. This trip we came armed with 5 newly-created color posters with accompanying handouts, all in the Khmer language. The five studies we hoped to complete were a series on the Bible prepared by Jonathan and translated by Vanny. After arriving at their home late Friday afternoon we made our greetings, had dinner, and began our first study. Brother Vanny delivered the lesson in a confident and engaging way, and afterwards we strung up our hammocks and went to sleep.

The next morning Jonathan and I took a walk down to the riverfront. Brother Vanny again exercised his talent of loving people by opting to stay back and spend some time with brother Theara, who was manning the store in their home. Jonathan took advantage of some down time by instigating an impromptu Bible study from Psalm 23. The goal was to demonstrate that simple Bible reading and study is a grounding and profitable practice, even if one cannot create or conduct involved doctrinal studies. From here we took Jonathan into town to catch a minibus back to Phnom Penh so that he could lead Sunday worship for the Christians there.

After returning to the Ken home, brother Vanny entered into another casual study with brother Theara, this time from Ephesians 6 regarding the Armor of God. The two Khmer brothers studying together was a wonderful sight. In the evening we conducted lessons 2 & 3: 'Authority for the Bible' & 'A Map of the Bible.' I think the 'Map' study helped these brethren feel less daunted by the scope of God's word. Late in the evenings brother Theara would use his own time to look back over his study notes from the day, and listen to the solar-powered MP3 player of his own accord. Here, he is the best example I have seen of someone who is willing to learn and take advantage of the tools which we provide.

Sunday morning Vanny and I shared in the Ken Family's weekly worship service. Although the men of the family can operate the service entirely on their own, they were willing to afford Vanny and I the opportunity to instruct them in our 5th lesson: 'The Path to Unity & Fellowship.' After services, Vanny and I took the opportunity to briefly cover the 4th lesson: 'Searching the Scriptures.' I felt it was important we not leave without reviewing this lesson. As the last two days had seen some wonderful examples of Bible study in several different ways, it was easy to share the fourth lesson in a concise way that left them with more tools for personal growth.

*\*Personal note: On Sunday morning, during the prayer for our morning meal, I was struck by a bittersweet thought. The realization that I would one day be saying my last 'Goodbye' to this family hit me like a 50-kilo bag of rice. In the past there has always been planning and preparations for future trips. There have been prayers for successful studies and safe travels. One day, however, I will be wishing them well and bidding them God's speed for the final time. Lord willing this will not be for another 15 months, yet I get weepy as I write about it now. I wonder if the love that Paul felt for his brethren, which, on occasion brought him to tears, felt anything like this. Brother Vanny graciously conveyed my sentiments to brother Theara. When he heard my feelings translated, brother Theara pulled me in for a comforting hug. As a rule the Khmer people do not hug. The experience warmed my heart as we made our way back to Phnom Penh.*

My Work in Phnom Penh by Chan Vanny

First I would like to thank God for all the blessing that He has blessed me, my family and all the brothers and sisters. For all the save trips and all need, shelter, food and healthy. In this month most of the time I spent time worked in Phnom Penh at home. I worked on my translating for the bible study that Mr. Jonathan prepared, and visited some friends. I also teach Marissa and Jonathan bible study about the beginning of the world how God created the earth and man [this is a Khmer language practice we do once a week on Fridays]. It sounds so funny because He is an evangelist and I have to teach them about God. But I pretend that they are just the kid, so I have to teach them in beginning start from Gen 1:1 in Khmer. He also teaching me about the way we worship God. We spent time on the bible study why we not using any instrument in the service. I really enjoyed the study because I get to know which way God has made for us and we should not walk in our own way.



# AMERICAN HANDS IN CAMBODIAN SOIL

## Opening Our Home to Others

by Marissa Edwards

One of my favorite things to do is fill my house with family, friends and good times. Opening the doors of your home to others is a very effective way to communicate to people that you care for them without needing to say a word. It was also something that I was saddened by when I thought I wouldn't be doing a lot of while living abroad. Silly me.



This past Friday evening we held the first (official) get together for the Phnom Penh congregation in our home. It went well. Some new

friends were introduced; we ate; played some games; everyone chatted; the evening drew to a close; and then everyone went home. If I were to compare this course of events to any one of the many get togethers that have been held in the States, I would be hard pressed to find a difference between the two. It was nice to once again prepare food and fun for an unspecified amount of visitors and open our home for the sole purpose of enjoying each others' company.

Yah, I was a little anxious when Jonathan showed me the calendar for the month and the event 'Monthly Get Together' had occupied the last Friday. "What am I supposed to DO?!" was my immediate thought. Some hospitality customs here can be a bit strange and confusing to this American, who doesn't want to be an oblivious hostess, and offend every person in her house. After the wise and encouraging words of "just make some food for them to eat, and they'll be happy;" were imparted to me by my loving husband, I felt better. Then I felt kind of silly for having the anxiety in the first place. Because really, it is all the same here, just a little different. As the day drew closer we planned the activities: Jonathan built a couple of yard games, and I planned what we would eat.



Thankfully, I have become familiar enough with several Cambodian dishes that the thought of cooking gave me a good boost of confidence. Even if I might mess up being a cross-cultural hostess, at least stomachs will be full.

That is a snap shot of what basically happens each and every time we have guests over for dinner or a visit. A ridiculously nervous take off, and a happy finish. We have been blessed with the opportunity on several occasions to open our door and show to friends, neighbors and acquaintances that we are as normal as anyone, but we are also Christians. There have been several awkward beginnings to some meals, but by the time everyone cleans their plate, we are laughing about something the kids have done and have learned more about who each person is.

## Too Much Sand in the Mix by Bradley Ballard

Recently I built a table for our home. The beautiful slab of wood that I used as the top was not wide enough for our purposes. My solution: cut the table down the center and pour a 'ribbon' of concrete to widen the table. Sounds easy right? Not in this country.



With no Home Depot in Cambodia, "hands-on" has taken on a deeper meaning than before. Mixing concrete is done per job. It does not come pre-portioned, in 80-lb bags. You buy Portland cement gravel and sand. In researching concrete recipes I decided to experiment with various proportions of the three in order to find the right texture for our table top.

There were six recipes, each of which used the three ingredients and water. After the measuring, mixing, pouring and curing were complete, I tested each of them for strength. After all, it would not do to have our dinner table breaking in two right before dessert. The test: If I were able to lay the sample piece across a fulcrum and crack it by applying pressure to either side, it would not be sufficient for use in our table. Out of the six sample pieces that were tested only two failed. Which two? The two that cracked under pressure were the recipes with the highest proportions of sand. In fact, one was so sandy that it was coming apart before it was even submitted to the stress test.

I have seen this in the real world as well. This base of a deserted house stands next to a church in Pum Leov, Cambodia. It is no wonder why it has been deserted. The count-down has already begun for its collapse. There are pieces of strong stone still clinging together. There is evidently some lingering binding agent holding what's left of it together. However, with its high levels of sand, its fall appears inevitable. How can I help but think of the 'Wise & Foolish Builders?'

In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders,<sup>1,2</sup> Jesus teaches that the outcome for each of them is certain. Those who dig down and build on the rock will be able to stand in times of trial and torrent. This does not come by the builder's wisdom, but by a willingness to get to Rock and to depend on its strength.

The builder who depends on his own methods and wisdom will, just like the builder who did not lay a foundation on the bedrock, meet certain doom. The builders of the house in Pum Leov may have saved money, may have saved time, and may have felt pretty good about themselves. On a sad plot of land, however, rests the product of their insufficient efforts and planning. The fact that they may have felt proud of their work does not do anything for the current state of this lonely house.

I do not know what can be done for this house. However, I have hope that in Cambodia, the foundation of faith is still being built. It is our charge to teach people about the Rock of Faith. It is our mission to give them the tools to dig deep, build their own foundation on the Truth, take their stand against the storms that Satan will send their way, and then show others how to dig deep themselves.

Footnotes: (1) Matthew 7:24-27; (2) Luke 6:46-49

In the States, having people over for dinner (for me) more served the purpose of strengthening bonds and while it IS important to grow closer with one another, I guess I never felt the full weight of what hospitality can do. Here, we use it to create a bond between what had been non-existent or as fragile as a single thread from a spider's web. Dinners have opened the door to studies and made subsequent meetings more comfortable and easy. It is here, in this previously normal activity that I have found a large part of my purpose in the work in Cambodia. Aside from supporting Jonathan in his work, and us raising our children together, I had previously felt that I wasn't doing enough. Then I realized I was doing exactly what I was needed to do. The part played by the preacher's wife is one that is hidden from the eyes of many, and sometimes may be hidden even from the eyes of the wife herself. Making your home ready for company can, at times be no small feat, and then feeding the group has the ability to cause a numbing effect on reality and what is really going on.

I'm not mopping the floor, I'm making an environment that is comfortable for everyone to be in. I'm not just cooking, I'm making food that is familiar to my guests that will offer the thought of an effort from my family to be a part of where we are and not apart from it. I am telling every person who walks into this house that they are cared for. Hospitality is a vital part of any work. Whether that work be in your own neighborhood or on the other side of the globe, don't let yourself be distracted by the 'doings' of having company; take a moment and see it for what it really is.