

The Build Up to Cambodia

The work of the Lord's church in Cambodia may seem new, but there are years leading up to the present churches and Christians within the country. For this report, I would like to spend the time leading up to our move in order to let the reader know the planning, prayers, and preparations made. In hindsight, some may seem strange and others insurmountable. We put these in the Lord's hands and trust when He says, "With God, all things are possible."

2008

When the church of Christ in Denton County (Lewisville, TX) first began, we were a small but ambitious group. We met (and still meet) annually to create goals that would challenge all our members to grow personally as well as grow as a united body of Christ. Our international goals seemed a bit more than ten people could handle, but we decided to pursue them. They were as follows:

- Choose country/city/area as soon as possible

2009

As the second year began, we grew in number and purpose. We decided that South East Asia would be our place of focus. There were works in the Philippines and Malaysia, but we believed the continent needed attention. The leadership wrote the following goal concerning international evangelism:

- Choose country to focus international evangelism and begin study of language and culture.

2010

By the fall of 2009, Marissa and I were taking Korean language classes at a local community college. The congregation believed that South Korea was to be our launch pad into mainland Asia. As 2010 began, our goals started to take shape:

- South Korea
 - ♦ Continue to learn Korean language
 - ♦ Develop ties with people connected to Korea/Asia
 - ♦ Teach Denton County Korean/Asian customs
 - ♦ Begin scouting trips (2014)

2011

Our research eventually indicated that South Korea was not the country we wanted to pursue. The cups brethren have been there for years but seemed to have little fruit to show, so we decided to look elsewhere. Much praying and research led us to Cambodia. The goal of 2011 was as follows:

- Cambodia is the base country
- Edwards to go as teacher (seek TOEFL license) [*this goal would eventually be scraped*]
- Begin Khmer language practice
- Countdown to scouting/moving - 2014

As the years had passed, news travelled around the brotherhood of our plans. Brother Dennis Crawford of the Pacific, WA congregation called me in December to ask if I would be interested in accompanying brother Savorn Him to Cambodia. Savorn is a Cambodian American citizen who was born and raised in Cambodia and immigrated to the States in the 1980's. We praised God to have such an opportunity to go to Cambodia, even if it meant pushing our scouting trip up a few years. The plan was to visit Cambodia in the summer months of 2012.

2012

As the New Year began, I asked Bradley Ballard if he would be interested in moving to Cambodia with us. While I don't consider myself a "Paul", I do consider Bradley a "Barnabas". He is definitely talented in the gift of encouragement. As he and his wife considered, the goals for 2012 were set:

- Determine if Cambodia is the country
- Following the trip, create a plan of action.

Bradley agreed to move. He joined Savorn and me on our summer trip. When we arrived, I believe we held over 20 Bible studies in that 24 span that we were there. We learned a lot, were culture shocked, and sowed the seed. While it wasn't our intention to yield fruit on this trip, three people obeyed the gospel and the Lord's church was established. While there are cups congregations in the country, this was the first assembly to my knowledge that worships the Lord in spirit and truth. We returned to America overjoyed yet uncertain of the future.

2013

With three babes in Christ in Cambodia, a trip was organized for brother Savorn to return to encourage them. Joining him on our behalf was evangelist Michael Bolton (now of the Kennewick, WA congregation) and brother Dennis Crawford. (Bradley and I could not join this trip as we were school teachers and could not take off one month for the trip). They spent parts of January and February in Cambodia encouraging the Christians and baptizing more. Our goals meeting in January set these goals for the work:

- Cambodia goals
 - ♦ Get July 2013 trip funded
 - ♦ Strengthen the church in *Cambodia*
 - ♦ Strong evangelistic push in Phnom Penh
 - ♦ Find a trustworthy translator(s)
 - ♦ Find living arrangements
 - ♦ Secure jobs in Cambodia
 - ♦ Compile a "moving list" for the families
 - ♦ Find local print shop
 - ♦ Research TV/Radio/Internet options

As you can see, our goals began to focus more on moving there than simply visiting. Savorn, Bradley and I returned in June 2013 to spend another month encouraging Christians and researching where to live in the city of Phnom Penh. Our trip yielded success and we were one step closer to moving.

2014

As the New Year began, our leadership met again to set goals. Included in these were goals for Cambodia. This year they were short and to the point:

- Maintain support and oversight for Cambodia work.
- Establish congregation in Phnom Pehn.

In February, Michael and Savorn returned for another month long trip. The Christians in Cambodia were edified and strengthened and there were a few baptisms.

On June 18th, 2014, the Ballard and Edwards families arrived in Phnom Penh to live and work. Bradley works part time at a local school and part time for the church. I work as a full time evangelist serving the congregations of the church of Christ in Cambodia. In the following months, I hope to recap the year we have worked here and update on the monthly progress.

As 2015 began, Denton County continued to set goals as a congregation. We will end with a look at what the coordinating church has in mind for the future. Lord willing, these goals are “mid-term” goals. That means they are planned for a few years down the road. They may seem lofty, but as I sit here thinking of the seven years building up to Cambodia, my heart beats with excitement to consider what the Lord has in store for the years ahead!

- Send others to Cambodia during 3rd year of Edwards’s family stay in Cambodia.
- Expand South Central Asia work throughout Indo-China peninsula.
- Expand South Central Asia work throughout entire South Central Asia region.