

The Carlyles in Cambodia – March, 2019

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.” – 2 Timothy 1:9



Since our early years serving in Cambodia, we have asked you to pray for what we call “dry season evangelism.” This takes place between harvest and planting seasons (December to April) when the weather changes from regular heavy rains and flooding to bone dry and dusty conditions. Temperatures start in the 70s but rise to the 100s by March, with a sun that is much more intense than what we are used to in the United States. Due to the lack of water, farming activities slow dramatically, providing us with the opportunity to sow seed among the people of Cambodia. In this month’s update, we give you an inside look at our dry season evangelism experiences in 2019.

“I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named.” – Romans 15:20

First stated by the Apostle Paul, this objective is the heart desire of many missionaries serving in pioneering settings. Yet here in Cambodia, we find it impossible to achieve no matter how hard we try. Let me explain...

Virtually all of Pursat City has been evangelized, either by our past or present teams of fellow-laborers or by other Christian groups. But owing to significant improvements in infrastructure over the last few years, in 2019 we decided to start working in remote villages that would have been prohibitively distant in the past. Many roads leading to and from the city that were previously twisty mazes of muddy potholes and rocks have been widened and paved, reducing trips that would have taken an entire morning to less-than an hour. And time isn’t the only consideration—after taking a sweaty beating on the motorcycle for hours in the hot sun, one is hardly what would be considered “fresh!”

So this year, we chose a rural village north of Pursat City called Srei S’Dok (“luxuriant rice paddy”), known for rice farming and herding water buffalo. (See the picture above.) We had never worked in Srei S’Dok and were unaware of any prior Christian activity in this remote location, but on our first outing we heard of a church building near the center of the village. This is not surprising—it seems that no matter how far you go “off the map” in Cambodia, somebody has funded a church building project there. What did surprise us is that this small and distant area had two such church buildings, neither having a congregation.

Against the backdrop of small wood and thatch houses on stilts, each one having altars for worshipping the ancient ancestors and other care-giving spirits, these large cement buildings look like out-of-place “temples” for a “foreign God” to the Cambodians (their words), as unwelcome as they are impressive. We were told that the group who built them had gone through the village passing out t-shirts to gain followers and now holds a kid’s club each Sunday. When asked if there are any adult Christians living in Srei S’Dok, the villagers said, “Of course not!” In a culture where elders are respected leaders



in both the home and the community, starting with children to form the foundation of a church doesn't pan out.

Sadly, all of Srei S'Dok already knows about Jesus in this way—as a threat to their ancient traditions funded by powerful foreigners. And there are hundreds of these “churches” without congregation in villages all over Cambodia.

Resistance is Futile

Cambodians don't know the difference between one group of Christian foreigners and the next, so when we arrive representing the same foreign deity, they heap all of their pre-conceived notions based on prior experience upon us. We walk into situations like this finding the village braced for another powerful foreign invasion, nevertheless hoping to get a handout of some kind because they think that passing out stuff to the poor is what Christians do.

To overcome the obstacle of foreignness, we have labored to adopt their language and culture—Cambodians love it that we speak their language and know how to greet them properly! We assured people that we weren't there to buy their faith and told them there has been a congregation of Cambodian Christians in Pursat for 13 years to break the ice. Yet try as we might to bridge the gap, there is still resistance to our presence and especially our message.

During our first two weeks in Srei S'Dok, we had more liberty to talk with people about why we were there and what we were doing. Our presence caught them off guard, to be sure, but we faced no outright rejection. Still it was obvious that people were uncomfortable, looking either at the ground or their neighbor's homes to see if anyone was watching. Nevertheless, we had some great opportunities to share the gospel, on which see below.

One morning, a man actually came out to meet me! I thanked God for the opportunity and greeted him. The man acted interested in talking to me until his son came out from the house. Then he said, “Go ask the foreigner for some money,” and it ended there. I felt deflated! Several times, people interrupted us insisting that we provide them with medicine because another Christian group had gone through the village passing out medicine a few weeks before.

By the third week, the resistance had clearly intensified. We noticed more people taking our tract and flipping through the pages while nervously saying “yes, yes, yes” to anything we said. We had fewer good conversations with people than before. I asked one fellow if I could park my motorcycle under the tree next to his shop and was flatly told to park it elsewhere. One day we arrived on a peaceful morning to the sound of birds chirping, only to have the village leader drown out our conversations by blasting love songs through large speakers used for weddings. As we left, he turned the music back off and we could once again hear the birds.

Nevertheless, our work is not in vain. Some of these people are inwardly curious about Jesus, but in their social setting they wouldn't dare show outward interest lest they face censure from family and friends. Those who can will read the tract we gave them, and some will listen to our radio program or read our Facebook page. Lord willing, we will meet them again, either on a later trip to Srei S'Dok or when they come up to the “big city” of Pursat. And despite the resistance we faced, we continued in our labors believing in our hearts that the Word of God will not return void.

If Momma Ain't Happy...

Well, sort of. In Cambodia, if grandma ain't interested, ain't nobody interested, and in a typical multi-generational Cambodian home, that can be a problem. Sometimes we have a good opportunity to share with younger people, but when grandma feels that Buddhism is being threatened, she walks away acting busy. Everyone else in the family gets the hint, shutting us down. But the opposite is likewise true! Michael had a great opportunity to share with three generations of extended family, about 12-15 people, on our second trip to Srei S'Dok. The key was two grandmothers listening and engaged. Michael was able to share a summary of the gospel from creation to Christ, including God's deity, sin, Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection, and saving faith. Since both grandmothers were paying attention, everyone paid attention, and some were even asking good questions. Praise God!

Forrest McPhail (GFA) had a great opportunity to share the Gospel with a man selling fish traps. He started by mentioning that Jesus' disciples were fishermen as well, which piqued the man's interest. God then granted Forrest the opportunity to share a basic explanation of creation, the fall, separation from God, Jesus' incarnation, and why He died on the cross. The man had heard that Jesus died on a cross, but didn't know who Jesus was or why.

Nathan Waldock (BMM) participated for his first time since finishing language study. On his very first attempt, despite the stumbling that comes with trying to do something for the first time in a foreign tongue, God provided him the opportunity to share with three young people, who likewise listened with interest. God is good!



"Trust Jesus, receive forgiveness of sins"



"Jesus frees sinful men"



"Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life"

About Those Yellow Signs

There is a Christian organization from Japan that travels up and down rural roads all over provincial Cambodia posting various yellow signs as seen above. Though precious and eternal truths to us, without any explanation their meaning is obscured to Cambodians, who think of god(s), sin ("karma"), salvation ("nirvana"), and the world in ways categorically different than Christians. Srei S'Dok has its share of these yellow signs, and the villagers pass them by every day having little idea of what they mean. But they came in really handy at times when one of them would be posted on a tree near a villager's home. "Do you know what that sign means?" "No." "Allow me to explain..."

The Fruit of the Harvest

The rains have come again and Khmer New Year is finally upon us, so plowing and sowing in Cambodia's rice fields will soon begin anew. Watching the farmers take up their work of turning the soil, pulling out stumps and rocks, and finally sowing reminds us that Gospel ministry is hard work by God's design—in His sovereign wisdom, He has determined that preaching the Word and making disciples is like farming, not hunting (Matthew 13, Mark 4, 1 Corinthians 3:5-9). So we go into the field expecting to face heat, sweat, dust, and hardship. Our reward is rarely immediate, but like Cambodian farmers, we press on anticipating the season of harvest that lies ahead.

Thank you for your diligent prayers for our family and for those who labor alongside us. We are all convinced and believe in our hearts that God has created the Cambodian people for His glory, and that through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His Gospel, God will save a remnant of Cambodians for His glory who will one day praise God and the Lamb around the throne (Revelation 5:5-19). You will have a share in this glory as the lives of these precious people are presented complete in Christ before the throne.



"I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." 2 Timothy 1:12

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Missionaries to Cambodia

