



Beginnings at Phnom Penh Bible School

Genesis is where it all begins, and so fittingly, Genesis was the topic for my first course at Phnom Penh Bible School, a course for first semester freshmen also in the genesis of their college theological studies.

Founded in 1992 just after Cambodia was opening up after a long period of civil unrest, Phnom Penh Bible School is the oldest and probably the most well established institution here for pastoral training. The principal and academic dean are Cambodians who have earned master's degrees abroad, and the school's faculty is a mix of Cambodians and foreigners.

When a mission colleague from the Reformed Church of America asked if I could sub for his course for a semester (November to February), I knew it would be a challenge. However, it was even harder than I thought. Teaching is a lot of work, and teaching in a second language adds another layer of complexity. Nevertheless, I love teaching students, and I knew we would have a lot of fun too.

For three hours every Wednesday morning, I met with my 14 students—8 men, 6 women; ages 18-27; 13 ethnically Khmer and 1 ethnically Kuy (a brave young woman from an ethnic minority people group in a distant part of the country). They had nearly perfect attendance, were extremely respectful, and willingly participated in class activities—which isn't quite how I remember my 8am classes as a college freshman!

In contrast to other young people I'm used to interacting with in Phnom Penh, most of my Bible school students had either grown up in Christian families or

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Prayer Points

Help!

- As Cambodians travel home for Khmer New Year, pray that Christians would be faithful witnesses in their communities.
- To be honest, I'm tired. So, while Cambodians celebrate their new year, I'm taking a week break in Vietnam.
- Home service planning involves lots of details. Pray that these would all fall into place.
- April is the hottest month of the year. Pray for patience and strength in the heat.
- Pray for wisdom as I advise and assist World Renew's work with rural churches.

Thanks!

- Thank God with me for a great semester teaching at Phnom Penh Bible School (left), and pray for the students and faculty as they continue their work.
- My housemate Reatrey has started a paid architecture internship. This is a tremendous opportunity for him.
- Resonate Cambodia has been able to partner with others in offering spiritual formation opportunities for young leaders.

Bible School, continued

had at least become Christians in rural Cambodia prior to their move to Phnom Penh. Their biblical literacy was still quite low, but they had a greater familiarity with the basics of the Christian life—prayer, worship, evangelism, etc. Many had been or were currently serving as youth leaders and children’s ministry leaders. Furthermore, many had hopes of returning to rural Cambodia to serve rural churches (though the reality is that this may change for many of them after four years in the big city).

Given all of this, my goal was to interact with the biblical text in a way that would make it come alive for the students, to get to know the characters and movements of the narrative and wonder how it might apply to our lives. Though we struggled to move from concrete stories to more abstract analysis, I found my students in some ways intuitively understood the biblical stories. Land, inheritance, family conflict, human trafficking (think Joseph)—these are key issues both in Genesis and in rural Cambodia.

Thankfully, all of my students passed the course! And I passed too, as the principal and academic dean both indicated they would welcome me to teach at the Bible school again (maybe Deuteronomy next year). I am grateful for this opportunity to interact with and train future leaders of the Cambodian church through formal education. Please keep them in your prayers as they continue their studies and ministries.

Upcoming Home Service

I’m coming to see you! I will be in the US for just over three months this year, with some family time planned for the end of July and then church visits in Michigan in August and in Iowa for September and October.

In addition to speaking at churches, I would love to meet with individuals and groups to learn how God has been working in your lives these past two years and to also share more personally about my life and ministry here. I really value these personal connections, so please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address below. **Thank you for your ongoing partnership in this ministry!**



One the traditions I have with my housemates is to go out for pizza to celebrate Khmer New Year before they all travel home to see their family.

Happy New Year!

April means Khmer New Year, the biggest holiday of the year. In a Buddhist country like Cambodia, Christmas isn’t a national holiday. Instead, the main family event of the year comes in the middle of April when Cambodians flock back to their home towns for eating and drinking, dancing, and hanging out with family and friends.

The holiday is three days long, April 14 to 16, but as people say here, it’s a three-day holiday that lasts for three weeks. Schools close for a few weeks, and the spirit of the holiday time slows down everyone’s productivity for the whole month.

For many young Christians, this holiday can be a challenging time. How will their newly found faith in Christ in Phnom Penh translate to life back in the village? Many will be teased and mildly persecuted by their families. Furthermore, the holiday has religious roots in the folk Buddhist tradition, and I believe these spiritual forces continue to have an impact in some way.

Please join me first in giving thanks for the *goodness* of Khmer New Year—the joy of family, laughter, and good food; but also please pray for young Christians in a spiritually challenging season.

អរគុណច្រើន! / Thanks! – Justin

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