

UPDATE Cambodia 2009 Mission Trip

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Dear Family & Friends

It's been just over a couple weeks since we've been back from Cambodia but my heart and emotions still seem to be in Asia. This is a normal aspect of the re-entry process that we are called to embrace. In many ways, it is the most difficult part of any mission experience because it is a time to be still, to listen and to wait on the Lord for another chapter to unfold. Nonetheless, as I reflect on our journey, there is much to give thanks to God for. I especially thank Him for each of you who have sown so generously into our lives. Because of you, we experienced His faithfulness in providing for all the needs of our team---whether it was your prayers for us, whether it was the financial resources given, whether it was your words of encouragement, whether it was your support at the Our Thai Fundraiser, whether it was your gifts for the Cambodians, God blessed us way beyond what we could imagine. He indeed was not only watching over us, but time and time again, we saw His hand directing our steps and giving us opportunities to encounter Him through the poor, the oppressed and the broken. So on behalf of the team, thank you for your investment of time, energy and resources to stand in the gap not only for us but for the people and children in Cambodia. ***This service that you perform not only supplied the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*** (2 Corinthians 9:12)

Jesus In the Least of These

This year's trip, the verse that seemed to reverberate in my soul was from **2 Corinthians 12:9**. "***For my power is made perfect in weakness.***" Each time I visit Cambodia, it is the weak and vulnerable that God uses to speak to my heart. For it is in their vulnerability, my vulnerability is revealed. In their brokenness, I am forced to confront mine, in their helplessness, I see my own. This is not about dwelling on the pain and suffering of others but rather gaining understanding about an aspect of 'the cross' that we so often seek to avoid. For the cross of Christ challenges us to enter into the suffering of the world in all its darkness, hopelessness and pain, yet it is the cross of Jesus that also reminds us that where there is brokenness, there can be wholeness, where there is despair there can be joy, where there is ugliness, there can be beauty, where there is rejection, there can be acceptance. It is in the spending time with the 'least of these' I find Jesus and discover that His power is made perfect in weakness. What do I mean by this?

Jesus With The Rejected

At a tender age of 4 days old, baby Bayana who I met at Daughters experienced rejection. Because of her disabilities (she was diagnosed with spina bifida and had club feet) she was rejected first by her parents and then by a pediatric hospital where the doctors suggested to her parents to just take her home and let her die. But Jesus is on the side of the rejected and one phone call and a few hours later, baby Bayana was ushered into a whole new world; a world where her weakness became her strength, a world, where new opportunities and new hope arose. She was given a new name, Neang Rua (which means 'Ruth' but also 'live'), 'adopted' by [Place of Rescue](#) run by my dear friend Marie Ens and was sent back to the very pediatric hospital where she was initially rejected and is now receiving treatment for each of her ailments. As Marie said, *God has a plan for Neang Rua's life.* Yes Jesus's power made perfect in the weakness of the abandoned. Though the world may reject Neang Rua, He accepts her just as she is. Though the world may want to write off Neang Rua, God has engraved her on the palm of His hand. Though the world may want to forget her, He has not, for He has created her for such a time as this!

Jesus With The Oppressed

But Jesus was not only present to rescue a helpless babe, for He was standing in the midst of one who continues to live a life of oppression as I thought of a former sex worker from [Daughters Cambodia](#), whose tears were a visible reminder of the pain that she endured each day. The violence against her has been transferred from the brothel to her home where she experiences daily beatings from her husband. In one of our seminars, she came forward for prayer, she could barely look up, her body language, a reflection of the downcast spirit within. How does one possibly offer hope to one who is so crushed? I asked her what her name was and asked if she would look into my eyes. I began to tell her that *Jesus sees her pain. He knows what she goes through each day, He hears the cries of her heart. He is not a God who is distant but who cares what happens to her and He will rescue her because He loves her.* She began to cry and so did I. There is something special in having the privilege of sharing in another person's suffering, in sharing their pain and helping them to know they are not alone; that we stand in solidarity with them just as Jesus does. I wanted her to know how much she was loved and valued as a human being. That day, she laid her pain at the foot of the cross trusting that God could make something beautiful out of her brokenness. That day she stepped out in faith choosing to believe



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that God's power is made perfect in her weakness. That day, I prayed that she saw the loving gaze of Christ, offering her hope that a new day was coming in her life.

Jesus With The Exploited

Svay Pak, the village 11km outside of Phnom Penh notorious for being the pedophile's paradise is a place where strangely I have come to experience God's love through the little ones I reconnected with from last year. For it was here that I was confronted with the reality of the statistic that 80% to 100% of the girls in this community are trafficked. Such was the case one Saturday when I learned that within 24 hours one of my little "daughters" was going to be taken to a brothel up north owned by her parents. She had come to the sanctuary of the Lord—[Rahab's House](#) asking for help from the pastor. This time she did not want to go for she knew the fate that awaited her. Each time she had been previously and returned, Pastor Chantha had to take her to a medical clinic for treatment. It is here that both my fear and faith collided. Fear as I thought of the 'worse', tears welling up in my eyes, as I sat with her and others, yet 'faith in Christ' as we prayed and pleaded for God to intervene. For the first time in my life I felt compelled to fast for the life of this precious one that evening. God's word to me over night was *'don't worry she will be okay.'* Indeed the next day I saw her at the Sunday school program and gave her my cross necklace not only as a symbol of my love for her but more importantly, as a symbol that Christ loves her and that He would never leave her nor forsake her. Praise God, as of this writing she is still safe. Her grandmother who attends Rahab's House church had refused to let her go, but the tension remains. She remains 'at risk' of being sold for sadly she is a 'favorite' in the pedophile catalogue. What is it like for a child to live under such a cloud of darkness? I have no answers to this question, but through this process, I am reminded that to love the way Jesus loves, is costly—for it demands that we persevere with an enduring hope despite the visible reality, trusting that in the invisible reality, Christ will be faithful to His promises of protecting the defenseless so that one day, they will terrify no more.

Jesus With The Redeemed

But all is not dark and dismal. For God also is in the business of restoring the years the locusts have eaten from those who have experienced years of sexual slavery. Such was my encounter with 3 of the former victims of the first ever convicted Canadian pedophile/sex tourist Donald Bakker. These special ones are now under the care of a Foster care program that Ratanak funds in Cambodia. I had the awesome privilege of spending a few hours with them, celebrating their birthdays, asking them about their hopes and dreams for the future. They are all believers, doing things that any teenager would do—enjoying junk food, going to youth camp, posing with their favorite stuffed animals, giggling and laughing as they each shared their hopes of being a lawyer, a hip hop instructor, or a business woman. But I was struck by their spiritual maturity as one of them prayed for us and asked that God would use the words that we had prayed for them to touch their hearts deeply. Their story and journey demonstrates the power of Christ to heal, to bind up wounds, to set free and to release new hope and new life. In them, I see evidences of God's grace restoring and redeeming shattered lives.

Indeed each of these stories are reminders that the oppressed and the brokenhearted will continue to call us out of our comfortable apathy and indifference, just as Christ himself calls us to set aside all that entangles and follow after Him. It is an emotional roller coaster with bitter and sweet moments intertwined, but the poor and the downcast are in need of hope and justice; they need mercy, they need love, they need to know that someone cares, they need to know that they matter and they need our time, even as Jesus seems to tell us that it is *we* who need *their* time. For in gaining a glimpse of their darkness, in spending time with them, I become more keenly aware of the words that Henri Nouwen once penned: **In these suffering bodies of people we must be able to recognize the suffering Christ. They too are chosen, blessed, broken and given to the world. As we call one another to respond to the cries of these people and work together for justice and peace, we are caring for Christ, who suffered and died for the salvation of our world.** In each one of them we not only see Jesus in disguise, but it is the poor and needy who teach us how to love Christ even more. In the cup of cold water delivered to the least of these, He is there among us demonstrating that His power indeed is made perfect in weakness.

Thank you again for your incredible support. For those who would like to read more details about our experiences in Cambodia, check out the Ratanak Missions blog below.

Much blessings,

Lisa

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