



# 2024 Year in Review

## Mark Wilson

In partnership with the Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS)

### A glimpse at what your support made possible:

#### Continuing Life Together

Because of your partnership in the Cambodian Ministry, I am able to spend time with PPBS alumni. During a break in my teaching, I was able to spend a week travelling to spend time with alumni Pastors Seyha Sorn and Hout Soheng and their families. Due to the physical and social distance of their ministries from the school and other churches, these pastors do not receive many visitors. This was the first time a member of the school's board came to visit them. Because of our shared history from my time as their teacher and small group leader, we were able to continue *"doing life together"* (cf. 1 Thes. 2:8), something which was an encouragement to us both. You all last met Pastor Seyha when I visited him after his graduation (pictured right). I recently learned that he and his wife will be joined in the ministry by Chan Chhaeut, one of PPBS's newest graduates, as they minister to the "least reached" people in homeland, the Kuy people.



*Pastor Seyha and his family and Pastor Seyha with me.*

#### The Unremarkable Remarkable Miracle

During my visit with Pastor Heng, I spent time with his family but he also invited me to go with him and the elders of the church as they went pray for the sick in their community. One such visit was to the brother-in-



Pastor Heng and his family.

law of a church member who had almost been completely paralyzed by several strokes. Neither Mr. Phanet nor anyone in his household knew or followed Jesus.

Early one morning, we gathered at Pastor Heng's house and prayed before riding motorbikes some 20 minutes outside of town to the house. The house was a typical simple one-room wooden Cambodian "stilted" house raising some 15 feet above the ground (on stilts)—a design which provides shade under the house in the hot summer months as well as protection against flooding during the rainy season. After

being invited up, our little group made our way up the stairs and sat in a semicircle on the floor of the outside porch (another typical feature of tropical countryside living—a place to catch breezes if there are any in the hot summers). Hoping not to become a distraction, I sat off quietly to the side listening and praying.

Soon, members of Mr. Phanet's family brought him onto the porch. His wife and adult children pulled out the mat on which he was laying. He was clothed only in an adult 'diaper,' his paper-thin skin hung loosely over his bones and a feeding tube hung from his nose. I did my best not to weep.

While I cannot assume any of the credit for the words or actions of Pastor Heng or his elders, I know, without a doubt, that he was paying attention in Global Missions class as much as I was when Carla and Vern Sterk were teaching some very important lessons about mission and evangelism. The core of what I would like to share with you is that Pastor Heng and the elders conducted themselves as true servants of God, taking their time during the visit, treating Mr. Phanet as a person, not a project. They were careful to avoid allowing their own anxiety about Mr. Phanet's condition to push the agenda and their prayers rather than taking their time listening to Mr. Phanet's family and following the Spirit. They not only asked Mr. Phanet if he wanted prayer (he indicated yes), asked if he wanted to hear about the Creator God of all things to whom they would pray (again, yes), and about Jesus who sacrificed himself for us, which was the opposite of the local spirits which require sacrifices from them (again, yes). This naturally allowed a time of prayer to become a lesson about God. And, before they prayed, they took the time to explain that it was not by their power but only by the power of God that he would be changed. Lastly, they explained God's love for him and asked him a very difficult question—explaining that they would pray for his healing no matter how he answered.

They asked him if he would be willing to have one of his family members cut off the "magic" strings, which were tied around his wrist, ankles and waist. Again, it was not a requirement, they would pray for him one way or another, but it would express his willingness to trust in the God to whom they would pray. You see, most Cambodians, while Buddhist at least in name, are very deep-down animists. They believe in the power of the local spirits over every aspect of life, including health and well-being. Pastor Heng and the elders knew that for Mr. Phanet, cutting these strings would show the truest intent of his heart, more so than making any profession of faith.

While from my earthly perspective, I'd like to end this story by telling you that I witnessed a *remarkable miracle*—that the effects of Mr. Phanet's stroke were instantly reversed—but I cannot. What I witnessed was something much more profound. You see, Mr. Phanet agreed to have his magic strings cut off that morning—a truly remarkable miracle. For those of us from North America it would be as if we were asked the same question as Jesus asked the "rich young ruler" in Luke 18—to sell all of his material wealth. Though in this case, it was to give up all of his perceived spiritual protection. And yet, rather than "becoming sad" as the young man who had encountered Jesus face-to-face, Mr. Phanet did the opposite. And as we were preparing to leave, Mr. Phanet's eyes locked with mine for a moment. I again prayed that he might experience the joy of the Lord. And, for the first time during our visit, Mr. Phanet smiled. Please join us in praising God for his grace and for the reports of openness by the rest of the family to hearing about the Lord. Join us in praying that there will be ways for Mr. Phanet and his family to grow in their understanding

of the Lord. I look forward to the day when I can report that the other family members have made similar decisions to cut off their “magic” strings as well.

### Accreditation

Finally, when thinking of the things made possible by our RCA partners, one of the most exciting and revealing things was the re-accreditation of PPBS’ bachelor’s programs and the accreditation of our master’s program! This was something I began close to seven years ago when I was a teacher, and then passed off to the only remaining full-time American member of the faculty, Mr. Joe Martin. If it were not for the support of the RCA back then and over these past few years that I served on the board, I’m not sure this initiative would have continued. Thank you! During my most recent time in Cambodia, I received several words of thanks from faculty and board members for my contributions to the school and board for bringing a fresh, “field-level” level perspective.



### Challenges of 2024

The greatest challenge of 2024 was keeping balance between the various types of activities in which I’m involved with at the school: board, teaching, mentoring, and my own professional development. I largely need to be better organized and better able to synchronize various aspects of my work. To work at overcoming this in 2025, I’ve connected with someone in a similar situation and we’ll be helping one another in this area.

### Please Pray

- Please pray for PPBS alumni, especially those who serve in physically remote areas. May the Lord strengthen these servants, giving them joy in their service and wisdom to take care of themselves.
- Pray that PPBS would be creative and strategic in reaching their alumni with their limited resources.
- Pray for the new graduates heading into the places which God has called them.
- Give thanks to the Lord for the re-accreditation of PPBS’ bachelor’s programs and accreditation of the master’s programs. Pray for the follow-up needed on several items included several board-level items.



Above left to right: Presenting Chan her graduation certificate and performing the traditional graduation dance.