



The Farmers



on Mission in Cambodia



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The first 4 years: a solid foundation for long-term communication

If you're reading this, it's probably because you've invested heavily in us and our mission. Your precious finances and your even more precious time and energy in prayer earn you a right to know what's going on in our work. So, these 2 pages are designed to give you details about **our primary ministry goal for the next 4 years**. I'll certainly be sending additional (and shorter) updates on our progress, but this is a road map to remind us (and you) of where we hope to be by the next time we see you face-to-face.

At some time or other, I've outlined for each of you our [long-term vision for mission](#) in Cambodia. Again, this is a "30-year plan" if you will, and our first term in Cambodia will most likely see little or none of this plan actually materialize. We're okay with that, and here's why. Based on our study (both at SIL and privately) and our conversations with various missionary veterans in recent years, we've been deeply impressed with the nearly insurmountable **barrier of language and culture**. The two are inseparably interwoven in this barrier, and few of us are able to appreciate its magnitude until we begin to study and attempt to climb it. Our professor in Second Language Acquisition class repeatedly referenced a study which estimates that achieving "near-native fluency" in a second language/culture takes 17 years! Well, we don't exactly have that kind of time for focused language learning, but we do plan to be in Cambodia for the long haul. Therefore, we hope to proceed carefully and avoid as much as possible the many language-learning traps and dead-end streets so commonly encountered by missionaries.

Perhaps an example can help. Language learning occurs in stages or plateaus. Fairly early in the process, the foreigner (that's us) learns enough to order from a menu, complete a grocery list at the market, or hail a taxi. At a higher level of proficiency, he can describe people,

places, and events using complete sentences; he can even interact in a limited way with natives who are willing to meet him in his growth zone. Ultimately however, the missionary's desire is to be able to communicate adequately, even persuasively, in the realm of *ideas*—he wants to explain the deity and humanity of Christ, justification, regeneration, and a host of other spiritual realities; he wants to be a good storyteller; he wants to address the heart. Unfortunately, many of us never reach this level, and the reasons are numerous. But one very common reason is that after reaching one of the earlier plateaus I mentioned above, we are encouraged and excited (understandably so) by the new territory we've conquered. This progress in the language, not to mention a passion for the gospel, presents the temptation to jump eagerly into various ministry opportunities, which means that time for language study and growth dwindles. At that point, the opportunity to return to focused language growth is rare and difficult.

គេហទំព័រស្រុកបាត់ដំបងសូមស្វាគមន៍
" បាត់ដំបងជាជម្រកស្រូវរបស់ប្រទេសកម្ពុជា "
គេហទំព័រនិងផ្តល់ជូនលោកអ្នកនូវព័ត៌មានសំខាន់ៗអំពីស្រុក និងរដ្ឋបាលស្រុក
ប្រពៃណីវប្បធម៌និងជីវភាពរស់នៅរបស់ប្រជាជន ឱកាសសំរាប់ធ្វើផ្សព្វផ្សាយ
ព្រមទាំងមូលនិមត្តិព័ត៌មានសំខាន់ៗទាក់ទងនឹងគំរូបទេសចរណ៍
នៅក្នុងនិងនៅជុំវិញខេត្តបាត់ដំបង។
យើងសង្ឃឹមថានឹងបានជួបលោកអ្នកក្នុងពេលឆាប់ៗខាងមុខនេះ !

The methodology we acquired last summer is designed to provide us, **through 2 years of focused study**, with a firm foundation for a lifetime of growth in effective



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communication with native speakers. So, shortly after setting up house in Phnom Penh (English pronunciation: [puh-nom pen](#)), we will hire a language tutor who will meet us in our home each day for about 4 hours. We'll then spend the remainder of the day preparing for the next day's sessions. Additionally, I'll be compiling information about Khmer culture using methods from my [ethnography](#) class last summer. Our goal here is to learn how the Khmer live and why they do what they do. In all of this, our desire is to remove as many linguistic and cultural barriers as possible to the Cambodians hearing and embracing the Gospel.

By the end of year 2 in Cambodia, we plan to leave the capital, Phnom Penh, and move to the northeast province of Stung Treng where we can best access the Laotian population. Then we'll repeat the same process all over again for another 2 years with the Laotian language and culture! Believe it or not, we're nerdy enough to be very excited about the learning process. So, at the end of 4 years, it is our prayer that we will have **a solid foundation for long-term communication** with the Khmer and Laotian peoples. Please pray with us.

Now, **the good news about all of this study** is that the method we will use is based on the premise that language is not primarily a cognitive pursuit to be carried out in the recesses of a private study and that to approach it as such is often counterproductive. (Can I get

an Amen from all you Greek and Hebrew students?) Rather, language is fundamentally a *relational* phenomenon and is best acquired through regular interaction with an expanding circle of native speakers who, in varying degrees, "nurture" you into their Khmer (or Laotian) world. So, it's not as if we get to the end of year 4 and then say, "Okay, let's find somebody to evangelize!" Rather, by the end of this season of focused learning, we pray that the Lord will give us a growing circle of relationships with people whom He has already appointed for eternal life! Again, please pray with us, **that the transition from "student" to "gospel minister" will be smooth and seamless.**

Finally, we're rookies. We like to *think* we know what we're doing, but wiser, more experienced heads tell us otherwise; and we know they're right. We simply present here a plan that will need regular adjustment, perhaps even complete overhauling. So please **ask the Lord to give us humility, skill, and perseverance** to be learners, both from the Cambodians and from those who've gone before us.



Well, if you've persevered this far, you're probably either a family member or every bit as nerdy as I am. Either way, thank you for your investment in us. May we prove faithful stewards with it, and may our Master impart rich returns for His glory!

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