

Report from Cambodia

Esther Thomas is the 18-year old grand daughter of Peter & Rosemary Thomas, whose son Rod and his wife Glenda are in Sendai, Japan. Esther is in a gap year attending a Discipleship Training School (DTS) with Youth with a Mission (YWAM) in Wollongong, Australia. Esther visited a South Korean Peace Camp in July last year which was recorded in "Faith Matters" September 2009 edition.

This school has been a completely new and challenging experience and I'm sure it will become more and more during our time of outreach. Our DTS of 19 people has been divided for outreach – Cambodia and Thailand. I was selected for Cambodia. Another girl and I are planning to make an illustrated gospel in Cambodian style art to try and reach the people who cannot speak English. Cambodia is a country of a very oppressive and traumatic history, and many still suffer the effects of the land mines, etc. We really want this outreach to be a success and for it to bring many Cambodians to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, so that they can find healing and belonging in Him.

We arrived here in Cambodia yesterday (9 December) morning. We had to buy our visas on entry to the country, and we are only allowed to be in Cambodia for a month before it expires, and then we have to cross the border to Thailand and get it renewed.

The nine of us students are staying with our staff in a YWAM house close to the centre of Siem Reap. The house is really nice and cool compared to outside and we all have ceiling fans in our rooms. In the common area there is a fridge and a very nice new kitchen. There is a lovely balcony overlooking the street below where we can have our devotions and team meetings. We are very lucky to be in the middle of the busyness, because it gives us a very good feel for the culture and we are able to make friends with the shopkeepers. We are also in an amazing place for evangelism opportunities because we have prostitutes living directly behind us. People who have prayed intentionally for us feel like God is calling us to be a lighthouse amongst the darkness. Hopefully people will be drawn to us!

We found out yesterday where we will be working and what classes we will be teaching. Another girl and I are being sent to White Doves for a few hours everyday to work with girls who

have been saved from prostitution. We will most likely be doing crafts with them and helping them to earn a living independently. This is very exciting for me because I have always had it in my heart to work with prostitutes and young girls who have suffered from human trafficking. A few days a week we will be sent to the slums (which are literally a minute's bike ride away) to do evangelism and practical services such as washing and dressing the people's wounds, washing their hair and teaching them English and hopefully the bible as well.

We have also been asked to teach children who go to the YWAM base for lessons. They get 500 students everyday who are eager to learn English and Computer Studies and any other practical skills. They have invited me to teach art there for a week (and maybe even Japanese!), as there are quite a few students who are interested. There are not nearly enough staff working here for the amount of students they are getting everyday. The man who runs the YWAM base here tells us that teaching is an incredible way to build relationships and create opportunities for sharing the gospel. The Cambodian people are so friendly and very hospitable and welcoming. They still remember teams who were here 3 years ago, and once they form a relationship with you, it is likely that they will never forget you.

Siem Reap is said to have a very intense spiritual atmosphere because of the Angkor Wat temple where both Buddhists and Hindus come from all over the world to worship. We have been warned by the YWAMers here and local Christians that the spiritual atmosphere can make people feel extremely tired and depressed, especially for Christians. This is one thing you can pray for us about; that we will have discernment to know how to pray and wisdom in how to sort out problems that will arise. We really want our attitude to be one of praise and thanksgiving so that we will not be overcome by the darkness around us, but instead we will be able to

overcome it by Christ's love and joy. We know that one person with a bad attitude can bring the whole team down and also give Satan a foothold in it. So these are just some things you can pray for our team. You could also pray that the Holy Spirit would start to move in the Cambodian people's hearts and make them receptive to hearing the gospel.

Please be intentional about interceding for us, and ask God for any words of knowledge or wisdom that could help us in our ministry. It is really so amazing to see how faithful God has been to us and how he has truly been working everything together for our good. He has given us an amazing place to stay, amazing people to work with, and an amazing country to do an outreach in! Thanks for all your prayers and support.

Love, *Esther Thomas*

Cambodia Update

Esther Thomas, whose parents, Rod and Glenda, are in Sendai, Japan, is in Cambodia with the Youth with a Mission (YWAM) and wrote the first of her reports in February's "Faith Matters".

I thought it would be appropriate to write another update as we are more than half way through our outreach. Since we have passed the halfway mark, we realize that the next four weeks we have here are going to speed by! We have revisited our goals that we set for ourselves in the beginning, and have decided to really push through these next few weeks, rather than slowing down. Our aim is to *"make disciples"* as Jesus commissioned us to, and not simply *"make believers"*.

During the time we have been here we have seen 8 conversions. We are careful to follow up the people who have decided to follow Christ and to disciple them so that they will establish a firm foundation in the word of God and then also be able to disciple and teach others. There is one young man named Lam, who was one of my students and is seeking the Lord. He recently told me that he believes that God created the world, and he has apparently been praying to Jesus. Please pray that God gives him a revelation of exactly who he is, and that he gets saved!

There are 8 women that a few of us meet with in a small village 3 times a week to tell them the gospel and to pray for their sicknesses, etc. We have seen many healings among the people in the village and I feel as if God is really doing a mighty work in their hearts. Just last week, a tiny baby with TB was completely healed by Jesus after we prayed for him! This was not only a witness to the Khmer people that our God is the one true God, it also really encouraged us in our faith. Now the mother believes that Jesus healed her baby and that our God is more powerful than Buddha. However, she has not yet made a final decision to follow Christ, so please pray for her.

In the time we have been here, we have noticed a major setback in witnessing. There is a general mindset that if you are a Cambodian you are automatically Buddhist, and therefore if you convert you are no longer worthy to be called a Cambodian. This is one thing that holds Cambodians back from accepting Christ as the

only way to salvation - fear of man. However difficult it may seem, we firmly believe that the Holy Spirit has the power to overcome difficulties such as this. Please pray for the recent converts; that they will grow in faith and knowledge of Christ and his sacrifice for them. Most of the converts have Buddhist or Hindu parents and so they are frightened of what might happen to them if they were to tell their parents about their conversion. Please pray that they will be encouraged and become bold, but also wise in the way they go about doing this.

As for us, we have been praying and fasting for a revival to break out in this land. God has really answered our prayers to do with our team, and I feel as if we are more united than ever. A few of us girls have been visiting a brothel at night with about 8 prostitutes living there. They are warm and friendly people, yet we can always sense an emptiness and depression whenever we visit. We would love to see God save these desperate women, so that they can turn to him in all their brokenness and be made completely new.

Weekend discipleship opportunities.

We have been meeting with some of the students outside of our classrooms on Sundays and sometimes on Saturdays as well. Almost every Sunday we meet with students who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord and disciple them on what it really means to follow Christ. C, S, and D were some of the new believers who have been meeting with us every Sunday for about four or five weeks now. Although there is a language barrier, Holy Spirit is working in these meetings through testimonies and also, at times, by providing an interpreter.

I am so thankful for what God has been doing in the lives of these wonderful people and for what He has been doing in my life. God has given me a new testimony of how truly faithful He is!

Thank you so much for all your prayers and support! We wouldn't be able to do it without you.

God bless!! ***Esther***

Cambodia Reflections

Having graduated Discipleship Training School, I have spent much of my time reflecting on the things God did in me and through me during the past 6 months. It is really wonderful to look back on my time in Cambodia and view the ministry we did from another perspective, having completed what God had asked me to do.

The thing that stands out to me most was the work God did by using us to reach out to prostitutes. I mentioned briefly in my previous update that we had been able to share the gospel with street women from a local brothel about twice a week. This started before I left for outreach, in that God impressed upon me a burden for women in prostitution, so I expected that sometime I would be able to reach out to these kinds of people.

When we finally arrived in Cambodia, I was shocked, challenged and yet excited to find out that the main street on which our guest house was located also had more than 5 brothels. In Cambodia these are very poor, run-down looking places usually with a sign outside saying *assuage*. The ministry was initially very slow, because of the language barrier. During our first week in the city of Siem Reap, we concentrated on the most prominent one on the street, and it had about 10 girls hanging around the doorway looking for work. We called it *Green Doors*.

As we walked past every night, they became familiar with our faces, and one night they invited us YWAM girls inside (the boys in our mission stayed outside and kept watch for our safety). We sat and tried to communicate with actions and smiles, but we felt like we were not being that effective. After about 4 weeks, and as we started to seek God for new ways to proceed with this ministry, the idea came to take them out during the day, outside of their working hours. So we took them out for ice cream, which was a lot of fun and we really built up trust with them. They began to open up to us about how they felt, and it turns out that they were amazed that we would even look at them, let alone hug them and talk to them. In South-East Asia, prostitutes are shunned and completely rejected by all areas of society, no matter how poor. We had no idea

how much God was using our smallest actions to soften these girls hearts. We ended up becoming very good friends and were able to actually tell them the gospel, and how God looks upon them with incredible love and compassion. We wanted to make sure that they understood how valuable they were, that the Son of God might die for them. As our time in Cambodia came to end, I was very heart-broken to be leaving these women who had had such an impact on my life. I felt very attached to them, and very anxious about leaving them.

One morning as I spent time with Jesus, He showed me that the girls in the brothel were actually in His hands, not mine. They were always in His hands. He just decided to use me for a short while to reach out to them, and now it was time for me to leave them in His care. As this realization sunk in, a strong peace comes over me and I understood that God is very capable of doing the impossible. Our God really is an awesome God, and no one can limit him.

Before we left Siem Reap, we were able to connect the girls in the brothel with Martin and Dary Mydland, two long-term YWAM missionaries who have a very fruitful ministry called *White Doves*. *White Doves* is a home for women who want an alternative income to prostitution. Many women have come to Christ as a result of this.

As I mentioned in the beginning, God has given me a strong desire to work with women in similar circumstances. God willing, this work will be continued as I go to work in South Africa at the end of this year. I will be volunteering with a YWAM organization called Justice ACTs (Alliance of Christians against Trafficking) in Muizenberg. I am very excited about the future! Please pray for the necessary funds to do this.

Thanks again for all your prayers and support.

Esther Thomas

