



## Dave and Leoni Painter

*Serving the Lord in Cambodia*



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Dear Praying Friend,

We arrived in Australia on the 6th November, on our second lot of tickets purchased (first canceled) and our second attempt to board a plane in Phnom Penh. The first time we were turned back by an overly cautious airline official saying one of our many documents was not correctly prepared (when as it turned out, it was). Upon arrival we had a much anticipated reunion with our son Joshua and Dave's parents, who we had not seen for over two years. Since then we have been helping Dave's parents to move into their new home in Newcastle, after living in Gloucester for the last twenty years.

Now, as Christmas approaches, we are preparing for CMS Summer School and deputation with our link churches. This year, while we shall be going up to Katoomba with the CMS staff team and missionaries from around the world, Summer School will be only available on-line due to COVID. The theme is "Walk His Ways" with teaching from the Psalms. We shall be involved in the missionary sessions and presentations. Then, after a short break, we shall commence visiting link churches and small groups. Our schedule will include:

Sunday February 6th – St. Anne's Ryde  
Sunday February 13th – St. Matthew's Manly  
Saturday February 26th – Central West Mission  
Sunday February 27th – St. Alban's Lindfield (1)  
Sunday March 6th – St. Mark's Darling Point  
Sunday March 13th – St. Alban's Lindfield (2)  
Sunday March 27th – Christ Church St. Ives  
Sunday April 3rd – St. Andrew's Wahroonga  
Sunday April 24th – St. Andrew's Cathedral

If we do not get a the opportunity to see you, we are sure these churches will make you welcome on these occasions.

We have been asked by some of you to share more about “long-term mission”, so you can find what Dave has written about this at the end of this prayer letter, after the prayer points.



*Some of our present and past PTC students*

We wish you all a very merry Christmas as we remember the greatest gift of all... the gift of God’s Son to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world. We hope that this season the world may have the opportunity to know Jesus as their Savior.

**Please join with us in praying:**

- Giving thanks for the many students who successfully completed their studies in Old Testament (Leoni), Hermeneutics, and Romans (Dave).
- For the warm farewells we received from many neighbors, old students, missionary colleagues and friends who we shall not see for six months.
- For the opening of Australian borders, safe travel and the provision of housing in Sydney

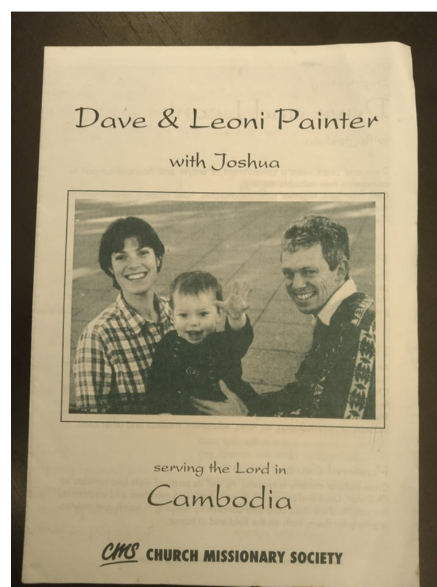


**Also, please pray for:**

- CMS Summer School – for effective Bible teaching, challenging missionary sessions, and opportunity for many supporters to engage online.
- For preparation of sermons, mission talks, and good opportunities to catch up with supporters and friends.
- Deputation at our link churches, for many opportunities to engage with supporters and to share about the opportunities and challenges of cross-cultural gospel mission.
- Grace, who has decided to study “the Bridge” course at Sydney Missionary Bible College next year (2022), and for the provision of accommodation for her after we return to Cambodia.
- Joshua, giving thanks that he has now found some work, and that he might be able to get a full-time position.

## **The Costs and Benefits of long-term mission: Is this still a viable model?**

About 15 years ago, Leoni and I were sharing with a small group in Australia about our missionary work in Cambodia. We had been discussing the importance of taking the time required to become proficient in the local language, understand the local culture, develop relationships, and commence ministry in a small way. Then one participant asked: “How long have you been there now?” (“Six years!”) “**Haven’t you had your turn? Shouldn’t you let someone else have a go now?**” More recently, a fellow missionary (who was about to return home after five years) said to me over lunch one day that I was an old fashioned missionary, who tried to learn the language (rather than engaging the services of a translator) and stayed a long time... the implication being that newer (more effective) missionaries did not need to stay so long to make an impact!



Thanks to the constant prayer and the sacrificial financial giving of so many Australian supporters over these years, we have (only by the grace of God) completed six terms in Cambodia with CMS so far (since 2001). Some of you have asked us to reflect on our missionary experience and share something about **the costs and benefits of long-term service.**

If we define long-term mission as the giving of the best part of your working life, then this generally means giving up your secular professional aspirations (or those of your parents). I was a local government engineer at a time when this was generally regarded as a job for life providing a good salary and other benefits (company car, generous superannuation and a career path leading to much civic responsibility along with a commensurate salary for those with sufficient ambition). Public service hours were great, leaving me time and energy to prepare and lead a mid-week Bible study group, do some further study, and have a network of friends. Leoni graduated in science with first-class honors from Sydney University. She **forwent a potential career in academia to become a missionary mum**. Many missionaries going for shorter terms (for say up to ten years) can often pick up from near where they left off, but there comes a time when you know there is, realistically, no way back!



Often the most heartfelt cost is borne by other family members, especially those close to us. My parents only saw our children every three or four years when we came back on six-month home assignments. Now our adult children have returned to Australia without the large network of friends that most of us developed in our school years. Most of their school friends from Cambodia returned to their own passport countries within a week of graduation. While our sending agency has taken good care of us, and we have benefited from God's protecting hand through times of peril (and our own foolishness), **we have witnessed other missionaries face medical emergencies that would be easily handled in Australia** (dengue fever, traffic accidents with no ambulance available, food poisoning), individuals burn out from the pressures of work and life in an alien environment, and we have seen marriages break up in an environment filled with temptation. Then there is the presence of the sexual abuse of vulnerable people, modern day slavery sanctioned by local authorities, and the grinding mental anguish of living among the very poor.



**CMS** Proclaiming life through Christ

Serving the Lord in the Cambodia

**Dave and Leoni Painter**  
with Joshua (8/3/1999)  
Grace (13/9/2002)

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*'Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.'* 2 Timothy 1:14

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**So why bother?** Is the cost of taking a family from a great place like Australia into the undeveloped world still worthwhile? Aren't there plenty of opportunities for Christian service in (almost wrote "godforsaken") Australia? Why not just go for a short time so you we can experience cross cultural life, be identified as missionaries, make some foreign friends and gain new life experiences, but then leave before we face any serious costs that threaten to permanently scar us, our family, or put an end to normal Australian life ambitions?

Speaking from the other side, if 20 years is long-term (I have some distant relatives who are just about to return to the UK after completing more than 55 years of service in Thailand), the real benefits of missionary service come from long-term service. I am not speaking about the benefits that accrue to us, but to the people and the Church that we seek to serve. At the end of each term we leave Cambodia feeling that we have been that much more effective in our work than the previous term, but also with the sinking feeling that there is so much more we need to understand in order to become truly effective. As this is only an overview, I shall just outline some of the benefits.

**CMS** A WORLD THAT KNOWS JESUS

Serving the Lord in Cambodia

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with Joshua and Grace  
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*'Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.'* Ephesians 6:19

There are many aspects to learning a foreign culture. As we become more familiar with some aspects, others begin to emerge into our field of vision. Cambodia is a place where the "patron-client" system operates, and churches often just repeat this pattern with a Christian veneer. Like many other cultures, this is an "honor-shame" culture, where people are generally primarily motivated by avoiding shame and seeking after honor. When they encounter the gospel, they enter into a new

understanding of shame (and who bore the ultimate shame), and the object of their primary honor should now be directed away from idols (or people) towards God. **The temptation is to merely move this honor to the messenger**, whether that be the pastor or the missionary. Our students are often motivated by a survival mentality, parental fealty, post-traumatic stress, the presence of the spirit world and a host of other dominating influences that we did not imagine and certainly not comprehend in 2001.

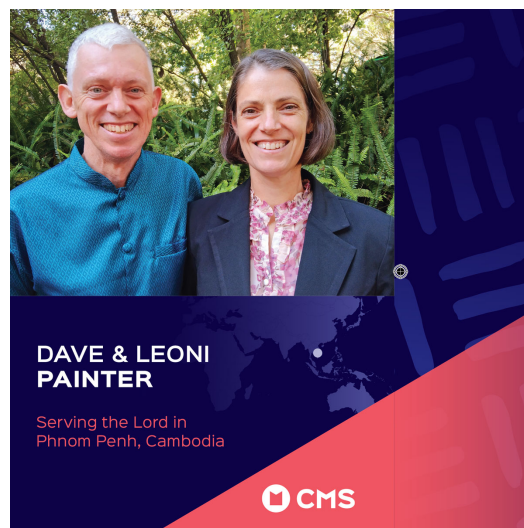
Language acquisition is (or should be) an endless process. **We have always found that our communication and effectiveness is limited by our understanding** of technical vocabulary, slang, or sayings. At first language learning is 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration. We open our mouths to communicate and people laugh (and they sometimes still do). Even Western missionaries experience shame at this point, and many begin to clam up, resorting to local interpreters for an official communication. Long-term missionaries need to endure, persevere and continue to learn more and more if they are to see tangible benefits from the grind of daily language learning. As with much learning, it does become more interesting and rewarding, as we not only communicate, but begin to comprehend its nuances (such as people literally say one thing but mean something quite different). If we use an interpreter or translator to teach and prepare our lessons, our communication limited by their understanding of the subject. If we are grappling first-hand with the language, we are encountering the challenges our students face. We are then in a better position to equip them to learn. The Khmer Bible is at places quite different to the English Bible (and this too depends on which version you are using). The students might appear appreciative of our efforts, but inside they are puzzled but don't want to bother or dishonor the foreign teacher with questions revealing their ignorance.



When I was a new missionary I was quickly surrounded with lots of local friends, and received lots of invitations to preach and teach. Only much later did I realize that these people had found me, and were drawing me (a potentially rich patron) into their agendas, generally by making me aware of some urgent financial need: “Our church would be so much more comfortable if we had air-conditioning!”. However, these invitations soon ceased. As we have become more culturally savvy, we began to initiate the contacts with local people, and so set the parameters of relationships. Rather than being potential patrons, we seek to come more as equal partners in the gospel. Where we are ambassadors, **we want to be representing Christ’s kingdom, rather than representing a source of foreign funds.** Despite our many language mistakes, cultural blundering, and disappearing at awkward times for home

assignment, we now have hundreds of former students who continue to regard us warmly as “lokru” or “neakru” (teacher), as well as neighbors, market stall holders (where Leoni does the family shopping), cycling buddies, and work colleagues.

Measuring the impact of missionary service is never easy. Many return burnt out with a broken spirit, some bankrupt, or left with few family members and friends. Some are forced to leave their adopted country due to a change of government policy or regime, while others find ill health brings about a “premature” conclusion to their service. Sometimes we measure our impact by organizations set up, churches planted, numbers of converts, books published or any one of a number of other performance measures. However, I suspect that it will often be some passing conversation, the testimony of family life, some seemingly botched sermon, or a classroom lesson within a seemingly unimportant subject assigned to us, **that the Spirit of God used to bring about a spiritual transformation in a local person**, who will go on to be used by Him in mighty ways that we were never able to be used.



Finally, a question we are often asked is “How do you do it?” that is “How did you manage to stay on the mission field for so long?” If I am in Cambodia, it is easier to joke and say that I am still saving up for an airline ticket home. Many people come with a long-term plan, but often through difficulty, and sometimes tragic circumstances, are forced to return prematurely. However, many others come ill prepared, and dare I say, less committed than they ought to be. Almost every missionary term we have faced some major crisis that threatened taking us from the field. This has included having to defend ourselves in a court of law, the birth of a disabled child (our daughter was born with a bilateral cleft palate, and so could not feed herself), the tearing apart of a Bible college I was teaching at, seeking to manage anxiety and exhaustion, death of students who were close to us, and leaving our son in Australia only to have a world-wide pandemic ruin our plans of regularly catching up with him. My relatives (mentioned above) had to cope with the death of a child. By the grace of God, our daughter received surgery enabling her to lead a normal life, the court case was satisfactorily resolved, the Bible college continued under new leadership in a better direction, and with the opening of Australia’s borders we are reunited with our son.

Missionary commitment does not come easily, **and the costs are borne not just by the individual but by the wider family and the sending Christian community.** However, if the missionary enterprise is deemed worthwhile, then long-term missionary service bears fruit that is the most likely to withstand the test of time. To

see this commitment from a historical perspective, I recommend you read Ruth Tucker's [From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya](#). Other worthwhile books we have been reading recently include: Harries, Jim. *Theory to Practice in Vulnerable Mission: An Academic Appraisal* and Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials*. We look forward to sharing more with you from our experiences of gospel work in Cambodia at CMS Summer School (online) and when we come to visit our link churches over the next three months.

Thanks,

*Dave & Leoni*

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CMS is a fellowship of Christian people and churches committed to global mission. We work together to set apart long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our vision is for a world that knows Jesus. We aim to do this by: reaching gospel-poor peoples for Christ, equipping Christian leaders for church and society, and engaging churches in cross-cultural mission.

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