

May 2022

MISSIONS



CAMBODIA God's Living Fields

Peru
One Boy's Story
of Grace

Chile
59 Years of
Kids' Bible Classes



THINKING IT THROUGH

BY CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ

Through Dark Valleys

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." The words of Psalm 23 have been heard by millions around the world and throughout history as comfort and encouragement for God's people. They've become a hymn for the heart as we travel through life's dark valleys, where suffering stands alongside the hope we have in our Savior.

This last year, Psalm 23 resounded mightily through the deepest parts of my soul. To me, like many believers around the world, the last months have felt like a long trip through a dark valley. Sickness, the deaths of dear ones, fear and misinformation, isolation, and the absence of in-person church fellowship for a season have been some of this journey's recent lows.

As the psalm continues, its words take on more meaning: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff,

The knowledge that the Good Shepherd is by my side keeps me going.

they comfort me." (v.4, ESV) Maybe you've read these words before and wondered: What brings such confidence? How can the psalmist stay calm? There must be anxiety of not knowing what comes next. Surely, there is fear of the compelling shadow of death all around him. How can he say, "I will fear no evil"?

And then, you wonder, How can we fear no evil? How can we move past the fear and the pain to continue to honor and serve our God as good sheep?

The answer is simple yet deep: the Good Shepherd is there with us. You see, the psalmist knows who the Good Shepherd is. He has walked with Him, he has seen His mighty works, and he trusts that He is by his side. So, even though the valley is dark, his Shepherd shines brightly.

We should have an even stronger trust. Looking at the psalm from this side of its revelation leads us to understand our Good

Shepherd's character even better. He is the Man of Sorrows experienced in pain (Isaiah 53:3). He has gone through our same circumstances and understands our struggles (Hebrews 2:14–18). He is also the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us (John 10:11). He knows the valley of the shadow of death and has felt the anxiety and sorrows that accompany it because He has walked there before (Luke 22:39–46). And, above all, we must remember that He has been victorious! He conquered the valley, He came to the other side, and He defeated death itself (1 Corinthians 15:55–57).

This beautiful psalm reminds us that the good, sweet, gentle, experienced, and powerful Shepherd is the One who walks by our side. Yes, the valley is dark and frightening; no one says it isn't. But, as children will tell you, the darkest rooms are easy to face when you have a light by your side. I've walked the valleys—in some ways, I'm still walking through one—but the knowledge that the Good Shepherd is by my side keeps me going. It keeps me hopeful and even joyful amid this world's suffering.

We must never forget that a valley is only a stage in our journey; it is not the final destination. We must go through it to reach the land of plenty that our Good Shepherd has prepared for us. Believers like Paul knew this, and so they sang as they traveled, "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18, ESV) As the Good Shepherd walks with us, He tells us: Yes, we are going through a valley; yes, it is dark. But trust me because I've been here and I have come out victorious (John 16:33).

Whatever your situation is right now, I pray that the Lord, our Shepherd, will comfort you and that nothing will stop you from serving Him. And I pray that, even through our suffering, we may tell the world around us about our mighty, good, and loving God and about the way to Him through the Good Shepherd. ■

Christian Ramirez serves in Colombia.

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COVER PHOTO: Farmer in Cambodia—©AdobeStock





GOD'S WORK IN CAMBODIA

Killing Fields Become Living Fields

BY INSUN & YOUNI PARK

I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'" (Isaiah 46:9–10). As these verses in Isaiah indicate, God is at work even when we are unaware. Even in the most challenging circumstances, we can still rest in the knowledge that God is on His throne and, in His faithfulness, He continues to accomplish what He has purposed from the foundation of the world. It is our great joy to share with you how God is at work—in our lives and in the living harvest field of Cambodia.¹

God at work in the past

We are the product of the faithful labor of God's servants who went before us. Foreign missionaries first brought the Gospel to Korea more than a century ago. Our generation grew up hearing about British missionary Edwin Arthur James, who came to Korea in 1962 when people were living in devastation and poverty following the Korean War. God greatly used him to bring many souls to Christ and to disciple believers.

James was instrumental in starting the Noryangjin assembly, from which many full-time workers, including Youmi's parents, were sent. Her parents answered God's call and gave their lives to His service. Youmi's father started out serving as a Sunday school teacher and, then, became an elder and full-time worker. He planted a new assembly and moved to Cambodia as a missionary in 1994.

At that time, only a few families were commended to foreign missions from the Korean assemblies. Now, more than 37 missionary families in 19 countries are faithfully making Christ known. Praise God for using Korea, which once was full of darkness, to proclaim the Gospel and carry out the Great Commission.

God at work in our lives

Youmi went to Cambodia with her parents as a missionary kid. It wasn't her choice, but God had special plans for her. She grew to love Him more and desired to give her life for His service, as her parents had done. She developed a personal relationship with her Savior and became an integral part of her parents' ministry as a Sunday school teacher and a translator. In 2008, after completing her university education in the United States, she was commended to serve as a missionary in Cambodia.

The son of hardworking parents, Insun was born and raised in Korea. His mother and sister came to know the Lord first. As a teenager, Insun started to go to church. While he was at university, he spent a year as an exchange student in Hungary, where he met God. Insun had the opportunity to travel to more than 20 countries, and God opened his eyes to see the great spiritual need of souls around the world. Although Insun looked forward to a promising career in semiconductor engineering in Korea, he was willing and ready to go anywhere the Master called him to serve.

In God's perfect timing and orchestration, we met, and with a common desire to make Christ known, we married in 2010 and started serving together in Cambodia. God has blessed us with four children: Grace (10), Joanna (8), Joshua (7), and David (3). The following verses, which brought us together, still serve as our confession: "According to my earnest expectation and hope



From left: Children in 1960s Korea listen to a gospel message; British missionary Edwin Arthur James visits a Korean family.



Above (from top): Interested believers fill an Emmaus Bible seminar; The Park family (Youmi is seated at far left) enjoys a meal in a church member's home; A children's meeting, which Insun leads, gathers a crowd; During Sunday school at Prek Takov Church, children listen attentively as Youmi teaches a small-group activity.
Opposite page: Ferries frequently cross the mighty Mekong River, taking the Parks to and from their home in Phnom Penh and Prek Takov Church.

that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:20–21)

God at work in His harvest field

In our first decade of ministry, we served with Sangkhim Canaan School, a mission school that Singaporean believers founded to reach the Buddhist community through quality education in Kampong Chhnang. Youmi served as a teacher and administrator until our children were born, and Insun began serving in a leadership position.

God shaped and molded us through our marriage, ministry, and life as we lived cross-culturally. Insun became the country director for the Emmaus ministry in Cambodia and discovered that this was his passion: helping Cambodian believers grow spiritually through teaching and by producing resources to reach succeeding generations.

God at work in His church

Desiring to focus on literature ministry, we prayed about relocating to Phnom Penh at the end of 2017. Around that time, our friend and fellow missionary Myung Sub Kim (CMML) unexpectedly went to be with the Lord in a tragic accident. Church leaders in Korea asked us to consider stepping in at Prek Takov Church, which Myung Sub had started and, now, was left without a shepherd. In His faithfulness, God worked in our hearts through His Word and circumstances, and we answered and obeyed His call.

Prek Takov Church is located across the Mekong River, a ferry ride away from Phnom Penh. Many people there are living in darkness and are mostly unreached. Although young people are more open to hearing the Gospel, they face more distractions and worldly lures than ever. From the beginning, we have been heavily involved in children's ministry. This work was also Myung Sub's passion; many children joined weekly Bible clubs and Sunday school to hear the Gospel.

Contrary to what we had anticipated, we faced many challenges. After sorting through some heartbreaking issues, the church was left with only a few members. We are thankful for and encouraged by the remaining little flock, young in faith yet eager to know and follow their great Shepherd.

God at work through His Word

Besides church ministry, we also devote our time to translating Emmaus correspondence courses for personal and small

group Bible studies. Currently, four courses are available in Khmer, and many more drafts are ready to be edited. The courses are carefully chosen and specific to the Cambodian church's needs.

We have also been translating children's *Bibletime* lessons from Bible Educational Services (BES). In a country where almost half the population is under 20 years old, there is a great need for age-appropriate resources that can help young people understand God and His Word at a crucial time in their lives. When the *Bibletime* lessons are published, they will be a blessing and a help to many Cambodian Christians and their families.

Considering the extensive workload, our literature ministry team is small. We need more workers to speed up the process of producing these resources. We are praying that God will send us more faithful men and women who are equipped with the skills and passion to help people grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

God at work in the COVID-19 pandemic

As in other countries, Cambodian schools have been closed for a long time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Large gatherings are banned, and people are suffering due to job loss and the economic crisis. To continue spreading the Gospel during these challenging times, we are producing the book and movie of *King of Glory*, by Paul Bramsen (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 27), which presents God's plan of salvation. We aim to finish the movie first and make it available on the internet since Cambodians now have access, even in the most remote areas.

As part of the Emmaus ministry, we typically have Bible seminars a couple of times per year. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we organized online Bible seminars for youths, young adults, and married couples. Topics included biblical manhood and womanhood and God-honoring relationships and marriages. We were happy to see many people from different churches and denominations joining, eager to learn what the Bible has to say about these important matters.

God at work through prayers

The first Protestant missionary came to Cambodia in the 1920s. Despite religious freedom and tireless efforts in evangelism and aid work, Christians still make up less than 1 percent of the population. The spiritual darkness is still very real. Please pray for Cambodia. Pray that God will continue to turn what were killing fields into living fields. ■

¹ Historically, Cambodia has been associated with "killing fields," where the Communist regime brutally massacred and buried more than one million people during its 1975–1979 rule. Now, the Parks see God's hand in turning the nation into a "living field."

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Pray that Cambodian Christians will remain faithful, without compromise in the face of persecution and prejudice.
- Pray that Cambodian church leaders will be grounded in the Word and gain biblical discernment.
- Pray that Prek Takov Church and others around Cambodia will grow as bodies of Christ and be salt and light in their communities.
- Pray that God will give our team wisdom while translating Emmaus correspondence courses, BES *Bibletime* lessons, and other Christian literature.
- Pray that God will send us more helpers.
- Pray for safety, spiritual vitality, and endurance since the work is difficult and takes years to see any genuine fruit.
- Pray that God will protect Cambodia during the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Insun and Youmi Park serve in Cambodia. Youmi is commended from Community Bible Chapel in Bel Aire, Kansas, and Overbrook Gospel Chapel in Greenville, South Carolina. Insun is commended from a Korean assembly.

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Marvin's Story

GRACE UPON GRACE IN PERU

BY MINDY RAMIREZ

Over the last couple of years, God has reminded me again and again of His grace—of the fact that we can always trust in Him, even when life does not go as planned. When sin and suffering enter our lives and make it hard to see God at work, His grace is still there, still sufficient. Recently, God brought Marvin into our lives to teach us that.

Adjusting and readjusting our plans

When Javier and I married in August 2019, we planned to wait at least a year to start our family. Imagine our surprise when, at the beginning of December that same year, we found out I was pregnant. We changed our plans quickly and grew more and more excited about the baby. Near the end of December, our plans changed again when I was put on bed rest. We weren't sure if the baby would survive.

After Christmas, Heydi—a young woman whom we first met when she lived at the orphanage that Javier and I were once connected to—came over for a counseling session. During that meeting, she told us that, on Christmas Eve, she had received a call from her mom's neighbor asking her to come over right away—her four-year-old brother, Marvin, was not safe.

Heydi had been taken from her mom when she was seven years old, but Marvin still lived with their mother, who was not in her right mind. Following the call, Heydi took Marvin with her to the transitional home where she and her older sister Isabel lived, but the sisters had no idea what to do with him since he couldn't stay long term. Heydi and Isabel had until January 2 to figure out a plan.

While our hearts went out to them, we weren't sure how we could help. We started by inviting Marvin to come over with Heydi the next day. I walked a bald-headed, skinny, raspy-voiced kid who was terrified of letting his sister out of his sight. He had scars all over his body and acted like a wild animal in our house.

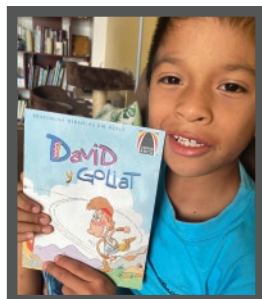
Then, on January 1, I miscarried. Javier and I prayed about Marvin, Heydi, and Isabel's situation, and we decided to help. On January 2, Marvin came to stay with us.

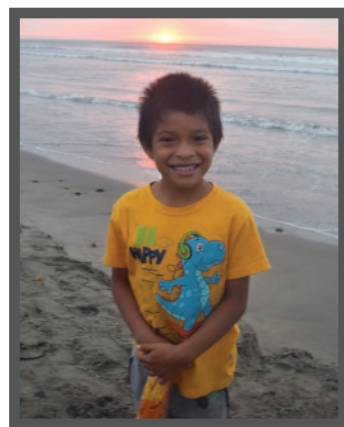
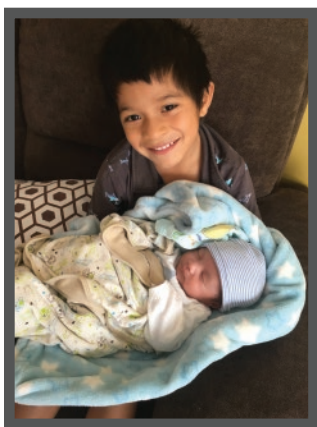
Making tough choices

Our first long days and nights together are difficult to describe. Nightly, Marvin would scream like someone was hurting



Above (from top): When Marvin arrived, he was skinny, bald-headed, covered in cuts and scars, and jaundiced; Now, he's a healthy, active seven-year-old (pictured here with Javier and Mindy); Marvin enjoys his fifth birthday with his sisters, Heydi (left) and Isabel (right); A believer from the States sends Marvin books in Spanish and other goodies—he loves them!





him, which woke up the entire apartment building. He would not sleep in the spare bedroom, only on an air mattress in the living room. His body would reject most foods except rice. He would scream endlessly whenever one of his sisters left after a visit. He had no idea how to play with other children.

Heydi and Isabel knew that they needed a plan. Both were in school, so they were unsure how they would manage with their little brother. And legally, we could not keep Marvin in a foster-care situation. The sisters took turns staying with him at night, but that could not continue forever. Then, Marvin's night terrors were so bad that the neighbor told us she was thinking of turning us into the police.

In February, Heydi and Isabel took Marvin back to the transitional home with them, planning to sign him into an orphanage. They were ready to sign the papers in the middle of March 2020. But the COVID-19 pandemic closed everything, forcing Heydi and Isabel to keep Marvin with them for four months. In July, Isabel told Javier that Marvin could no longer stay with them, but now, she was not sure she wanted to send Marvin to an orphanage.

By then, we had moved, and our new neighbors knew about Marvin. He also screamed less at night. We all decided that Isabel and Marvin would move in with Javier and me for two weeks.

Forging a unique family

When it began looking like we could foster Marvin, we transitioned Isabel out of our home and helped Marvin adjust to being with only us. When those plans fell through, we pivoted quickly. We asked Isabel if she wanted to move in with us, and we would help her become independent while she cared for her brother. What started out as two weeks of living with us would turn into more than a year. We bought bunk beds, made spare keys, and slowly settled into life as a unique family of four.

Marvin came not knowing anything an almost-five-year-old should know, academically or socially. Let's just say we had a lot of meltdowns. A lot. We also learned a lot about grace. We washed a lot of sheets and a lot of clothes. I spent a lot of time talking to counselors and consulting foster-family resources. And due to the pandemic, schools were closed, so we had to figure out how to home-school Marvin too. Every day brought

new challenges. We consistently took three steps forward and two steps (or 10) back.

But God met us right where we were. He gave us grace for each moment. We cried a lot (well, mostly I did). But God saw those tears, and He held me. Friends cried with us, prayed with us, helped us buy clothes and toys, and were the hands and feet of Jesus. That grace found a boy whom neglect, alcoholism, and many other sins had damaged but who is not beyond rescue.

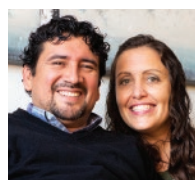
Witnessing a testimony of grace

If you were to meet Marvin now, you would see a busy, happy seven-year-old who has transitioned well to living with Isabel in a nearby apartment and staying with us every day while she works. We still have rough days, and Marvin still faces many challenges. We can't erase his past. But grace has reached out to him. He knows about a God who loves him, even on his worst days. He knows he is created in God's image.

“Hearing Marvin sing to God and seeing him live a mostly normal little boy life is worth all of the tears, sweat, and sacrifices.”

After Marvin sang about that God on our church's stage in December 2021, one of the elders said, “If you know even a little of Marvin's story, seeing him up here singing to God is a

testimony of His mercy.” We agree! Others have seen the changes in Marvin too, and we have shared about God's grace with friends, neighbors, even the dentist. Hearing Marvin sing to God and seeing him live a mostly normal little boy life is worth all of the tears, sweat, and sacrifices. ■



Mindy Ramirez is commended from Des Moines Gospel Chapel in Des Moines, Washington. She serves with her husband Javier, a Peruvian national.

Above (from left): Marvin is a good helper, whether holding a friend's baby or washing dishes; Isabel, Marvin, Mindy, and Javier celebrate Peru's Independence Day; Javier reads Marvin a Bible story before bed; Marvin gets his wish for his seventh birthday: a trip to the beach, his happy place.

“Written Down for Our Instruction”

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXAMINING CHURCH HISTORY

BY T. J. MARINELLO

After Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus responded, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, ESV) While readers of *Missions* likely are familiar with the outworking of this promise in Acts as well as in the rest of the New Testament, how familiar are we with the history of the period from the last apostle's death at the end of the first century until today? What do we know of this sweep of time, and why might this history of the church be important? What about the history of the Brethren as a part of this? What can we learn and apply?

Applying the past to the present

First, by studying the lessons of the past, we are better equipped to recognize and rightly adjudge the same issues in the present. As Solomon wrote, "There is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) This means we can benefit from observing the commendable, wise thoughts and actions of those believers who have come before us. And, by observing some past believers' pitfalls and failures, in belief and practice, we can avoid the same mistakes. For example, after the Roman persecutions of the church ended at the beginning of the fourth century, some groups and leaders refused restoration of fellowship to those who had failed under the intense persecution. Once you had failed, you could never be received back into fellowship. Others held the biblical standard of forgiveness and restoration, and they championed this understanding. Today, exercising forgiveness and restoration still challenges us, and in some parts of the world, the pressure to apostatize amid persecution is very real, so the parallel is much closer. Will we advocate a permanent exclusion or promote forgiveness for those who fail?

In another example, we find that, in the 16th century, the believers in the Netherlands had a vicious and deadly debate between the proponents of Calvin's thoughts respecting salvation and those of Arminius's. The conflict eventually saw around 150 pastors banished or precluded from ministry, and the leaders of the losing party were executed. More self-effacement in precisely explaining the imponderable mysteries of the role of God and the responsibility of man in salvation would have done much to avoid the resultant divisions and strife. So do we hold our beliefs about such



mysteries stridently, or do we interact with other genuine believers as brothers and sisters, together searching the Bible “to see if these things [are] so”? (Acts 17:11, ESV) Thus, the lessons of the past can be instructive for godly behavior, or they can provide a cautionary tale about attitudes and actions to avoid.

Understanding our place in God’s plan

Second, by studying the history of the church, we should gain a measure of humility and tolerance concerning the medley of genuine believers whom the Lord has used to accomplish His purposes. Through observation, we see that God has raised up and laid aside many different movements and denominations as part of His plan. No one group that holds to the Lord Jesus as Savior has ever done all things perfectly or believed all things rightly. This includes the Brethren assemblies. Our movement is neither the sole group nor the last group the Lord will use as we await His return.

That said, in the early 19th century, the Brethren presented anew the biblical centrality of the Breaking of Bread as a memorial, a celebration of the local church initially open to all who were born again, not just those from a particular group. That openness for all believers to gather to remember the Lord is a shining example to us. Sadly, the later creation of a narrow circle by some who welcomed only believers who had a certain understanding of a variety of matters is a stark example for us to avoid. Another encouraging and instructive historical chapter—a chapter that, thankfully, is still being written—is the Brethren’s wholehearted commitment to cross-cultural missions from the movement’s earliest days. The Brethren believers’ burning desire to make disciples at home and abroad is a passion worth imitating.

Exploring available resources

So where can we look to learn more about church history and, in particular, Brethren history? A recommended overview is the fifth edition of Bruce L. Shelley’s *Church History in Plain Language*. The chapters are short and easy to read and can be consumed in an on-again, off-again fashion. A user-friendly history for the nonspecialist is Ryan Reeves’s excellent video series, *Historical Theology for Everyone: One Gospel through the Centuries*.¹ His visually stimulating, 30-minute presentations cover the entire span of time from Pentecost to the end of the 20th century.

But what about the history of the assemblies? A good place to start is Tim Grass’s *Gathering to His Name: The Story of the Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland*. Other resources more focused on specific historical topics concerning Brethren beliefs, practices, and historically significant figures are available from the Brethren Archivists and Historians Network (BAHN). These resources include the book series *Studies in Brethren History* and BAHN’s journal, *Brethren Historical Review*. Attending conferences on Brethren history is also helpful. One such event is the three-day BAHN Conference 2022 that will be held at Emmaus Bible College and streamed online at the end of this month.² This conference concerns the history of the Brethren as national believers in many countries experienced it.

“ANOTHER ENCOURAGING AND INSTRUCTIVE HISTORICAL CHAPTER—A CHAPTER THAT, THANKFULLY, IS STILL BEING WRITTEN—IS THE BRETHREN’S WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT TO CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS.”

Also, popular-level biographies of historically significant Brethren figures and the histories of the New Testament assemblies in various countries are available from Gospel Folio Press (GospelFolio.com) and Everyday Publications (EverydayPublications.org) in North America and from Ritchie Christian Media (RitchieChristianMedia.co.uk) and Crimond House Publications (CrimondHouse.co.uk) in the United Kingdom.

Benefiting from a look back

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that Israel’s history was “written down for our instruction.” (1 Corinthians 10:11, ESV) While none of the many historical resources above rise to the level of the Bible’s inerrancy, they do narrate a noteworthy story of people and places, beliefs and practices—positive and negative—from which we can benefit. We are part of the church that the Lord promised He would build. What, then, can we learn from church history and, particularly, our movement’s history that will help us to honor the Lord? The answer begins by knowing the history “written down for our instruction.” ■



Dr. Tom Marinello and his wife, Patti, are commended from Garland Bible Chapel in Garland, Texas.

¹ These videos are available on the author’s YouTube channel, [YouTube.com/c/RyanReevesM/playlists](https://www.youtube.com/c/RyanReevesM/playlists). ² Learn more about BAHN’s resources and conferences at BrethrenHistory.org.