

Sent as Email

May 2019

Dear Pray-ers,

It's hard to remember when I've been more nervous about a Pastors school session. This Monday, May 13, the missionary community of Ratanakiri Province will teach Hermeneutics I to a group of 70-plus pastors, future pastors, Bible teachers, and Bible translators. Hermeneutics is a complicated discipline and can't be boiled down to just a few points. Even those programs that tout a 3-step hermeneutical process (like ours), add 3 or 4 sub-steps under each step (also like ours!), bringing the whole process to at least 10 steps.

Remember that most of our students are self-educated. Because of the remoteness of this province, and the attitude of the majority population toward the minority—not to mention the upheaval of the Khmer Rouge period when nearly all the teachers were killed—most of our students have received, at most, a third grade education. (A handful have graduated from high school and two from college.)

This means that we can't just use an off-the-shelf hermeneutics method, but must create and adapt our own. So recently I wrote a 100-page syllabus in Khmer called *"Text/Meaning/Application—Reading and Understanding the Word of God in the Presence of God,"* which tries, perhaps unsuccessfully, to simplify a complicated task.

On the other hand, the students have seen us model healthy hermeneutics for almost 25 years now, and many of them have internalized "the method" that they've observed in our teaching. Plus they all have the Holy Spirit of God living in them, guiding them to carefully observe God's **text** in order to ascertain God's **meaning**, so that they can **apply** God's Word to themselves and their churches.

We will use the book of Ruth as our main practice text. The students prepared for this session by reading Ruth 10 to 20 times. Normally each session is 30 hours of teaching, but this time it will be just 15 hours, reserving the other 15 for practice and workshops. The week will culminate with each student's preaching a 10-minute sermon on Ruth to his table-mates in his mother-tongue, with the listeners evaluating the sermon using a form we developed.

During the week we'll learn about how to **observe** a text by asking good questions, the importance of **context**, how to identify the **genre** of the text and why that matters, how to use study tools to find out about the **history** and cultural context of a text, and how the text fits into the **salvation storyline** of the Bible (something they're already pretty good at because of our 25-year emphasis on Creation to Christ).

Whew! And all that is just under the first major heading, "Text"! Under "Meaning," we'll learn how to write an "original meaning sentence" for a text and how to discern what the present-day meaning is (if it is somewhat different from the ancient meaning). Finally, under "Application"

we'll learn to ask how the text leads us to (1) know and love God more, (2) change and renew our thinking, and (3) change our actions (these three points are based on Romans 12:1-2).

If all this sounds like drinking water from a fire hydrant, you'll understand why we're nervous about this session. But with God all things are possible. The Holy Spirit can do anything He wants to do, whenever He wants to do it. Please pray.

Grateful,

JD and Kim

### **More Prayer and Praise:**

**Firm Foundations teaching to Vietnamese church leaders** in Phnom Penh this April was quite miraculous. The main church leader, who was obviously negative to the whole idea of creation-to-Christ teaching and evangelism, was totally on board by the end of the week. Astonishing! Again, God can do anything He wants to do, whenever He wants to do it. Thank you for praying.

At the recent dedication of the new **Radio Ministry Studio** next to the EMU office, a villager gave a testimony about his unsaved neighbors who not only listen to the hour-and-a-half broadcast every night, but also stream it through their huge boom box for everyone else in the village to hear! Let that sink in.

Transitions all around!: In 2 weeks **Nathaniel** will leave his boyhood home to go to college. The three of us will spend the summer in Greenville, South Carolina, and, Lord willing, Kim and I will return to Cambodia in October—bereft of our children for the first time, but excited about this last chapter of our lives. Pray for Nathaniel.

Attached is a diagram of our hermeneutical approach in Khmer. The large, yellow words in the modern city close to the reader say "The Present Time," and the much smaller yellow words far away say, "Ancient Times." The words in red are the normal three steps of hermeneutics, with "Text" and "Meaning" in the ancient times, and "Application" in the modern times. The smaller words are various sub-steps and questions in the process. It's always tempting to take the shortcut directly from the ancient text to the modern application, but we've put a red "x" there to force people to go down the road of observation and meditation. In the middle of the triangle is the word "Pray!" to remind us of the importance of depending on God at each step.