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NEWS

BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP!

By Dr. John David Smith
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In global missions, we often celebrate the fruit—churches planted, believers baptized, lives transformed. But every harvest begins with soil, seed, and sweat. The reality is that gospel work among the nations almost always begins from scratch. Missionaries enter with empty hands and full hearts, building from the ground up in foreign soil, often with nothing but a burden from God and the power of the Spirit. The biblical mandate is clear, and the strategy must reflect both Christ's model and the New Testament pattern: humble beginnings, patient labor, and incarnational living.

This year's World Missions Day theme, "Send Me," resonates deeply with the legacy of BMA Global Missions. For 75 years, BMA missionaries have left home and comfort behind, embracing the unknown for the sake of the gospel. From small villages to crowded cities, they have obeyed the call to begin where no church existed. Their sacrifices form the backdrop for this article series, rooted in the biblical call to build Christ's Church, one life, one disciple, one gathering at a time.

The apostle Paul's words still anchor our purpose: "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). True mission work does not export a cultural package—it exalts Christ. Cultural anthropology reminds us that every people group already has a worldview, traditions, and patterns of behavior. Our task is not to replace their culture but to redeem it with the truth of the gospel. This means moving slowly, listening carefully, and communicating in ways that make sense within their context.

Missionaries must become students of the culture. Cultural assumptions, when unchecked, can smother rather than serve the gospel. From language learning to worldview analysis, a faithful ground-up approach requires deep contextualization and humility.

The model of Christ—the Word made flesh who dwelled among us—is the heartbeat of incarnational missions. Missionaries don't work above or apart from the people they serve; they live among them, suffer with them, and grow alongside them. This incarnational posture—"Send Me!"—requires surrender, discomfort, and a long-term vision.

Suffering is not incidental to mission—it is often the soil in which the gospel takes root. From the apostolic age to modern missions, we see again and again that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus

will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Whether through political instability, disease, or rejection, missionaries often face the reality that the path to planting a church is paved with personal sacrifice.

And yet, there is joy in the struggle. As Jesus taught, the kernel of wheat must fall and die to produce a harvest (John 12:24). Each difficulty faced is a chance to join Christ in His suffering and to trust in God's redemptive power to bring fruit.

The end goal of ground-up missions is not simply evangelism—it is the birth of a local, mature, and multiplying church. As the BMA's "Mature Church Model" outlines, these churches are marked by gospel clarity, spiritual vitality, indigenous leadership, and contextualized worship. We are not just spreading beliefs; we are establishing communities of believers who live out the gospel in their own heart language and cultural forms.

Looking Ahead

This series will highlight stories and strategies from missionaries who are planting gospel seeds where there was once no witness. Their lives testify that the Spirit still works in new soil, that the Church still grows from nothing, and that the gospel still transforms. May we be inspired to say with Isaiah, "Here am I. Send me."



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TAKING THE GOSPEL TO CAMBODIA

By David Perez and Juren Mamon
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When God calls, we often begin with a simple “yes.” For Pastors David Perez and Juren Mamon, that “yes” became the first step toward a bold mission: taking the Gospel to Cambodia. What began as a short-term exposure trip soon became a clear and compelling call to build something from the ground up: a Christ-centered ministry among one of Asia Pacific’s spiritually hungry nations.

A Burden for Cambodia

During a visit to Cambodia, Pastor David Perez witnessed something that changed his life forever. He saw the deep spiritual hunger of the Cambodian people—communities with little to no access to the Gospel, yet full of openness and yearning for hope. That moment became a turning point. “The Lord was clear,” he said. “I must go.”

Pastor Juren Mamon, similarly, never imagined that his background in motorcycle repair and vocational skills would one day play a central role in foreign missions. Yet in Cambodia, he saw a way to connect deeply with young men, offering training, mentorship, and ultimately, the Gospel. “I realized all of my education, experience, and training were God’s preparation for this very work,” Juren shared. “Now I can use those skills to point others to Christ.”



From Preparation to Launch

The path to the mission field wasn’t immediate. It took months of spiritual, emotional, and practical preparation. Both men dedicated themselves to prayer, studying God’s Word, and seeking counsel. “Crossing cultures isn’t just about packing bags,” David noted. “It requires a surrendered spirit, a renewed mind, and a heart anchored in God’s Word.”

Leading up to their departure in April, the pastors traveled across the Philippines, sharing their vision with local churches. These visits not only built support but also sparked a shared passion for missions. “We were overwhelmed by the generosity and

encouragement,” Juren said. “Seeing churches catch the vision reminded us we are not alone.”

A New Beginning in Cambodia

Now on the ground in Cambodia, Pastors David and Juren are beginning their ministry at the grassroots level, literally. Their initial focus is on building relationships and trust among locals, especially in rural provinces. They visit villages, bring food and toys to children, and share the love of God in practical ways.

Language remains a key hurdle. Khmer is complex, but both pastors are committed to learning it completely—reading, writing, and speaking. “We can’t explain the Gospel clearly unless we understand their language and culture,” David emphasized.

They are also partnering with Filipino teachers renovating a rural school, providing not only physical help but spiritual encouragement to the community. Opportunities like these serve as open doors for the Gospel and allow the pastors to live out their faith in action.

Long-Term Vision: Discipleship and Development

The ultimate vision is discipleship. Both pastors dream of seeing young Cambodians come to know Christ, be trained in Scripture and life skills, and return to their villages equipped to lead. “We want to raise up local disciples who will carry the Gospel to their own people,” Juren said.

They are praying for a mission house in Phnom Penh, a hub that would serve as both a discipleship center and a temporary home for rural youth studying or working in the city. There, these young people would receive pastoral care, vocational training in small engine repair, and English lessons, all grounded in the Gospel message.

Strengthening the Work at Home

Even as they invest in Cambodia, the pastors have ensured that the work they helped build in the Philippines remains strong. With outreach ministries, ALS programs, and churches continuing under local leadership, they leave behind a legacy that will flourish. “This is the fruit of years of Gospel labor,” David said. “We believe God will sustain and grow it.”

Faith for the Journey Ahead

The road ahead is filled with challenges, including language barriers, cultural adjustments, and spiritual warfare, but these men are undeterred. They rest in Christ’s promise in Matthew 28:20: “Lo, I am with you always.” That assurance propels them forward with faith.

“We are truly building from the ground up,” David reflected. “There’s very little here, but we trust God to accomplish something magnificent.”

“This is more than a mission,” added Juren. “It’s a partnership...with God, with the church, and with everyone who prays and supports this work.”

Together, these two men are living proof that when God calls, He equips—and when we say “yes,” He opens doors no man can shut. The journey has just begun, and by God’s grace, the fields of Cambodia will see a harvest—one soul at a time.

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STARTING FROM SCRATCH

By Jarred Etheredge
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When God called us to the valley we currently are serving in, it was a big step of faith. Not only was it in a new-to-us area, but there was also nothing on the land that had been given by the tribal authority. No municipal services or even any hope of ever getting them, no water, no road.

The first few weeks my wife and I slept in the back of our truck under a tree as we established a fence and began work on a long drop toilet. Thereafter we set up a 6x10 tent and our family of six moved on site. Life in the tent was interesting to say the least with many adjustments and a lot of grace needed. We cooked on fire, used heavy black plastic bags to heat water for baths, and learned to live in cycle with the daylight. Our water came by tractor from a nearby river into a 1,000 gallon tank we procured. During this season we continued to learn our new community and customs while building relationships and structures for the future.

Eight months later a wind event—we think it might have been a small tornado—destroyed our tents and forced us into the workshop we had only just finished. While in the shop we were able to get solar electricity, which, after a year of having none, was welcomed with tears of joy. Not long after that the Lord blessed us with a water well and additional larger water storage tanks.

Eighteen months after moving to the village we finally were able to move into our small house. The Lord taught us so much during that time and knit our hearts together with the community around us. They saw us live like they live. They watched us struggle and learn what village life is like. They would ask why we would stay and why we would do these things, when surely because of our nationality and skin color we could afford to go somewhere else. Some even offered to find us established homes in other more “easy” areas. This opened the door for great Gospel conversations and opportunities that the Lord is still reaping a harvest from to this day. We didn’t stay because we were stubborn or strong. We stayed because this is where God put us.

On some of the clear cool nights we would sit around the fire and watch the stars and count satellites that passed overhead. We would see the lights from the surrounding villages and try to learn what we could about them from our local friends. We found out that from our home we can see seven villages that have no Gospel presence at all. No church, no fellowship, nothing. This ignited our prayers for God to provide opportunities and pathways into these villages.

In early 2024 a door opened into a village about five miles from us, and in February we began holding meetings in a local community member’s garage. Though this village



is a short distance away, a large river separates them from us. In the dry season our 4x4 truck can cross with little effort, but in the rainy season our trip extends by 70 miles to go around the mountain to the other side. On this longer drive we found other villages which we couldn’t see but must travel through on our way that also have no church. We now pick up people along the way as we travel, even having to make second trips to some villages to make sure we pick up everyone. To celebrate our first year of meeting together we held a special baptismal service where 14 people stepped into the muddy water for baptism.

Whether building a home site or planting a church where none existed previously, there will inevitably be great highs and lows. The peaks and the valleys go together in the building of God’s vision for His people. In all of them our focus remains on the call that God birthed in us and His desire to see His people saved. Hard days will come and go but the Kingdom of God stands forever. Most people will never see the places we live or know what joy and sacrifice went into establishing them, but I am fully assured of this: It is worth it.



REACHING THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL

By Emily Brantley
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As Lifeword continues its mission to speak the gospel in the heart language of every person, teams around the world are expanding outreach efforts, training new disciples, and developing creative strategies to overcome obstacles. From Asia to the Americas, God is opening doors, and Lifeword teams are walking through them in faith.

Asia: Training, Tutorials, and New Frontiers

Pastor Pete in the Philippines is diligently following up with broadcasters across the islands, especially helping older pastors adapt to modern media tools. Though personal circumstances have limited his travel, Pastor Pete continues training online and is preparing new tutorials to support pastors and technicians across Asia-Pacific. Exciting developments include growing interest in Cambodia and Vietnam, where pastors are eager to launch gospel media broadcasts. These doors are significant opportunities to reach the unreached in Asia-Pacific.

In the Middle East, Bro. Joe Costa reported positive progress on four ministry pages, especially those reaching New Age and Muslim audiences. Engagement is growing, with open conversations taking place through the “Feast” program, which connects believers with the LGBTQ+ community in thoughtful, respectful dialogue. Despite the volatility of the region, there is great hope for gospel advancement.

Africa: Overcoming Obstacles, Advancing the Gospel

In Africa, Brother Hayford is continuing his gospel work despite the technical challenges of limited internet access. He’s training to produce radio and streaming content and preparing to disciple others in video and audio editing.

Meanwhile, in Liberia, Bro. Abraham Cheyee reports exciting progress as the gospel spreads into rural and even Muslim communities. Many have come to faith, and Lifeword is encouraged by the fruit of faithful ministry in hard-to-reach areas. The team continues recording and distributing content while trusting God for more breakthroughs in infrastructure.

Europe: Expanding Partnerships and Reaching New Audiences

Bro. Bogdan and the European team are building new partnerships and expanding their media platforms. A highlight this season was a baptism event, including the return of a former Gypsy speaker now living in Germany. With this momentum, the team is considering a new media project aimed at ministering to Gypsies in Germany or German-speaking Gypsy communities.

Americas: Discipleship and Preparation for Colombia

Bro. Valmori recently began discipling a new believer and asked for prayer as he and Bro. Rigoberto work to continue to support Lifeword’s vision by pairing media outreach with on-the-ground evangelism in their region.

Conclusion

Lifeword is pressing forward with over 200 monthly productions in 165 languages and planning to expand into 10 more. Whether it’s online tutorials, grassroots discipleship, or cross-cultural conversations, the global team is committed to sharing Jesus in every heart language. Please continue to pray for the teams, their families, and the people they serve. The harvest is plentiful—and Lifeword remains on mission.

