



Disciple Cambodia by Steve Goode

Subtitle: We try to picture what “discipling the nations” might mean for us in our ministry: how can we really see the kingdom of God established throughout a nation as a result of our efforts?

For many of us in YWAM, the term “discipling the nations” is a concept we’ve heard discussed at schools and conferences. We try to picture what it might mean for us in our ministry: how could we really see the kingdom of God established throughout a nation as a result of our efforts? For others of us, “discipling the nations” is a work in process with the people we minister to, although we only see glimpses of it in their lives, their communities and their nations.

We can all learn much from these glimpses. Those of us who have been involved in YWAM’s work in Cambodia, for example, have much to reflect on. Philip and Wendy Scott have learned a lot working in Stung Treng, one of the poorest provinces in Cambodia. For them, discipling this province has meant involvement in everything from malaria prevention to church planting to prison ministry. It has usually meant caring for individual people in the often confusing and heartbreaking events of daily life.

Just take the story of Som, for example. Philip and Wendy first met Som shortly after they arrived in Stung Treng, some nine years ago. Som had not left his house for two years because of his embarrassment at being handicapped. He had fallen out of a tree when gathering medicine for his wife and was now paralyzed from the waist down. After talking with Philip, Som became interested in learning more about Christ. He finally gave his life to Jesus. Som now works in a neighboring province with a project that helps rehabilitate the handicapped. He has been an encouragement to some of the many landmine victims in Cambodia and has led many handicapped people to Christ.

Som is just one example of how YWAMers have been discipling Cambodia by serving the poor. This may seem like a strange model. Disciple a nation by serving the weakest, the least enfranchised? How can this be? But this kind of model should not surprise us. We see the same thing in the life of Jesus.

Following Jesus’ Model

A simple carpenter from Nazareth, Jesus lived his calling in a rather normal, common vocation for his first 30 years. His roots were rural and his culture was Jewish. However, Jesus was anything but common. He was also God who was ushering in a present and future kingdom.

Jesus called together a group of common people to become His followers. He did not call the elite, the power brokers of the day to be his disciples. His followers were fishermen, tax collectors, religious students and activists. His message was simple and two-sided, just like a coin. On one side of the coin, the message was to love God and on the other side, the message was to love your neighbor as yourself. This was a message that could not be disconnected without dire consequences.



He taught his followers and used discipleship principles that are just as valid for us today. He taught, modeled, coached, mentored and then finally delegated this life message to his followers with His last command, “Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).

Jesus’ neighbor was the weak, the poor, the sick, the outcast and the vulnerable. As He served the poor, he also came into contact with the social, religious and political leaders and decision-makers of the day. This is a basic principle of meeting people’s felt needs and discipling nations. As we serve people, their families, their community, we will be brought into contact with the structures and decision-makers that shape their world. As we lead people to Jesus, we find that salvation is the doorway to discipling a nation.

Starting Out in Cambodia

In YWAM, we have seen this happen over and over since we began our work in Cambodia 10 years ago.

In 1990, I wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of the Cambodian government. I wanted to have an introductory meeting with them to see if we could have a needs assessment team come into Cambodia. For 11 years, YWAM had been working with Cambodian refugees along the Thai/Cambodian border. God had spoken that he wanted YWAM to work in the surrounding countries as well.

Our first trip to Cambodia was primarily limited to Phnom Penh, the capital city. The government wanted us to see things that were important to them. It was a “get-to-know each other” visit. We told them what we had done in the refugee camps. We gave them letters of recommendation from other agencies we had worked with in Thailand as well as the Thai government. We also told them that we were Christians.

Toward the end of the visit, I asked one of the officials of MOFA where the most significant needs were in the country that would most likely be ignored when the international aid agencies came in to Cambodia. Without hesitation, he said, “The northeast part of the country and particularly Stung Treng, the regional capital.” We said that was the kind of place we would like to serve. He told us we did not understand; it was a poor place with no water or electricity and it had many challenges. We told him that was exactly the kind of place we wanted to take an assessment team.

We took several visits to Stung Treng to meet with government officials in health, water and education. There were no other agencies in the province of 60,000. Local doctors received US\$5 per month salary. The local hospital had no medicines, electricity, running water, toilets or infrastructure. In the province, 40 percent of the children were dying before reaching age five. There was no running water in the capital town of 20,000. We later found out that there were no known Christians in the province either. It was as we had expected: there were very poor Khmer and tribal peoples living in this province with no Christian witness. Stung Treng was an isolated region and had also been a key area of the Khmer Rouge. That was one of the reasons agencies did not want to risk working there.



The provincial government gave YWAM a letter of invitation requesting that we come to work in Stung Treng. That was the beginning of YWAM's official registration with the Royal Government of Cambodia.

In 2001, we have finished our 10th year in Stung Treng. Serving the poor in Stung Treng has been a great challenge but it has opened up significant doors to help disciple this province as well.

Here are a few examples of what discipling Cambodia has looked like for YWAM:

Giving Shelter

When Pauli's grandfather died, Pauli, age 13, had nowhere to go. She had been living with her grandfather because her mother was now married to her fourth husband, a man who would not accept Pauli in his home. In desperation, Pauli came to the Hagar Shelter, YWAM's emergency shelter for mothers and children in Phnom Penh. YWAM provided Pauli with a home with one of their foster families.

Coming Back

Rithy Chau suffered terribly under the rule of the Khmer Rouge. He lost his father, older brother and other relatives. After fleeing the country with his mother, he spent some time in the Thailand refugee camp where YWAM served and was finally resettled in the USA. Rithy has now earned a masters degree in public health and has returned to Cambodia. He works with YWAM in Siembok, which was formerly a center for Khmer Rouge activity. Rithy is a health advisor for a local clinic, is starting community development projects and is discipling new believers.

After the Flood

When a flood hit Cambodia's Siempang district, the Kravet people group faced starvation. YWAM Stung Treng partnered with Tearfund to intervene and provide 22 tons of rice seed.

Night Blindness

In many remote villages of Cambodia, a lack of vitamin A causes many of the women and children to suffer from night blindness. After a YWAM medical team distributed vitamin supplements, villagers were so impressed with the results that even cataract patients lined up to receive the little pills. The team explained to them that this was not a "miracle drug" that could cure all forms of blindness. The grateful villagers explained that they thought night blindness was normal. They had no idea there was a medicine for it.

A First Christmas

In Siempang, it was Christmas time and the YWAMers working there wondered how to explain this tradition to about 20 new believers they had been discipling. They decided to have a small, private ceremony in someone's home. They would show the first 10-15 minutes of the Jesus video, since it starts with the birth of Jesus. Then they could talk and pray and find out if this kind of annual event might be appropriate. However, when word got out that a film would be shown, 80-90 of the villagers arrived at the small house. They were excited to have a chance to hear about Jesus. The believers were very happy with their first Christmas celebration.

Our Decade of Change

It has been remarkable to see God work in Cambodia over these last 10 years. In Stung Treng, the health of the people in this province has dramatically increased since our arrival. We have seen a significant reduction in the numbers of children that are dying in this province before reaching the age of five. There are now 250 trained village health care workers for all of the villages in the province. We have interacted with local health officials, provincial health officials, the ministry of health and other political leaders in the region as well as Phnom Penh along with many international health agencies. I think it would be fair to say that we have been helping to disciple this Cambodian province in their health care.

This kind of discipleship has also occurred in education, water and with our involvement in the church. We now have about six different fellowships in this province that we have linked with the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia. We were a part of the dialogue that helped shape the freedom of religion clause in the Cambodian constitution. Serving the poor, serving the decision-makers and assisting in the shaping of structures go hand in hand.

Around the world, common, everyday YWAMers have been serving the poor for 40 years in thousands of locations. Their acts of mercy, good deeds and service to the felt needs of people have also brought them into contact with village, community and national leaders, religious leaders, health leaders, business and economic leaders, as well as leaders in the world of arts, entertainment, science and technology. This is the nature of service and discipleship.

In YWAM, we are giving input into health care, education, prisons, community development, the church and to governments in general. This is very encouraging and also very challenging. God is interested in families, communities, nations and the world that He created. I think that our destiny as a mission is intricately linked to the discipling of the nations, particularly in the developing world. May God help us as we walk in humility to serve and disciple people.

Steve Goode is the International Director of Mercy Ministries for YWAM. Reprinted with permission from the International YWAMer, published in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA. September 2001.