

Sudden, erratic convulsions overcame each person packed inside the aged Honda as it chugged along the uneven dirt road. A nine-year-old boy sat in his mother's lap, the crooked glasses on his nose teetering with each jolt of the car. Crammed beside the man in the passenger seat was a young girl, about 14 years of age, her head bobbing in slumber as the car crawled forward. Words drifted back to me from conversation between two men sitting in the front of the vehicle. The words sounded foreign, yet distinctly familiar. They were uttered in Khmer, the beautiful mother tongue of all Cambodians.

As far as the eye could see, only red dirt was visible. Behind the car a trail of red dust filled the air. The barren land looked lost and forlorn. Bushes littering the ground were covered in red dirt. I squeezed my eyes shut and sighed, longing for the lush green grass I once knew. Then I remembered why I was in Cambodia. My eyes opened and immediately fell upon three delicate, yellow flowers that stood out like an oasis in the desert.

"Look at those beautiful flowers," the mother in the car said, smiling at us. "That's what we should be like."

As I look back to that day, I think of Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men." With the Lord, Christians stand out like beacons in darkness, and their radically different lives pour out the love that Jesus Christ has poured out for each person.

When I first stepped into Cambodia, the first thing that struck me was the people's poverty. The second was their openness. "The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved," Mother Teresa once said. Perhaps God had sent me to this country for that purpose alone—to flood people's lives with His abundant love.

You hear about missions trips and teenagers attending summer camps with the sole purpose of ministering to others. Consider this: What happens when your whole life is a missions trip? Living as a Christian in a third-world country where every move I make is scrutinized by people of different ethnic groups brings its share of hardships. Upon moving to Malaysia I noticed everyone staring at me, no matter what I did or how I tried to fit in. I spoke their language and ate their foods, yet I was set apart.


A New Friend

Initially, when I visited a remote fishing village in Cambodia, I felt isolated because I didn't speak the language. One time, however, I did feel acceptance from a little girl who tenderly held my hand and returned my smile. Riding on a "motodop," or motorcycle taxi, through the dirt paths of the village, the first person I saw was an eight-year-old girl bounding toward me with open arms. Worn, dirt-caked, sweaty clothes were wrapped around her thin frame. She opened her arms wide and embraced my friend who lived in the village and me. She stared at me with questioning eyes, and I broke into a small smile.

"Her name's Aiei," my friend said. "She just wants some affection."

"Aiei," I said as she slipped her tiny hand into mine. She cackled and hugged my arm. Just at that moment the insignificant sign of affection I received gave me acceptance. From that point on God's love seemed to overflow as I spent days curiously trying to learn the Chain and Khmer languages from dirt-smudged individuals like Aiei.

When I left, my heart kept pulling me back, as if an imaginary rope gently restrained me. In the airport, for



the first time in weeks no children were crowding around me, and I felt strangely desolate. Little did I know that God's work in my heart had just begun. That trip to Cambodia ignited a spark in me.


Living with Trials

I went home to my family in Penang, Malaysia, after the tsunami hit, hardly knowing what to expect. Everything appeared normal because order had been restored, yet people still lived in fear and distress. The homes strewn across the shoreline, kampongs (villages) covered in trash and the collapsed seawall at our school remained as painful reminders of what had happened.

O, Lord, how could You allow something like this to happen? This question rang in my head for weeks. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance," James 1:2-3 tells us. That was what I needed to learn, but my heart was small.

Banda Aceh, Indonesia, lay in the middle of the turmoil, and the closest international church is located in Penang. Those who visited Banda Aceh told stories upon stories of the absolute devastation and hopelessness of the Indonesian people. "Almost everyone we met had a close relative or knew somebody who had died," one missionary said. Storekeepers didn't rebuild their shop houses because all the people were gone, and people didn't rebuild their houses because all their neighbors were gone.

Now that I live in Penang, seeing the destitution around me has altered my life in so many ways. "Pure joy" through suffering doesn't come easily; nor does "letting my light shine" amidst the trials and hardships life has laid upon me.

So when I feel lost, I close my eyes and find my way back to God, and when I open my eyes, they suddenly rest upon several beautiful flowers, resplendently contrasting the red dirt of the world. 



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THE ALLIANCE
Living the Call together...



...in all the world
BY CHRISTA DEVETTE