

Enter their world

"I entered their world ... I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life." —1 Corinthians 9:22-23 (The Message)

River Children

by Chris Wilkins, Cambodia

I knew he was mischievous just by the way he walked – he was an 8-year-old with a swagger. Paliup lives across the street from the Mekong River, approximately 100 miles from the border of Vietnam. About 30 families have built their wood and thatch huts there. With no electricity or running water in the village, the only drinking water comes from the river. As a result, many of the children have runny noses and various ailments.

In the summer of 2005, we started a school for the river children. I would drive along the river, honking my horn to let the children know I was there. Paliup loved to ride on my truck's running board. That made it easy for him to yell instructions in my ear or just yell for the fun of it. He would often open or close the church gate for me. At times when no one else in his village came to school, Paliup would be there.

The last two Sundays before we left Kampong Cham for home assignment, Paliup stayed after the children's church service and stood outside the adult service, listening to the singing and the message. I invited him to sit with me, but he acted uninterested.

While cleaning up the Sunday school room on the last Sunday, I found a paper with Paliup's name. He had colored a picture showing Jesus on the cross between the two thieves. His drawing is my treasure.

The last day we were in Kampong Cham, Paliup came to the house. He knew we were soon leaving. I gave him some items leftover from school. He accepted them with a smile, but he was quieter than usual. I told him we'd see him next year, put my hand on his shoulder, and walked to the gate with him. Paliup walked off. He still had his swagger.

I picture Paliup as I pray for the river children, and I smile.



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PO Box 535002 • Indianapolis IN 46253-5002

U.S. Phone: 800.342.5531 E-mail: missions@fmcna.org Web site: www.fmcna.org
www.FMExpeditions.org

Canada Phone: 905.848.2600 E-mail: ministrycentre@fmc-canada.org Web site: www.fmc-canada.org

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