

Cambodian pastor returns with the gospel to land he fled 30 years ago

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FORT WORTH—Rindo Nong had no idea three decades ago God was leading him out of the killing fields of Cambodia so that years later, he could return, bringing the gospel to his homeland.

In fact, Nong didn't even know God when his family fled to a refugee camp in Thailand to escape the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

"I grew up a Buddhist," said Nong, now pastor of a Cambodian mission church in Fort Worth sponsored by Travis Avenue Baptist Church.

"In the refugee camp, they had a missionary who would go in and come out to spread the gospel. They had built one church for Christians and one church for Buddhists right across from one another."

{youtube}qy9CmCc78CQ&hl=en&fs=1&rel=0{/youtube}

Cambodian pastor Rindo Nong describes his flight from the Khmer Rouge in 1979, his conversion to Christ in a Thai refugee camp and a journey to the Philippines and then to Fort Worth, Texas.

Nong's mother and stepfather were curious and began attending the Christian church to find out more about Jesus. Ultimately, they made professions of faith in Christ, and they began to share their faith with other family members.

Nong began his own spiritual search, but it took him some time to leave his

Buddhist roots.

One day, his mother and brother brought him a gospel tract to read.

“The tract talked about life, and it had a nice picture on it, and I liked that red flower. When I read through the whole tract, my spirit started to sing about life, what’s going on in life, and what happens when we die,” he said. “A new spirit came upon me. I didn’t know it was the Holy Spirit at that time, but I felt different.”

The next Sunday, when his mother went to church, Nong was by her side.

“When I accepted Christ, it changed my life. ... It changed the singing in my soul. Now there was joy,” he said.

That was 1980, and Nong began to spend a great deal of time with the Christian missionaries in the refugee camps, learning more about his newfound faith. He spent almost three years in refugee camps—two in Thailand and another in the Philippines—before he and his wife moved to Fort Worth, where his parents already were living.

In 1990, Nong began to feel a stirring to minister. Eventually, that sense of calling led him back to a place where he thought he never would return.

“I wanted to serve the Lord among Cambodians, but not go back to Cambodia. But one day, God called me back, and I had to go to Cambodia,” Nong recalled.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt8htrBwhZ0&hl=en&fs=1&rel=0>

Cambodian pastor Rindo Nong gives his testimony in the Khmer language.

In 1994, with the help of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, he started his ministry to the Cambodians of Fort Worth. Three years later, Nong and his wife went back to Cambodia for the first time since his escape from the

Com-munists years before.

“God told me I had to go back and start a church in my own village,” Nong said. Among his extended family, he found a readymade congregation who were eager to hear about Christ. In 2001, he led the construction of a church there.

He has made a trip back to Cambodia every year since, starting churches and constructing church buildings. Since 2003, a group from University Baptist Church, where he has worked as a custodian 25 years, has accompanied him to Cambodia.

“Now I’m involved with the whole country training pastors and leaders. The church there is really growing,” Nong said.

With help from his partners in Fort Worth, a Baptist center has been built in his home village of Batongbang to train church leaders.

While the people of Cambodia are closely tied to their family traditions and Buddhism, Nong said, they are very curious about Christianity. They have a thirst for more and are welcoming of Christians, he added.

“This is a good time,” Nong said. “We can’t wait too long.”