



'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.'
(John 10:10)

Belonging

It is January 1, 2023. We are at Schiphol Airport. "We" is a group of travel companions. We already know each other, but will get to know each other much better in the coming weeks. Together, we will be on our way to Cambodia. A prayer, a last greeting - Cambodia here-we-come!

We had prepared for the trip, but at the same time we didn't know what to expect. I knew the country, but most of the others did not. What happens in such a group I felt best when we were back at Schiphol Airport 2,5 weeks later. Instead of a group of individuals, we were now 1 group, a whole.

And how cool is that to experience. Call it 'tribe,' call it family, it is the place where you say and feel - here I matter, here I am

accepted, here I feel at home. A place of **belonging**. Everyone needs such a place.

Perhaps "something" or someone immediately comes to your mind when you think of **belonging**. Beautiful is that! And yet, even for many people, it is different. Many people are lonely, they don't feel connected, they don't feel at home. Poverty takes many forms, but this is certainly one of them.

From the very beginning the church has been known as a place of **belonging**, a place where people are allowed to be. Where there is care and love - after all, that's what Jesus taught the disciples. How is that at your church? How is it in your life? Do you know that place of **belonging** and do you create that place for others?

In The Alongsiders Story (feel free to email us if you don't have it yet, we'll send you a free copy) and in the Alongsiders

training we pay a lot of attention to **belonging**. It is one of the 4 principles we always fall default towards. Are we a place where people are welcome? Are we a place where everyone counts? Are we a place where we live out the radical welcome of Jesus anno 2023?

Often that simply takes time. Time to be, to talk, to share, to pray. To laugh and to cry. Time. A friend of ours in Cambodia has this saying, "*The most precious thing you can give one-another is your undivided attention.*" Undivided attention & time are scarce. Where do you give them to?

During the trip, we gave them to each other. Undivided. Generously. And what emerged was community where we saw each other, invested in each other, cared for each other. I enjoyed it intensely. Do you have such a place of community, such a place of **belonging**?

Continue on page 2 >>>

News | February 2023
40



'23-1

This News is sent out about 4 times a year in order to inform you well about the things that are happening in our lives and enables you to pray with us. Feel free to forward this letter to others.

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THE VISION TRIP TO CAMBODIA

So this year started with the trip to Cambodia, which was definitely not a vacation. Once we arrived in Phnom Penh, we went straight to the genocide museum the next day. Together we learned about the history of this beautiful country. Impressive. We would meet the young people at Shalom Valley in a few days, but did we realize the tragedy from which this country comes? Where the young people were coming from? Conversations followed, praying together, sharing, opening your heart.

For me - Mart-Jan - it was also just really good to be in the country again. The smells, the temperature, but above all the people. It felt a bit like coming home >> [belonging](#). The warmth of our friends, the teams in Cambodia. It felt like a warm bath. Talitha and the kids of course sympathized with us. We had regular contact and through the app they also received the photos. It reinforced for all of us the desire to go back for a few weeks at the end of this year. Our original plan was to do so after 1-1.5 years (that is one of the advices to missionaries who have lived in a particular country for years), but due to corona and ticket prices going up, this was not possible. We are now aiming for December. Christmas with 28 degrees - how does that sound? 🤔

After starting in Phnom Penh, we moved on fairly quickly to Kep, the place where Shalom Valley is located. How cool it was to be there again, again the warmth, the friendship, but also the beauty of the camp complex and the surroundings - wonderful. A little bit of coming home.



There is too much to tell about the camp. It was so cool, so impressive. Also for us as a group. Crossing language barriers, showing love. Acting together. Looking each other in the eye, encouraging each other - having fun.

I'll add some pictures on the next page. Enjoy, but know that 1,000 pictures cannot tell ...

And..., because the pictures cannot tell what we have experienced, and because we very much want to tell about God's greatness, and to testify to what He has done, we are hosting a Worship 'n Share evening on the Thursday, April 1. An evening full of worship, inspiration, testimonies from the group that went to Cambodia and meeting each other. You are more than welcome to join us for this evening (... but in your case, it might be a bit far away)!

After camp, the trip was all but over.

Sure, we took some time to catch our breath and enjoy the beauty of the country, but then we visited a missionary hospital, a fair clothing factory, a local church, a business-as-mission guesthouse, and you name it. All experiences that gave us an insight into the country and culture, but also touched on themes like justice and injustice. What does that have to do with my life? How can I step into that? Hugely educational, but of course also confronting.



One of the participants wrote a [BLOG](#) about the trip and what it did to him. It touched me that he wrote about how the Alongsiders in Cambodia give of themselves without thinking of themselves. Selfless. So cool. What can we learn from them? If you want to read the blog too click [here](#).

And so we wrap up the first newsletter of the year. Grateful for the journey, and for opportunities to share about God's greatness. Testimonies to pass on. We feel privileged. Are you praying with us as we prepare for the various Alongsiders events? Mart-Jan gets to share regularly in different congregations - that too is a blessing to do. Do you pray with us for impact in our hearts?

Thank you for being our Alongsider.
Blessing 🙏

Mart-Jan & Talitha
Joy, Micha and Amy

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