Keeping a promise, almost Kim had promised her daughters that she would be with them for the birth of their babies no matter the obstacles, and she kept that promise for 10 years. Then Covid happened. Charis was expecting her fourth child, and a few weeks before her due date of April 20, the government of Cambodia closed down all travel, making it nearly impossible to get to the airport in Phnom Penh 300 miles away. That was bad news, but it got worse.

Two weeks before her due date, Charis came down with Covid! All of Kim’s motherly instincts came to the fore: “We really need to go help her.” My first thought was, “Who’s going to call the Prime Minister?” but I didn’t say it out loud. We were stuck in Cambodia. “God provides all good things and controls all bad things."

By God’s grace Charis made it through a tough case of Covid and the birth of baby Rushton. We were still stuck in Cambodia.

Then Charis told us that Rushton had been diagnosed with a breathing problem caused by a lax larynx. He’d eventually grow out of it, but it made for sleepless nights for Charis and Brian. “If we were there we could take care of Rushton at night,” Kim said. Suddenly the Prime Minister lifted the travel ban! That day I bought two tickets to Greenville, and two days later we were driving to Phnom Penh to catch our flight.

Kim wanted to surprise everyone, so we kept it a secret from everyone except Ethan, who would pick us up from the airport. We arrived in the evening, went straight to Charis’ house, and knocked on the door. That was a mistake. Brian was at work, and Charis had no idea what stranger was banging at her door without having called first. She thought about getting her sidearm, (wouldn’t that have made national news!), but her neighbor recognized us from her side porch and called her to say that there was a nice surprise at her door. It was a happy reunion. That night Kim got her first chance to hold fussy and wheezing Rushton during the night so Charis could get some sleep. The next day we went house to house surprising all of our kids and grandkids, as well as Kim’s mom. That was one of the funnest days of our lives.

In quarantine

Now we’re back in Cambodia doing our required quarantine in a Phnom Penh hotel that the government chose for us. It’s a nice place and the food is pretty good. As we look back on the last six crazy weeks, we see that God was definitely guiding us.

• We were able to help Charis through the first four difficult weeks for Rushton (who is doing better now).

• We were able to receive higher quality vaccines rather than the inferior Chinese ones that we likely would have been pressured to get here.

• We were able to help Nathaniel through the complicated insurance process for his hand surgery. He had broken it wrestling with his friend.

• We had a few excellent opportunities to talk to some of our older grandkids about the gospel and faith in Christ.

• We spent many, many happy hours with our kids and grandkids and Kim’s mom and dear friends. I was also able to fellowship with and report to a number of pastors in our home church.

Kim and I have decided that we’re going to make a short trip to the States once a year until our retirement in six years. Every two years we’ll take our regular 3-month home assignment (furlough) to report to our partner churches. In the alternating years we'll go back to the States on our own dime to spend our yearly vacation with our kids and grandkids. Who wants to vacation alone in Cambodia?! This recent trip was of the yearly vacation variety, and we’re so thankful God brought everything together to make it happen.

Prayer

• Three days after we arrived in Phnom Penh we received news that our town in Ratanakiri was experiencing a significant Covid outbreak. Even Rith, my dearest Cambodian colleague, pastor, and friend, contracted it along with his daughter Karuna (Grace). Rith’s case seems mild, but please pray for him and his family.

• Pray that God would have mercy on this province, as we don’t have a proper hospital that can take care of Covid patients. Pray that all the believers here would be an example of serenity, love, and hope in the midst of this outbreak that has already claimed the lives of a few people in our town. Here is a picture of Rith and his daughter at the quarantine center.

• Since Kim and I are fully vaccinated, we’ll have more freedom to help Covid patients get to the quarantine sites and to visit them there. Pray that the officials would recognize our American vaccinations and allow us to help in this way.

• Finally, here is a happy picture of our entire family (except for Anna’s husband, Adam, who had work responsibilities back in Chicago where they live). Thank God with us that by his grace and through your prayers, all our children and their spouses are committed Christians and active church members. Please pray for our grandchildren that they would seek the Lord.

Adults and babies from left to right: Nathaniel Crowley, Zak, Jenna, and Nico Richards, JD, Grandma Jean Martin, Kim, Taylor, Emmie, and Marcus Crowley, Brian, Charis, and Rushton Johansen, Ethan and Emily Crowley, and Anna Pruden holding Ivan. Children in front: Jeana Johansen, Hudson Crowley; (Ethan’s son), Martin Johansen, Ami Johansen, Shiloh Crowley (Ethan’s daughter), Brett Pruden, Tasi Pruden. (Adam Pruden not pictured due to work obligations)

JD and Kim Crowley, sent by Hampton Park Baptist Church via EMU International, 209 Roberts Rd., Taylors, South Carolina, 29687