

Love and Light in India

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Sixteen believers from Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, CA, recently went to India for two weeks with Calvary Chapel Boise, ID, a fellowship that has been ministering in the Hindu country for 18 years.

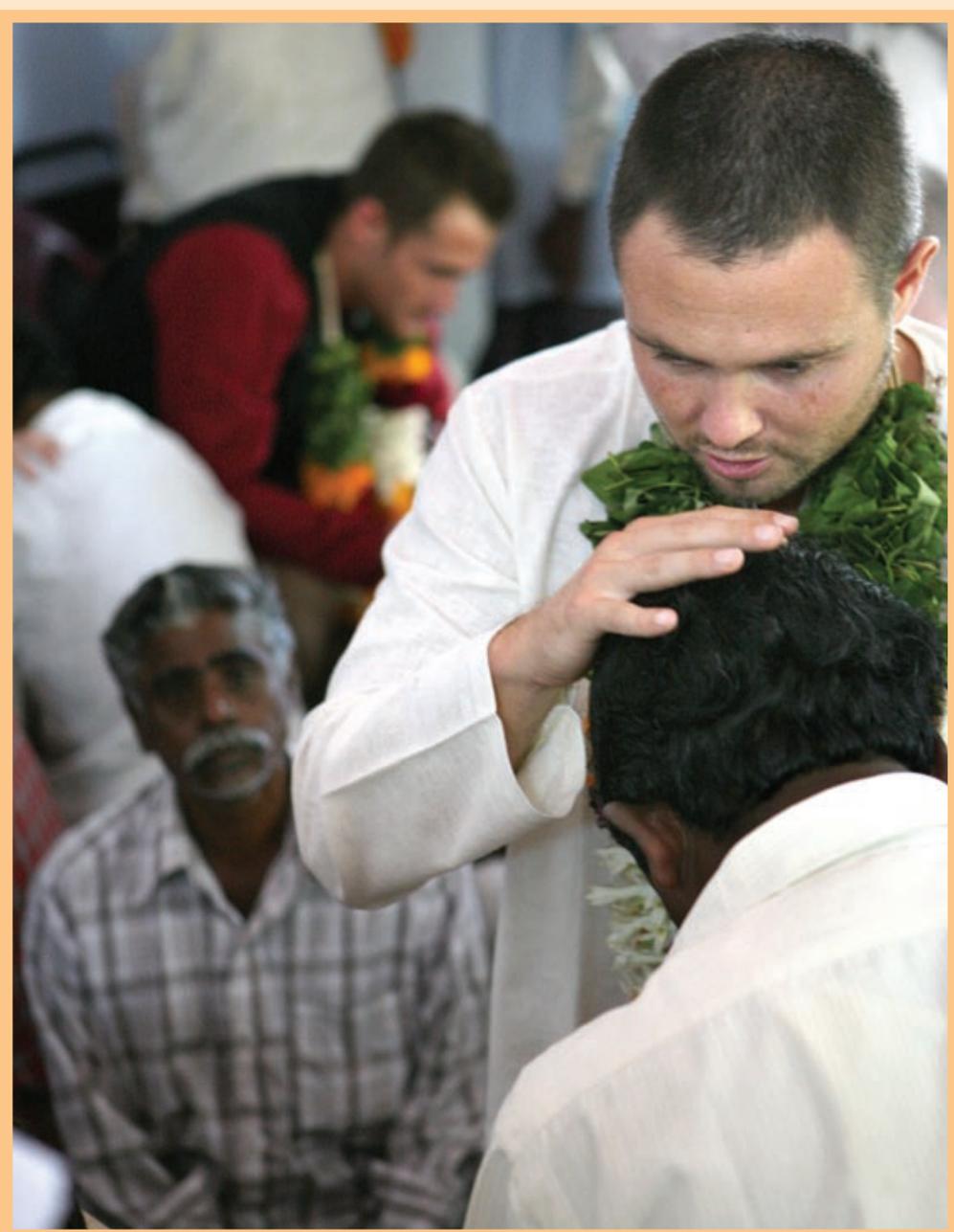
Sitting in London's Heathrow Airport, Ramie Virk, 30, was wrestling with fear about returning to the country of her heritage. In India, those who convert to Christianity are often persecuted for their faith. Her own conversion two years earlier at CC Costa Mesa had caused immediate chaos in her family, who are Sikh and live in California. Though they had begun speaking to her again, an awkward tension remained.

A few days later at a CC orphanage in Bangalore, Ramie spoke with two young girls in her native Hindi tongue. The oldest girl, 9, accepted Christ at age 5. Growing up in a Hindu home, the young girl had felt God speaking to her heart, giving her Scripture verses though she had no Bible. She told her family and friends that Jesus was God's Son. Horrified, the grandmother stuffed cotton into the girl's ears to block Jesus' voice. Soon the girl's little sister believed as well. The grandmother took the girls away and abandoned them rather than bring suffering upon them or the family. Pastor Guna, the director of Chapel Missions India, found the pair. The girls have grown up learning God's Word and growing in their faith at the Christian orphanage, Home of Hope.

Ramie shared that her family had also disowned her. The girl expressed hope that their families would soon accept Christ. Ramie left with a renewed desire to pray for her family and trust God with their souls—and with her own safety. At the end of the trip, Ramie was baptized in the Indian Ocean.

A Vision for India

India has more than 1 billion people—more than 80 percent Hindu, with some Muslim, Sikh, and less than 3 percent Christian, according to U.S. government statistics.



Garid Beeler, a college pastor from CC Costa Mesa, prays for a man in southern India.



The team prays with children at a Home of Hope orphanage in Bangalore.



Girls enjoy receiving candy and toys at The Palace orphanage in Krishnagiri.

Christians are often persecuted or killed for their faith.

More than 18 years ago, Pastor Bob Caldwell of CC Boise began visiting India with Christian organizations and praying about how the Lord would have him help spread the Gospel there.

After returning from a trip to India in the late 1980s, Bob was contacted by an Indian man visiting Boise. The man—L. Gunasekaran, or “Guna”—shared how he had been raised

in a Christian orphanage in India, accepted Christ at a young age, and had a successful career working for the government orphanage system in India. He came to the U.S. to pursue business, but all the doors closed. In desperation, he came to the church for prayer; he had no idea that Pastor Bob had a heart for India.

Bob and his wife, Cathy, welcomed Guna into their home. “You love the people of India more than I do,” Guna told Bob one evening. For several months, Guna served



Bob Caldwell, senior pastor of CC Boise, ID, enthusiastically teaches at the men’s retreat in Bangalore. He has been ministering in India for nearly two decades.

at the church and grew in God’s Word. As his desire to serve Christ grew, so did his love for his countrymen. Soon Guna felt God calling him to return to his homeland. He returned to the south of India where he began to minister in Bangalore slums—an unheard-of occupation for an Indian man who has come out of poverty and become successful. In 1989, Guna was named pastor and moved his family to the slum of Manjunatha Colony in Bangalore, where they still minister.

Coming Alongside

CC Boise began supporting Guna, then a small children’s center in a Bangalore slum, then a handful of orphans. They started a Christian orphanage, called a Home of Hope, in the early 1990s. Nearly two decades later, Chapel Missions India—supported by several CC churches in the U.S. and abroad—sponsors more than 400 impoverished children, 28 Bible College students, 43 pastors and evangelists who serve more than 70 churches, 46 children’s centers, and a native staff of 130 people. CC Boise’s ministry equips native pastors to reach out where there is no Gospel-teaching church and to dwell among the local people. Guna oversees the Homes of Hope Orphanages and the other ministries in India.

“Like a farmer, you have to keep going back and taking care of the field. You can’t just throw the seeds there and [leave them] whatever happens,” Bob said. “We have a responsibility ... to invest time in building up people, training up leaders.”

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” John 12:24

“Jesus says if we die we will have many fruits,” Guna said. “When we look back, many thousands of unreached and unloved children and people have been transformed with the love of Christ. Presently, we reach more than 5,000 non-Christians every day through churches, children’s centers, Homes of Hope, schools, and outreach work.” He is grateful to God for using Calvary Chapel believers to support and pray for the work in India.

Touched by Christ

During the trip, the team visited two leper colonies in Bargur to distribute special-made prescription eyeglasses. At the first colony, they met numerous believers who praised the Lord, full of joy and gratitude despite



Miranda Sheppard, right, shares God’s love with a woman at a leper colony in Bargur.

their disfiguring disease. One believer “told us that he thanks God every day that he has leprosy because it brought him to Christ,” Bob recalled. “This man was broken and humbled, and it was the Christians who reached out to him.”

Many team members laid hands on the afflicted to pray for them. “It really ministered to the lepers that people actually touched them and prayed with them,” Bob said. “It brought a revelation of Christ to that village, just that loving touch.”

And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matthew 8:2-3



Men sing during a worship service at a Christian-run leper colony in Bargur.



This woman at a government-run leper colony was among many who seemed hopeless and sad.

After her first visit to India, Miranda Sheppard dedicated her life to serving Christ and began attending CC Bible College. On the recent trip—her third—the 25-year-old felt God used the team to bring encouragement. After ministering at the Christian-run leper colony, the team crossed the street to distribute glasses at a government-run colony with few believers.

“You could feel a difference: The joy wasn’t there; they seemed oppressed,” Miranda recalled. As the team was leaving, she felt the Lord’s leading to pray for one petite, older woman. Miranda approached her with a smile, clasped the woman’s marred hands in hers, and silently prayed for her. “I could feel her joy and see it in her eyes.”

The trips to India have brought clarity and spiritual perspective to her own life. “You don’t forget the people there,” Miranda said. “I feel it’s my duty as ... a Christian, to help them ... to share Jesus with them.” Other team members were also impacted. “They’re seeking God through prayer now

more than ever,” Miranda commented. “It’s a blessing to watch people grow a heart for the world and get a clearer vision for their own lives and purpose. I know I got clarity in my own life.”

Multitude Joins in Praise

During the trip, a youth conference drew nearly 1,200 people—mostly “new Christians from our churches in the slums,” said Bob. “To see that multiplication of ministry was really exciting.”

James Sargeant, 25, of CC Costa Mesa agreed. “Some people traveled for hours to come,” he said. “I knew the Lord was going to do something amazing because these people had a hunger for His Word and a thirst for His presence.” In a country where many Christians are persecuted, the crowd praised God freely together. “There was truly an outpouring of God’s Spirit,” James said. “He liberated people from the bondage of sin; He healed sickness and disease that day.” ☞



India borders China and Pakistan.

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