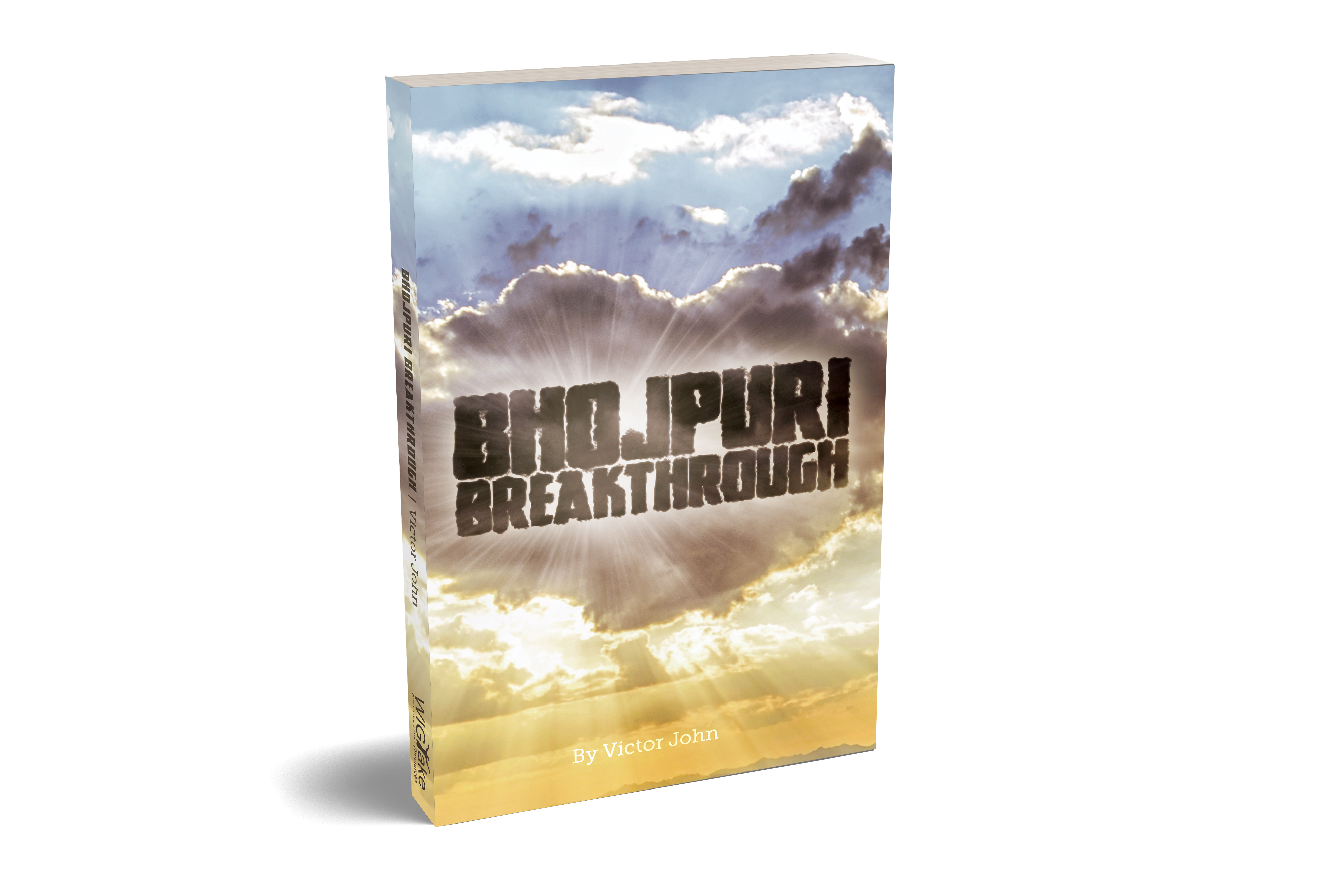
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**What Others Are Saying**

*Lorem Ipsum...*

Kent Parks, CEO - Beyond

With Victor and Dave's *Bhojpuri Breakthrough* we get to revisit the movement that began the proliferation of Church Planting Movements 25 years ago. For the first time, we are examining a Church Planting Movement in middle age, and seeing what is possible as this enormous movement is now catalyzing new movements into Hindu, tribal, marginal, and Muslim people groups across North India.

Dr. David Garrison

Missionary author

*Church Planting Movements*

Lorem Ipsum...

Steve Addison

Author of *Pioneering Movements*

Lorem Ipsum...

Don Dent

Prof. of Missions, Gateway Seminary

**Bhojpuri Breakthrough**

**Bhojpuri Breakthrough**

A Movement that Keeps Multiplying

by Victor John with Dave Coles

Bhojpuri Breakthrough, A Movement that Multiplying

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**Foreword**

I have often wondered what it would have been like to live during the days of the early church. Not long ago, I got a taste of this in North India among Bhojpuri language speakers. This area of India helped birth Hinduism and Buddhism and is home to many Muslims. For 200 years it was referred to as the “graveyard of modern missions.” Hundreds and thousands of years of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam had an iron grip on the Bhojpuri people. Western colonialism had created a deep distrust of the “western religion” of Christianity.

A small team trying to reach 90+ million Bhojpuri speakers faced what seemed an impossible task. But it was not an impossible task for God. Twenty-five years ago God began to do a new thing beyond what we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). Desperate for God to move, these gospel workers prayed more than they ever had. Forced to cast aside human wisdom and tradition, God brought them back to purely biblical approaches (i.e. Luke 10) for reaching new communities. Having a vision to reach the whole 90+ million and having so very few workers, they decided to go back to the New Testament pattern. This meant new believers leading churches and new apostolically gifted leaders rising up to start new churches within their own language group and neighboring groups.

I recommend that anyone who says the Bhojpuri movement is not happening (which some still do) needs to come and see what we have seen. All sorts of ordinary people just doing what they see in the Bible.

In 2014, I and several others spent a week visiting and meeting with leaders in Varanasi and the surrounding regions. In one meeting of about 25 leaders, we met several “ordinary” leaders: A 12th grade high schooler who has started two churches. A young woman in university who has started three churches. A young man, who barely spoke in the past, who saw his sister exorcised of many demons and has started 10 churches.

In a house church meeting we attended, the leaders asked a shy eight year old girl to stand up. She had died and was raised back to life after a group prayed for her. In the same church, a man had been healed of blindness and a woman healed of cancer. They saw these miracles as normal; God worked this way in the Bible so of course he would do the same today.

As we visited and listened to many people, it became obvious that this movement of the Holy Spirit is deeply holistic in every way. It addresses physical, spiritual, emotional, societal and (most importantly) eternal needs.

We visited the work among railway children which the movement has started in multiple cities. Abandoned children by the tens of thousands live at railway stations across India. They usually sleep only 2-3 hours a day due to fear of robbery, rape, and beatings. The Bhojpuri movement has started homes for these children. When they first arrive, most children are so exhausted they spend the first week literally doing nothing except eating and sleeping. Rescue workers help the children learn to trust and recover from trauma, then they reunite them with their families. They also help their families get healthy enough to care for the children, or they find them foster homes with families they know. There is a constant stream of children coming through this service. In two different children’s homes we listened with lumps in our throats as the children sang in local languages about God’s love.

In another village, we met a low-caste woman who started a church in her home then also started churches among the high-caste people nearby. Other Indians visiting with us were shocked she could do that. We learned that after she had prayed for healing for some high-caste people and God had healed them, they didn’t care what caste she came from. God’s truth and power can break down any walls.

We spent a day with a man who had been a drunkard and had killed two men. God powerfully saved him. He has helped start 100+ churches that each have their own leaders – a good number of those being women leaders. He currently works with 82 leaders (church planters starting churches beyond their own home church) who have each started between one and 30+ churches themselves. That number does not count leaders he has developed who now repeat this process with their own leadership groups. This man and his teams also shared stories of three people who came back to life after prayer, despite their own doubts and fear when God told them to pray for this.

Interestingly, we heard several people say that a miracle sometimes opened the door for the first believers in the community. Yet after that, it seemed that healing of sickness and addiction came far more often after people believed. And not everyone gets healed – some believers still struggle and pray with God saying “no” or “wait.”

We spent a day at a leadership meeting with another 40+ people who all have similar leadership groups with 20, 40, 50, or 80 leaders, all of whom are starting churches themselves.   
  
Throughout our visit we were struck by the desire of these people to share with us. Sharing food, though they have very little. Wanting to pray for us after we prayed for them. Sharing their time and stories so we could learn from them. Despite God’s amazing work among and through them, these people are humble. They kept saying, “We need to learn from others and we keep making mistakes,” and “Isn't God amazing!”

These believers happily share with the global Body of Christ what he is teaching them through His Word and they are obeying. These lessons have also helped spark movements in many other countries. I am deeply thankful and want to keep learning and do a better job of obeying.

This movement has some amazing numbers. Hindu fundamentalists with extensive political grass-roots census efforts claim there are now 12 million Christians among the Bhojpuri language group of North India when 25 years ago such Christians were almost non-existent. Bhojpuri leaders long ago gave up on trying to count, since the movement has exploded beyond human control and monitoring. Outside audits by missionary researchers over the last 10 years point clearly to tens of thousands of churches and millions of baptized believers.

But the main thing is not reports of amazing numbers. The main thing is that all the believers think everyone can and should share the good news, heal the sick, cast out demons, and care for widows and orphans. They are imperfect and human just like all of us, but they have a tremendous advantage. They have been spiritually born and raised in a movement that leads them to think that when you read the Bible you have to believe it and obey. They think disciples should multiply disciples and churches should multiply churches and leaders should multiply leaders.

They don’t realize many “Christians” around the world don’t live like this. When they read or hear of the New Testament disciples, they believe they have the same Father to teach them (John 6:44) and Holy Spirit to guide them (John 16:13) and empower them (Acts 1:8). What would happen if we all believed and acted the way they do?

Stan Parks

24:14 Co-Facilitator and VP Global Strategies for Beyond

**Introduction**

The content of this book belongs to Victor John and other leaders of the Bhojpuri movement in India. I have edited the material for clarity, but the concepts, stories and information are all theirs. They have shared this material with me while I visited them onsite at various locations.

The primary voice in most chapters is Victor John’s. But many other leaders, whom he has mentored, have also contributed. Prakash, Satish, Anil, Ravi, Pradeep, Tiwari, Kavilash, Kumar, and William have worked as a team to describe the dynamics of the Bhojpuri movement. For the sake of readability I have, with permission, combined the contributions of these leaders with Victor’s narrative, to create one collective first person voice for most of the narrative.

I have indicated in the text the names of other leaders who shared specific testimonies. For security reasons, I use only first names for most contributors. In some cases I have supplied a pseudonym marked with an asterisk. Location names are often more general than the level of detail shared in actual interviews. I have on file more complete names and locations that have not been included in this book for security purposes.

After presenting important background in chapter one, Victor and others describe the beginnings of the Bhojpuri movement in the early 1990’s in chapter two. Because caste plays a foundational role in the social life of India and presents unique challenges for application of Christ’s kingdom there, chapter three describes the movement’s approach and response to issues of caste.

Holistic service plays a vital part in the advance of good news through this movement. Community Learning Centers (CLCs) serve as just one part of the holistic service being done through the movement, but they play a major role in much of the transformation taking place. Chapter four describes the CLC concept and application.

Chapter five then describes God’s work in community transformation, which includes numerous references to CLCs and their role in that transformation. Signs and wonders also play a significant role in this movement, yet they function as simply part of the fabric of God’s great work. The book describes numerous miracles throughout, especially in chapter five, but will not focus on miraculous events per se. We aim just to honestly portray God’s power displayed as lives and communities become transformed by the love of Christ.

God’s people experience persecution, especially when his kingdom advances in a previously unreached context. Chapter 6 elucidates some ways this has been and is being experienced in the Bhojpuri movement.

Chapter seven describes the unique work among railway children and their distinctive needs. Chapter eight depicts the spread of the movement from rural contexts to the urban context of India’s capital, New Delhi, and other cities.

Although the largest part of this movement has taken place among the Bhojpuri people, the movement has also spread to numerous other language groups. The commonly described “Bhojpuri movement” actually consists of *quite a few* church-planting movements, with the reproductive kingdom dynamics of the Bhojpuri movement cascading in a variety of ways into neighboring unreached groups. Chapter nine describes the spread of the movement to other language groups. Chapter ten describes the impact of the movement among Muslims.

Leadership development constitutes a key factor in the movement’s multiplication. Chapter eleven describes the means God is using to continually develop generations of new leaders within the movement. Chapter twelve summarizes some of the guiding principles God has used to bring the notable level of reproduction and longevity seen in this movement.

Reports of God’s amazing works often raise questions in our minds, especially when the cultural context differs from our own and the events described fall outside our personal experience. For that reason, chapter thirteen answers more than forty frequently asked questions about the movement. If, by the end of chapter thirteen, you still have unanswered questions, you may write to the address given there and we’ll try to answer as many questions as we can. Opportunity will also be provided for connecting and perhaps lending your skills, gifts and/or resources to play a part in God’s work in this movement. The Appendix shows a brief timeline of the development of the movement.

The dynamics of this work differ from patterns of church planting that most of us in the Western world have experienced. For that reason, I want to clarify in advance a couple of points that could easily lead to confusion.

1. The nonprofit organization founded by Victor John plays a key role in the Bhojpuri movement. But as will become clear in the book, this is not a large organization and does not direct or control the movement. By definition, a church-planting movement is beyond human or organizational control. It is a work of God’s Spirit, in which his obedient servants have the privilege to participate. The organization plays a catalytic role in enabling the spread and strengthening of the movement, year by year.
2. The Bhojpuri movement has tens of thousands of leaders, and the authority structures are quite flat. So when you read, in these chapters, that “our leader” did something, this does *not* refer to someone in a top position in the movement or a leader in the organization. This means a local leader whom the speaker is leading or mentoring in some form – one of many thousands. It’s actually the *opposite* of someone in a position of greater authority or rank (as might first come to a Westerner’s mind when reading “our leader”). This reflects the “upside down” description of leadership Jesus commanded. The movement avoids honorific religious titles, and empowers all believers to become leaders in their context, using their unique gifts. This paradigm of leadership constitutes one of the keys to the ongoing reproduction taking place. Everyone in the movement knows their leaders and knows who they lead, but leadership truly functions as a means of serving rather than as a rank or a title.

God has done and is doing amazing work among the Bhojpuri and nearby groups. I consider myself privileged to have heard and to proclaim the Lord’s great work in this movement. I pray that his glory can be seen and his people elsewhere in the world can be encouraged, challenged and informed by reading what he has done and is still doing in Northern India.

I could say much more, but I prefer to let you hear the voices of those actually involved in this movement, beginning with Victor John describing the background of God’s breakthrough among the Bhojpuri.

Dave Coles

*Encourager and Resourcer of Church Planting Movements, serving with Beyond Ministries*

**Chapter 1. Before the Breakthrough**

About 12 years ago Sashi\*[[1]](#footnote-1) was very sick with a fever, so her parents took her to the hospital. After two days her condition became more serious and she was moved to the ICU. She had not been there long when the doctors came out and told her parents, “Your daughter is dead.” When they saw the body, Sashi’s mother began crying and screaming. Her father said, “Don’t cry. Let’s pray.”

So they went in, knelt down by Sashi's body and began to pray. They prayed earnestly for about 10 minutes, then suddenly they heard Sashi hiccup and start breathing again. They called for the doctor, who came and checked her over thoroughly. At last he said, “She’s completely healed! She doesn’t need any more treatment. You can take her home now.” She went from the ICU with high fever to dead to completely healthy and on her way home. This miraculous work is just one of many the Lord has done among the Bhojpuri.

God’s powerful work in this movement has even impacted people outside of India, including skeptics. In the year 2000 a pastor named Chris came to the Bhojpuri conference. He didn’t believe in divine healing or supernatural gifts. While he was with us he saw many healings, miracles, and deliverances taking place, but still did not believe.

One morning, on the day Chris was to preach, a fellow pastor friend of his wanted to arm wrestle with him. He said “I can't; I have an old injury in my shoulder.” But his friend persisted and finally Chris gave in. As they were arm wrestling, he felt a snap, and then pop, pop, pop. He knew he had torn several ligaments or tendons and he was in excruciating pain.

He came to me and said, “Victor, I tore the ligaments in my shoulder and I’m in agony, I can’t preach tonight.”

I pointed to one of the men at the conference and asked, “Would you like that pastor to pray for you? He has the gift of healing.”

Chris said, “I don’t believe in the gift of healing. Healing is not for today!”

I walked away smiling. I didn’t argue with him or even try to convince him. But as he walked away, the Lord spoke to him and said, “You fool!”

Suddenly he came back and said to me, “On second thought, will you ask the man to pray over me?”

So the Bhojpuri pastor gently laid hands on Chris’s shoulder and began to pray. Suddenly Chris felt as if fire came into his shoulder and he felt his muscles, tendons and ligaments twitch and dance. When the Bhojpuri pastor finished praying, Chris rotated his shoulder and he was completely pain free. Even the clicking from the old injury was gone. God had given him a brand new shoulder!

When Chris got back home he sought God like never before. He had a new encounter with the Holy Spirit, and by God’s grace his church was transformed into a place where people consistently experience the Spirit’s work. The Lord continues to move powerfully there every week with healings and God’s presence touching everyone who comes.

When hearing about the Bhojpuri movement, people often ask me: “What did you do?” or “What was the first thing you did?”

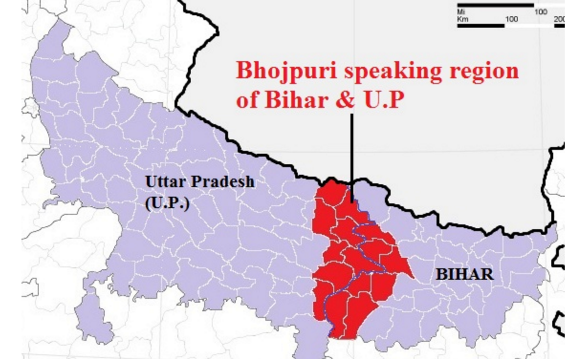
What can I say? “I ate, I slept; I watched TV; I labored faithfully.” They want some kind of dramatic answer and a formula. But every work of God is bathed in prayer and unique in its design. We can’t predict what will happen next. We ask for great things according to His will, and our sovereign God chooses how He will answer. Jesus said, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:13-14).

Signs and wonders have been an integral part of the Bhojpuri movement. We have seen divine intervention in difficult situations, and healings and power encounters have been experienced wherever churches have sprung up.

**An Area of Darkness**

God’s glory in this movement shines even brighter against the backdrop of this area’s history. The Bhojpuri area of India is fertile in many ways – not just in its soil. A great many religious leaders and gurus were born here. Gautama Buddha received his enlightenment and gave his first sermon in this area. Yoga and Jainism originated here as well.

The Bhojpuri area has had the highest number of court cases and land disputes of any part of India – often related to caste issues. Almost all of India’s political movements began in this part of the country. Our first, second and third prime ministers came from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the homeland of the Bhojpuri.



Source: [Wikipedia](https://bh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%A4%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B0:Bhojpuri_region.jpg), accessed 1/16/2017

In the past, this region was very, very hostile to the gospel, which was viewed as foreign. It was known as “the graveyard of missions.” When the foreignness was removed, people started accepting the good news. Yet even with all the Lord has done in recent decades, we still need to bind the strong man[[2]](#footnote-2) through prayer.

The Bhojpuri area has been described as a place of darkness – not just by Christians, but by non-Christians as well. Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul, after traveling mostly in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, wrote a book entitled *An Area of Darkness,* describing well the region’s pathos and depravity.

Ironically, the whole Gangetic Plain is very fertile. A person can just throw seeds on the ground and they will grow. Every year the rain washes away the dead soil and the flood brings fresh minerals from the Himalayas. So the land is very fertile and water is abundant. Yet poverty and the caste system have kept people under bondage.

Many people look at the fertile soil and wonder why there is so much inequality and wickedness. Why do so many people die of hunger while millions of tons of grain rot or get eaten by rodents? A dark power has worked to keep people poor and divided, and to keep Christianity from flourishing here.

**Mission Efforts in the British Colony**

For over 150 years, from the time of William Carey (in India 1793-1834), the British suppressed Christian outreach in the region so they could maintain a better face for themselves and continue to profit through business. Seeing white missionaries sitting with Indians humiliated the elite British rulers. They didn’t want missionaries to associate with common people as this caused embarrassment to the British Raj.

After those years of opposition, in 40 years of work among the Bhojpuri only 80-90 people had been baptized. Many of the missionaries during that period were territorial and controlling. They thought they had to keep the work in their own hands for it to flourish. They didn’t believe in passing on training to local leaders. Also many of the missionaries only reached people with little influence in their communities – not decision-makers. These people became nice Christians, but they didn’t have leadership qualities; nothing in their life or their caste background had given them the confidence to exercise leadership.

On the positive side, missionaries brought the good news and brought hope for the lowest people in society, and they tried to sow the good news in abundance. They established a Christian identity, but one marred by foreign dependence and lack of indigenous leadership. Indians who became Christians remained very dependent on foreign personnel and resources. Their mindset prevented them from functioning without outside assistance. Foreigners commonly pastored the churches. And Indian Christians thought only Western missionaries could evangelize or lead a church.

Many high-caste people believed that Dalits (the lowest in society) were converting to Christianity due to monetary benefits. After Independence in 1947, the government introduced special benefits and monetary help to uplift the Dalits. Some people thought this would stop conversions to Christianity.

**Left Adrift**

In the 1960s, India's new government limited the number of foreign missionary visas, leading to a sharp decline in foreign missionaries. With their departure, the flow of foreign funding also diminished. In many places the missionaries didn’t leave behind strong leadership, but left a lot of institutions needing to be managed at an unsustainable financial cost. They had not imagined that the ministry could be led by Indians, and Western churches stopped giving financially because they no longer had representatives in the country. In that vacuum, many Indians grabbed for power, property, and funds. The court cases that followed contributed to infighting and a siege mentality among Christians. In the turmoil, the Indian church's own missionary vision waned and then disappeared.

In Northern India, the few Christians were especially weak and dependent: a tiny minority in a vast sea of Hindus and Muslims. The mindset was “us vs. them.” “Us” meant a small minority lacking resources and adequate leadership. Hence they focused entirely on surviving as Christians rather than going out to share with others.

Suspicion reigned toward non-Christians who came to the churches. If a non-Christian walked into a church, the church members would think: “Who is he? Is he a spy? Why is he here?” rather than “Is he a seeker? Might he be open to hearing about the Lord?” Their deep suspicion overrode any motivation for outreach.

The church in India was also very westernized in language, culture, and style of worship. They didn’t connect with the vast majority of the people around them. Instead of using the local Hindi word for God they used the English word for God. This kind of Christianity, the only Christian message available up through the early 1990s, offered no real hope for reaching the Bhojpuri or other groups in Northern India.

**Searching for Fruit**

I grew up in this setting, as part of a Christian community like the ones I’ve described above. I began desperately seeking an answer for questions such as: “How can we get beyond these fruitless patterns? How can we go out and win people?” I worked for 15 years, trying to win people and bring them to the church, but it seemed futile.

I became part of a mission organization that had started Bhojpuri work in 1910. So it’s not that attempts to reach the Bhojpuri suddenly started in the 1990s. But those doing the outreach hadn’t used the Bhojpuri language in their approach, even though with 90 million speakers, Bhojpuri would be the 12th largest language community on earth. Conventional wisdom regarded Bhojpuri as a primitive language. When we talk now about the Bhojpuri language, it’s a key element of our strategy – a very different mindset.

I had heard about the missionaries who had previously served in the Bhojpuri area – the stories of their hard work and their failures and successes. I thought: “If all this work can produce such small results, what’s the answer? What’s hindering the missionaries from seeing a plentiful harvest?” Obviously all the significant resources, high levels of training and well-developed partnerships weren’t reaching the goal. This made me wonder about my own attempts: “Am I asking the right questions? Or am I actually causing offense to the non-Christians around me?”

In 1989 I attended the Lausanne Congress in Manila, where I met Southern Baptists who talked about the “Boldari people” (their pseudonym for the Bhojpuri people group) as one of the largest least-reached people groups in the world. My big question was, “What else can be done to reach these people?”

In over 15 years of ministry I had seen all kinds of ideas and visions come and go. I had heard talk about reaching the lost, analyzing the Hindu and Muslim populations and such. But the discussions focused on evangelism with no mention of church planting. I wrestled with, “What’s the *goal* of evangelism?”

In the 1980s megachurches were a hot topic of discussion. Christian magazines printed lots of stories about big churches, giving the impression that bigger is better. Church growth talks and seminars were everywhere, but very few people talked about obedience-based discipleship.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the midst of all this I attended a world Pentecostal conference to meet a famous megachurch pastor who had a 30,000-member church in South Korea. I shook his hand, talked with him, took some photographs and asked a couple of questions. I thought, “Maybe he will pass on some of that anointing to me!” But finally I concluded: “No, one megachurch is not the answer,” which led me to rethink the issue: “What is the church? How big should a church be? When should it be called a church?” At that time, people only gave vague responses to such questions and nobody seemed to have a clear answer.

**Vision for the Bhojpuri**

My Southern Baptist contacts came to visit me several times in 1991. During one of the visits they mentioned that they had missionaries stationed in India, including two couples assigned to work with the Bhojpuri people. One of the missionaries was David Watson, who at that time lived in Delhi.

David said, “I’ve been appointed as Strategy Coordinator to do some research,” so I invited him to the Bhojpuri area and showed him all kinds of places where our denomination was working. We had about eight churches in that whole area and I took him to churches to share about the modern mission approach to evangelism and establishing new churches. He talked about his experience pioneering in Malaysia and starting new churches there. It was very exciting and I hoped the church members would be inspired to hear his story. During his short visit David and I talked about reaching the unreached Bhojpuris and about the failure of Indian Christians in reaching out to them.

After that visit, I continued to share the vision for reaching the Bhojpuri people with those eight churches, but it didn’t make sense to the local churches. They preferred to keep to themselves. They felt that reaching out to the lost should be done by Western missionaries who had specialized training that they themselves didn’t have.

I was frustrated with the churches' attitude and with inward-focused church politics. I decided that the first thing I needed to do was to get free from pastoral ministry. So in 1992 I took two years’ leave without pay from pastoring and moved to Sweden for an indefinite period of time. (My wife is Swedish, and had been sent to India by a Swedish mission agency).

During that season I kept in touch with David Watson, and we met a couple of times a year. I found talking to David very stimulating; he had exciting things to say. I shared my heart with him and he said, “Maybe we can work together for a couple of years, because all I want is to see churches started.”

**Spiritual Challenges**

Coincidentally, as I began working among the Bhojpuri in 1992, Hindu fundamentalists[[4]](#footnote-4) began a new push to spread radical Hinduism. The extremists destroyed a 16th century mosque in Uttar Pradesh, one of the two major provinces where the Bhojpuri people live. Destruction of the mosque, which had been built on the site of the mythological birthplace of the Hindu god Rama, signaled that the Hindus meant to challenge all attempts for control by Christians or Muslims.

They also launched a campaign against Christians and Muslims. The Hindu fundamentalists’ design was to prevent any evangelists from entering villages. Some Christian groups at that time were pumping in money and having meetings that brought in famous foreign evangelists. They planned and announced how many Hindus and Muslims would be won to the Lord. They held citywide meetings and posted billboards about healing campaigns. I kept telling Christian leaders, “This is all coming to an end. You need to change your strategy.” And as I had anticipated, that ministry approach ended with a wave of persecution.

More religious TV programs began being broadcast in the early 1990s. It seemed that any channel you turned to had a Hindu holy man lecturing. Yoga also became very popular in the early 90s. And restrictions began to be imposed on building church buildings. So several things happened at the same time I was struggling to begin the visible work among the Bhojpuris.

**Return to India**

I wasn’t sure I wanted to come back to India. But I felt such a strong passion for the lost in India and the Lord’s call to the unreached that my wife Solevi and I, together with our three children, decided to return to India. We moved back in 1994, with a very uncertain future looming before us.

David Watson wrote me at that time and said, “We’re in Singapore and our organization is doing a one-month training for Strategy Coordinators. Would you and your wife like to attend?”

We traveled to Singapore to attend the training, and then returned to India, still uncertain about exactly how to start something new. The Strategy Coordinator (SC) training helped me learn (1) about the concept of a people group, (2) how to research the focus group, (3) how to mobilize prayer for the people group, (4) how to make 100 options for next steps in reaching the focus group, then (5) how to narrow those options down and choose three for implementation. I also learned how to train local contacts to do the work, then get out of their way before creating dependency (preparing an exit plan before starting).

Through our research into a particular people group, we were able to address the specific needs of their community, to understand their worldview, and to anticipate and overcome the obstacles that would come with our efforts to reach them with the gospel.

After the SC training in Singapore I started doing research in the city of Varanasi. This was central to the Bhojpuri region, connecting the two Indian states where Bhojpuri people mostly live: Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

This was a tough time in the work. I went places alone, mobilizing prayer and doing prayer walks in different Bhojpuri locations. I kept telling myself, “Don’t lose the vision.” Sometimes it was hard to press on, but I felt I had to follow the vision God had given. My problems mounted as I didn’t see much fruit and felt intensely isolated. It wasn’t an easy time, as if I just showed up, performed a miracle and a movement happened. We had challenges at every turn, yet the Lord graciously allowed a movement to begin.

**Chapter 2. Breakthrough Beginnings**

When my family and I returned to Indiain 1994, only a handful of Christian organizations were working in the Bhojpuri region. Those that existed were quite territorial and focused on literature-based evangelism, which was very popular at that time, despite the fact that much of the literature was in Hindi, and the majority of the population were non-literate Bhojpuri speakers. We chose to focus instead on obedience-based discipleship. This new approach to evangelism brought negative reactions from established organizations. But the Lord brought along a group of men who had gotten excited about using a Bhojpuri-language approach.

We invited all nearby pastors and church leaders, including Roman Catholics, to the first Bhojpuri Consultation, held in Varanasi in 1994. At this consultation we shared our vision for the Bhojpuri Church: culturally appropriate churches, which have a local flavor and are Bible-based. The idea behind the Bhojpuri vision was to eliminate the territorialism of the old-fashioned approach to evangelism and church planting. The new concept would facilitate an umbrella for better communication of vision, methods, and implementation among those committed to or open to the vision. A holy fire was kindled among the 80 leaders who participated.

We began a systematic survey of all the Bhojpuri districts, to learn who was doing what and assess the task before us. The survey showed that out of nearly 100 million Bhojpuri people, only about 10,000 (0.0001 percent) called themselves Christians, and most of them were not very serious about their faith.

By this time, what had previously been my personal vision quickly became a shared vision among many individuals and groups. We launched prayer mobilization and prayer walks, and one group brought in a full-time prayer team. We didn’t start with a blueprint for how the ministry would unfold; everything has been evolving through the years.

We began a one-month training on discipleship and leadership in three different cities. The idea was to form a group of leaders who would be ready for the harvest when it happened, equipped with a shared DNA for church multiplication. Within two years a good pattern had been established to carry forward the vision by anyone and everyone who was interested.

Working in the Bhojpuri language drew upon not only language but also culture, history and everything these people represented – through songs, music, and drama. This approach had been missed in the past. We recognized the Bhojpuri language as an integral part of the core of the Bhojpuri people.

As the number of fellowships multiplied we launched the first Bhojpuri Song Book in 1998. It contained songs of worship and instructions on baptism, child dedication, marriage, and funerals, including appropriate Bible verses for use with each occasion. This was received with much enthusiasm and greatly strengthened the local worshiping communities. It facilitated use of a wider variety of worship songs, since people no longer had to depend entirely on memory of songs in Hindi translated from other languages. It also built a broader sense of unity, as all Bhojpuri fellowships could sing similar songs in their worship times.

The real breakthrough with significant numbers occurred in 1998 when we released the first edition of the Bhojpuri New Testament. After this the movement began to grow exponentially.

In 2001, the Bhojpuri Dramatized Audio New Testament was launched. This made a tremendous impact, since illiteracy among the Bhojpuri at that time was more than 60 percent. We were delighted to note the role of the Holy Spirit speaking through this dramatized biblical text to people who had never heard the good news before.

An audiotape was also released in 2001 with 18 Bhojpuri worship songs – the first ever of its kind. The songs focused on salvation, worshiping God, and rejoicing in salvation. These songs were not translations from other languages; all were written by Bhojpuri people in their own language. Through use of the Bhojpuri language, good news and redemption have come to the very heart of this people.

Here are testimonies from some of the leaders who have been with me from the beginning. The first comes from Kavilash, who had been working among the Bhojpuri since 1991. After he and I met, I tried to help him unlearn some of his traditional ministry patterns. He was very Christian-flavored – always saying “Hallelujah” and casting out demons. I told him, “It’s good to do that, but you also need to disciple people and mentor them.” Now (25 years later) 30 percent of the people in his area have become followers of Christ.

**Kavilash’s testimony**

Before I met Victor John I was already a Christian; just a regular member of a traditional church. In the early 1990s Brother Victor used to come to my area to do teaching and training. My pastor and I built a personal relationship with him. Victor pulled together a conference in Varanasi and invited us. Only 60 or 80 people attended that first Bhojpuri conference. But that’s how the Bhojpuri work got started and how we got involved. Santosh Das was my pastor, and he was very involved from the beginning. He was favorable toward my participation and encouraged me in it.

At that conference we realized that the Bhojpuri area needed a lot of gospel sharing. We got very excited and began working among the Bhojpuri. In the beginning, we aimed to equip more people for ministry. We started fasting and praying for more harvesters, and slowly the number of workers increased. At that point, I didn’t yet have a mindset to train all believers; we mainly focused on training ministers and people who would be workers. In the first year we started training centers in many areas and trained 70 or 75 field workers.

In the beginning, we gave each person one to three months of training in basic biblical truth. It was different than traditional training, after which people expected to become a paid evangelist. We didn’t give that expectation. We taught about God, the importance of fellowship, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of God’s Word. We strengthened their faith in Christ and modeled ministry, spending whole nights in prayer, and having days of fasting. We took them on prayer walks and taught them how to share Christ, mainly emphasizing quiet witness to friends and families. We kept it very simple.” Then the work started moving ahead and the number of workers began to increase. They were all quite enthusiastic, and that’s how the work started taking shape in the early 90s and becoming a movement. There was a kind of fire in the whole area.

When I first got involved with the Bhojpuri work I was not very educated. I had only finished second grade. As I got involved in the movement, I began to get more educated – mostly not in regular school subjects, but in biblical education. Then I became eager to learn and I completed up to eighth grade in just a couple of years. I was most excited about the trainings we did, because they enabled me to learn the Bible and go much deeper in understanding it.

In the early days, I mostly worked alone. Then some of the other leaders started accompanying me. Victor was my main mentor. My pastor, Santosh Das, also left pastoring to focus on reaching out to the Bhojpuri people. He was crucial in the beginning of the work and he mentored a great many people before he passed away in 2008.

Over the years, we developed more tools in addition to the training materials. For example, in 2001 I started using the Dramatized Audio Bible. I would go around and play that for people, and it enabled me to start work in many places.

If I compare the early days with the present, many things are different, but some things have remained the same. The work is now much bigger, but one thing didn’t change: since the very beginning there has never been pressure to bring results. The work is not numbers-oriented, so we can work freely without any pressure. We serve because of motivation from the heart. Another thing that has not changed: there’s a loving relationship within our organization. It isn’t run from the top down. Everyone moves together. That has continued from the beginning until now, not only within our organization but also with other organizations involved in the movement.

Of course the people involved in the movement have changed as we’ve grown and matured in the Lord. That has been a positive change. In the beginning very few people were involved, now there are so many more! In the beginning, the focus was narrower, more directly on training workers for the field. Now the work is much bigger and more diverse. All kinds of work have slowly been added, with the holistic approach, relief work, empowering women, community work, and so on.

Over the years my own approach has also changed. Instead of beginning interaction by directly focusing on “spiritual” things, I now begin with a holistic approach. And instead of mainly working alone I’ve now learned how to build a team and work as a team. Over these years I’ve mentored a couple of thousand leaders, most of whom have mentored others and reproduced more groups and leaders, on average up to 10 generations. I’m currently mentoring about 150 leaders of groups.

**Nageshwar’s Story**

I came to faith in 1987. My older brother had a serious mental health problem and had gone to many doctors, but had not gotten healed. Then we learned about pastor Santosh Das, and heard that many people had been healed at his fellowship. So I took my brother to Santosh Das and there, within one hour of prayer, he was completely healed! I often share this testimony with people as a way of building relationship and interest before presenting the good news.

After I came to faith, I was just a typical believer attending church, though occasionally I would go with Santosh Das to help him in ministry. I appreciated that, and I wanted to learn more and get involved. In 2001, we started training for using the audio Bible. The training equipped me for ministry, and that’s how I got involved with the movement.

Since then I have mentored a couple of thousand leaders who have started groups and mentored others. On average, these groups and leaders have reproduced themselves to 10 generations, i.e. one group starts another, which starts another, continuing 10 times. Today I directly mentor about 200 group leaders.

**Master’s Testimony**

I was at the first Bhojpuri conference, which I had heard about from my pastor, who was a friend of Victor John. We attended together, along with about 80 others and I learned about the Bhojpuri people. From there, everything started changing. My first impression was realizing that the Bhojpuris had received almost no witness of the good news. We thought, “This is something related to us! The time has come for my own people.” We got all excited and I became energized to serve the Lord. I also received boldness at that conference, because I realized that we, as Bhojpuri people, can also do something!

My ministry changed radically from that point and picked up speed. In those days we went door to door to talk with people. We built relationships, and sometimes we wouldn’t share the good news for days. But when there was an opportunity – someone in need or having a problem – we would pray for them. I was amazed at what God would do.

Especially when we met at a conference and 10,000 leaders gathered, we would be very encouraged with what God was doing. We never thought that such a large number of people would come to faith.

**William’s Story**

I have been with the ministry from the beginning. Right from the start, Brother Victor John had a great vision. In the early days it was very difficult to do the ministry. We had to work very hard to reach people. We began in one small room and most of those present didn’t recognize that anything was happening. Many people thought the Bhojpuri movement was just a name being thrown around. A lot of organizational leaders laughed and said: “Why are you trying to work with the Bhojpuri? You’re just wasting your time.”

When the Bhojpuri songbook was published, those people said, “This is not good. They can sing in Hindi. Why bother with Bhojpuri? That’s strange!” They thought that because it was different, because it wasn't a literary language, it wasn’t good. Many people tried to discourage us, and many were discouraged because there was no Scripture in Bhojpuri. But we printed some tracts and distributed them and tried to reach the community with tracts.

Then we started to translate the New Testament into Bhojpuri. Despite the opposition, Victor John kept forging ahead. He ignored all the criticism and kept going forward. There was a great commitment to keep moving ahead with the vision. Victor himself visited many places, met with people, and conducted programs that helped many people. He himself did a lot of hard work traveling and meeting people.

In the beginning the work was very small but now it has become very large. The Bhojpuri movement started with hard work and commitment and a great vision. And now millions and millions of Bhojpuri people are believers in Jesus.

**Conclusion**

God has worked in surprising ways and opened a wide variety of doors for ministry through more than 20 years of growth. In the next chapters we’d like to focus on specific issues the movement has faced, and show how the Lord has turned challenges into opportunities for rapid kingdom growth.

**Chapter 3. Breakthrough in Caste**

The heartland of the Bhojpuri language borders the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. While Uttar Pradesh surrounds the nation's capital, Bihar is infamous for its unruly history and caste warfare. The 1990s saw years of brutal warfare between high-caste and low-caste people in the state of Bihar. Both groups had guerilla-type armies and over 1000 people were killed in the violence. Our group brought the good news into this context of enmity, revenge and wholesale human slaughter. Through prayer warfare and proclamation of the good news the caste warfare amazingly subsided.

In 1997, the same year as the bloodbath at Lakshmanpur Bathe[[5]](#footnote-5), we began work in Bihar, and the church-planting movement (CPM) started moving into that area. In less than two years, the good news reached many of the fighters themselves, who were broken and weary of the conflict and bloodshed.

In 1999, two area commanders of these warring groups accepted Christ and became completely transformed. Instead of leading raids and killing sprees, they began leading the way to plant churches. This transformation has continued to the present, as 19 former area commanders of militia groups have now accepted Christ and become church planters. So the church-planting movement impacted the caste war and helped bring peace instead of strife. But Bihar’s caste wars only highlighted a much more widespread problem.

**Understanding the Caste System**

The caste system originated roughly 1500-500 BC, based on the Hindu belief in reincarnation and karma, the notion that a person's position in life is the result of their good deeds or sins in a past life. Thus, if a person is born into a low-caste family, it is viewed as the just consequence of sins in a previous life. Functionally, caste means that society has divisions for different kinds of work. In that sense, it’s similar to the situation in other societies. But because of the religious belief undergirding and standardizing it, the caste system is much worse. It dehumanizes because it gives religious authorization to dominate, use and even kill those who find themselves in low-caste communities.

As Hinduism portrays the castes, the supreme god (Brahma) created high-caste Brahmins from his head.[[6]](#footnote-6) Historically Brahmins functioned as teachers and priests. From his arms and chest he created the Kshatriya caste: the warriors, kings, landlords, and administrators. The kings and the chief commander in the army came from this caste.

From his legs Brahma created the Vaishya: the business class – the traders and the farmers. The king’s secretary would be from this class: the one who managed and recorded things. From Brahma’s feet came the Shudras: the laboring classes. Their job was to help the three upper castes. The Dalits or “untouchables” (not mentioned in the Hindu scriptures) were considered less than human, lower than animals. In the past the Shudras and the Dalits had no rights of their own.

In past centuries, if a Dalit family’s first child was a boy, they had to offer him to Mother Ganges by throwing him into the river. This was a way of keeping the Dalits in submission. This practice was outlawed by the British, along with other inhumane practices such as *sati* (burning of a living widow with her deceased husband’s body when he died). However, caste-related crimes still occur all too frequently in Northern India.

The Vedas, ancient Hindu scriptures, say that Shudras are not allowed to listen to any of the holy (Hindu) scriptures. If a Shudra hears the scripture, they should have molten lead poured into their ears, so that even the faintest memory of it would disappear. Of course that would kill the person, but that’s what was done; it’s written in their scripture.

Some girls from the lower caste were offered to the temple as *devadasi.* (*Deva* means god and *dasi* means servant, so a *devadasi* was god’s servant, basically a temple prostitute.) The *devadasi* would stay in the temple rather than in their home, so the priest would always have someone close by whom he could enjoy. At night the *devadasi* could go out and service other people to make money, and from that money they would give a tithe to the temple. The girls had to make their own living by being abused day and night. That was also part of the caste system.

The high castes would consider themselves defiled even by the shadow of a low-caste person. It was and is a very dehumanizing system: incredibly degrading to human beings.

In the neighboring state of Haryana, for example, the caste system is still very strong in cities, towns, and villages. It dominates all of life; caste strongly influences each person’s identity. People still get burned alive and tortured in caste-related incidents. Animals can drink from certain ponds, but Dalits and Shudras are not allowed to use that water. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, “Dalits and indigenous people (known as Scheduled Tribes or *adivasis*) continue to face discrimination, exclusion, and acts of communal violence. Laws and policies adopted by the Indian government provide a strong basis for protection, but are sometimes not faithfully implemented by local authorities.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

In light of such social dynamics, why would we want to perpetuate the caste system? We want to see God’s Kingdom advance, without focusing on caste. We see in Scripture that God’s Kingdom is equally open to all kinds of people. Yet when the culture has such an organized dehumanizing system, Christianity comes as a threat because it talks about equality under God and tries to give rights to people who have no rights. It creates disruption, because it suddenly brings someone who has always been under others’ feet to a position of equality.

**Cultural Tensions**

In India’s social context as a whole, caste still plays an important role. It underlies social tensions and feeds Hindu fundamentalism. The mindset of many people is now changing, and high-caste people often don’t demand special treatment. But when something happens that makes them feel threatened, caste consciousness immediately arises. As I talk with all kinds of people, I get the feeling that the caste system still remains in their mindset. This worldview persists no matter what position they hold, what education they have received, or what place they have in society.

Because of democracy, the high caste have lost much of their power as rulers. The vast majority of the population is from low castes: scheduled castes[[8]](#footnote-8) and scheduled tribes. Democratic voting increases power for that majority. Also many Dalits and lower caste people have risen up and gained high positions in government and society. So high-caste people feel their social power diminishing.

Hindu nationalism has arisen in reaction to this changing social dynamic. Fundamentalists propagate Hindu nationalism, so that the Brahmin minority can hold onto power. This reaction includes attacking the most vulnerable, which is where religious persecution comes in. The real issue is not conversion but social reformation, which releases lower caste people from oppression. When low-caste people know their rights, they no longer suffer quietly at the hands of the high caste. So Hindu fundamentalist groups attack because they know Christians are social reformers. We educate people, and once people are educated they no longer function as slaves to the high caste. The social equation is changing, which terrifies those at the top. Most of the Hindu fundamentalist groups are run by high-caste people afraid of losing their power, and that fear inspires persecution. In some cases they have relatives in the police, so they complain to the police and ask them to do something to stop the Christians. But the real issues behind such persecution are social control and power.

**The Challenge of Caste**

The Bhojpuri movement has made a great difference in this caste-driven context. The population of the Bhojpuri area consists of 20 percent high-caste people and 80 percent low caste or outcast Dalits and *adivasi*. The good news has tended to more quickly enter the low caste 80 percent of the population, so the church reflects that social reality. This means we have had to address real issues related to caste. The emerging Christian fellowships face poverty, illiteracy, and leadership challenges because low-caste people haven’t been trained for leadership. They’ve been trained for generations to follow orders, not to take initiative. So we needed to develop a special kind of discipleship and leadership training to empower each person. That’s one vital difference between this church-planting movement and a *mass* movement. In this movement each person is being discipled and mentored.

Another challenge in our contexts is that traditional churches are still very caste-focused. People from traditional churches in Southern India come from caste-based churches. They have a very distinct division between the churches, with high-caste churches and low-caste churches that never interact with each other. They have no connection or fellowship with one another as part of their normal pattern of social interaction.

In the Bhojpuri movement, however, we don’t talk about Brahmins and Dalits and all. We talk about lost people. The reality is that unless they hear the good news and receive it, they will remain lost whether they are Brahmin or Dalit.

**Language Touches All Castes**

Sometimes people say, “Why don’t you focus on high-caste people?” But our approach among the Bhojpuri is different. If the high caste in our area are only 2 percent or 10 percent of the population, that same percentage is also reflected in the churches. By contrast with the work in the south of India, our percentages reflect the national population. God is at work in all the castes.

In addition, caste-focused work would be impractical in many cases. In some villages, there might be only one family from a particular caste. You can’t start a worshiping community with only one family, so you need a multi-caste fellowship. We focus on reaching persons based upon their language, geography, and economic status, rather than caste, because that helps the good news to take root throughout the region, and spread.

Caste divides groups but language unites people, so we have intentionally chosen not to focus on caste. We have instead focused on language, starting with Bhojpuri then spreading to many other language groups.

Top government officials mostly come from the high caste. Nowadays, though, because of the government's reservation system (a form of quota-based affirmative action for lower castes), some lower caste people are moving up in status, but they’re often not very efficient. Some people think, “If he’s from a low caste, he probably won’t be able to do things properly.” They continue to believe that caste reflects how people are designed rather than how they've been educated or trained.

When people move to the city, caste becomes less of an issue than class. Some of the first people who came to faith through our work in Delhi were construction workers, yet they were Brahmins (the top caste). People only look to their own caste when it comes to something like marriage. Otherwise people don’t take much notice of it. In the cities, they may live next door to people of different castes without a problem.

Among the Bhojpuri, God is now moving among every caste, even with lower caste people reaching upper caste people. Believers from different castes may not socialize a lot with each other, but they have worship meetings together and pray together. We have one low-caste woman who leads a worshiping community on the low-caste side of the village, then goes to the high-caste side of the village and leads another worshiping community there. Although she comes from a low caste and is female (which makes her an unusual leader in any village), God is using her effectively in both the high-caste and low-caste contexts.

**Tiwari’s Testimony**

One of the leaders who has been connected with the Bhojpuri movement from the beginning came to Christ from a high-caste Hindu background. In the next few pages Tiwari shares his testimony. He reflects on the impact of caste in his own life and on the movement through the years.

I was the firstborn son of a Hindu high priest in my district. In 1980 I came to faith in Christ. I consider myself a first fruit of the good news from the Brahmin side in my area. That’s a big thing. Santosh Das, who led me to the Lord, was also a Brahmin from a Rajput background. He was a very humble man. He paid a big price for his faith and lost a lot for the sake of the good news. He lived all his life in a simple house and whatever he had was owned by the Father. He gave us a wonderful model of making good friendships throughout the community.

One day while Santosh was planting a small field he had in my village, some friends and I thought, “This guy is talking a lot, let’s go and teach him a lesson.” So we went, and my friends teased him and made fun of him and I just enjoyed having a laugh. In the middle of it, he said to me, “Tiwari, some day God is going to judge you, and what will you answer him?”

I said, “Why me?” I wanted to know why he singled me out, because there were nine others there. And I was a good person in the village; they were the ones making fun of him. I was just enjoying a good laugh. I got angry and thought, “Why only me being judged? Why not them?” So I came back to him the next day to ask him about it, and he told me about Jesus.

I thought, “OK, this is something different, but I don’t need to pay much attention to it.” I was still curious, though.

Then as I was leaving he said, “Today there’s a small prayer meeting in my house. Why don’t you come?”

I thought, “Why do I need to go to your prayer meeting? I have many other Hindu prayer meetings in my own place.” But I was curious, so I went to see what kind of prayer meeting he had.

There was a woman there from Pennsylvania, who I didn’t know would be there. She had a gift of healing that I also didn’t know about. As I went in, I saw her and thought, “Why is she here? These people have set this up for me to meet with her.” I thought she would try to convince me about her religion and we would have a big argument. But we actually didn’t talk to each other, because in those days I couldn’t speak English and she didn’t speak Hindi. Then in the middle of the meeting, she grabbed my hands and prayed for half an hour. I was stunned! Then she grabbed my head and prayed another half hour.

I thought, “What have I done wrong that I need an hour of prayer?” I was just watching this happen and feeling humiliated. Out of all my friends, I had gotten singled out to be warned of judgment. Now, out of everyone at this meeting, I got singled out to be prayed over for an hour! After that, the prayer meeting finished.

Even before I got home that night, news had reached my father: “A foreign woman has done something to your son. Please take care of it or something bad will happen.” That same night my father kicked me out of the house and I had no idea what I would do next. I hadn’t even gone to that house to become a Christian. I just went to find out an answer to my question about God’s judgment. But I suddenly found myself homeless and alone in the world. It was a cold night in December and all my dreams were shattered. I didn’t know what to do or where to go.

Six months later, I came to know the reality of Jesus, and he became my savior. Then I got baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. But it took me another six months to really understand the good news. When I first came to faith I found it hard to interact with people from other castes. But the good news touched me and transformed my perspective.

Many new believers don’t have much understanding initially. High-caste people who come to faith need to be taught: don’t destroy the culture; just follow the good news. This has been a theme of the movement from the beginning – a culturally relevant worshiping community. Some people say a lot of things against the culture. I say, “Even if these things are bad, why criticize them? People need the good news. They need life so they can be redeemed! It’s better to focus on that in the beginning stages.” Various cultural applications can come afterward, when people are more mature and have more understanding of which way they’re heading. I believe if we handle cultural things carefully and wisely, many young people and families will come to faith. So we aim to teach the good news well.

I now think the caste system is an evil in our nation, but high-caste people are also suffering. From their perspective, the big issues are: “To whom can we give our daughters in marriage?” And, “Where can we eat?” It’s a big problem. In Hindi we say “*roti* and *betee.*” Roti is bread; *betee* is daughter. These are the two major issues for the high caste, and they won’t compromise on them. In the cities they can adapt to some extent, but in the villages these issues are still very strong.

The first people to believe through my testimony were a 70-year old couple – three times older than me at that time. The husband was a village chief over about five different villages. God helped me share with them and they said, “You are one of the best gurus on this planet; you helped guide us to salvation.” Soon after that their nephew, Vijay, became a believer. He is still in that area, planting a lot of fellowships and even seeing dead people raised. A lot of miracles are happening there and he has 22 generations of worshiping communities in that area.

I’ve now officiated at weddings for 50 or 60 couples. After 30, I stopped counting. Some people said, “We don’t want to have the bride in a white sari (as per the Christian custom). Can you marry us with the bride in a red sari (the normal Hindu custom)?”

I said, “OK, of course! You should marry in any color you choose. Marriage isn’t dependent on the color of the dress.” So the Bible guides us in choosing what customs to continue or reject from the local culture.

I consider it important to teach believers from all castes to meet and worship together, even while being sensitive to local customs. I also see it as very helpful if Brahmins can hear the good news from someone from their own caste. Just recently, I was sharing the good news with a husband and wife who are doctors, and another Brahmin happened to come in. I shared with him too and explained some things about Hinduism that made him think. I said, “Jesus didn’t come to make a new religion; he brought a way of life. He came only once in history (not a reincarnation). He came with only one face, not a lot of faces to confuse you.”

In my opinion, the problem with the high caste is that they think, “Who will keep the Hindu faith here and who will protect the nation?” They fear losing control over the majority and claim that Christians damage the culture. I believe some cultural parts of Hinduism are good things that past generations did well. We should understand and honor what is good. Some things are bad in any culture, and of course we should turn away from those.

I think that along with sharing what we believe we should make good friends as much as possible. For example, my home village is in an area where many Christians have been beaten up very badly. I recently got a call from a pastor who leads a small fellowship there. He said, “It’s been 30 years; you need to come back to your own village and share the good news.”

I said, “You’re right; it’s time. I’ll come to visit on the three days from Good Friday to Easter.”

So I went there and preached for those three days. It happened that an RSS[[9]](#footnote-9) member was passing by the village. The pastor is a good friend of that man. He invited him to come in and hear the message, so he came. The man asked me, “Who are you?”

I said, “I’m from this area. I used to live less than a mile away.”

He asked, “Which household do you belong to?” I told him my grandfather’s name, and he said, “Oh, I see.” He understood that I’m from a high-caste Hindu family. But because of the friendship between him and that pastor, everything was okay.

Five hundred people came to the church for three days. On the last day (Easter), people sat under umbrellas in the hot sun outside and enjoyed the fellowship. After the meeting, 11 people wanted to get baptized. Behind the church building was a small tank, and I said, “Fill that tank.” One by one, 11 people confessed their faith in Jesus and got baptized. In that same place where many Christians have been beaten up, God gave us this blessed occasion.

That’s one example of the value of friendship. I think things can go well when we make good friendships. Not that it will go well everywhere. Some people will always be an enemy but as much as possible we try to be friends.

Another example is a home for widows near Varanasi. Brahmins donated land for the home and they still bring donations from time to time. There’s a new doctor in this area, running a small clinic in the village. He said, “Since you prayed for me, my clinic is running well. I would like to give my tithe to the widows’ home.”

A lot of things can be done in outreach to the high-caste community. Those from a high-caste background are able to eat with them. Believers from the low caste can serve water and food. They’re allowed in the high-caste community, and in their circle they can influence that community. But the Lord’s work shouldn’t be a one-man show anyway. We need teams (including members of various castes) working together for the cause. A team has a greater possibility for multiplication, so that’s how we normally work.

**Conclusion**

Through the good news of Christ, people from every caste in India are getting set free. Not only individuals, but whole families and groups are finding a way toward unity by the power of God’s Spirit. This transformation is not yet complete, but outposts of God’s Kingdom light the path to a better way of life than the one passed down from their ancestors. God’s power can do what no human could ever accomplish: tearing down dividing walls of social hostility through the love of Jesus Christ.

**Chapter 4. Breakthrough via Community Learning Centers**

Community Learning Centers (CLCs) have become one of the most successful and effective strategies in facilitating and accelerating this movement. Many previously struggling leaders have become very fruitful and influential within a short time after learning the CLC approach and putting it into practice. This approach has also given us access to the most hostile mission fields in our region.



In 2001 Savender, one of our leaders, suffered well-organized persecution against the churches he had planted in one area. He was driven out of the area and not allowed to return. The ministry stopped in that area because of the severe persecution.

Six years later, in 2007, Savender started a CLC. This gave him a new opening: the same people who had previously harassed him welcomed him back into the area to work there. People realized that his service wasn’t just spiritual, but would benefit them. The change was so radical that they gave him a piece of land in the village to build a community center, so that he could run the program. He built the community center using bamboo and simple materials, then began an anti-drug awareness program. The program impacted not only those who came to the building, but also touched people for a two to three mile radius. Most CLC activities took place around the villages, in the streets and courtyards.

After the CLC had been functioning a while and Savender had built solid relationships, some people became more open to the faith. Some of those began to follow Christ. When new people started coming to faith, there was no persecution or negative reaction.

Savender shares, “We saw a whole new attitude after I started the CLC; all the misconceptions changed. I’m now well connected with all the leaders of the community. Many political leaders come and say ‘Can you promote us? Can you recommend us?’ So the influence from the CLC has changed the equation. There’s no need to be fearful, rather I’m respected in the community.

“The CLC also helped me gain boldness and strength. The first time persecution came, I immediately fled. Since having the CLC I’ve had courage to endure and have gained a positive reputation. In the next election I may run for village head. From being isolated and being a victim I’ve become a victor. Like Joseph, whom the Lord took from slave to prime minister, the Lord has brought me from tragedy to triumph. Three to four hundred people now meet at the community building for worship services and no one opposes the work.”

In addition to drug awareness, Savender’s CLC also empowers women and provides educational programs. As he leads the CLC, Savender involves many other people to help with it. He notes that all the CLCs apply this pattern of on-the-job leadership development of local people.

**Holistic Impact**

One of our CLC leaders, previously a temple priest, reached out to and discipled a physically challenged beggar. Through regular counseling and prayer, the man became a follower of Jesus and stopped begging. Along with our CLC leader, he has reached out to 12 more beggars – some of whom are also physically challenged. We praise God for the great transformation in the lives of these people. They have stopped begging and have become self-employed. They have started to earn their living by selling paper bags, toys, and similar items. All are being discipled and a worshiping community has started among them.

Sanjit\* was a member of the mafia in Haryana. By his mid-twenties, he had been charged with more than a dozen crimes, including drug dealing, theft, and murder. He was also demon-possessed, which caused many physical illnesses. His mother was demon-possessed as well. One of our CLC leaders was asked to go to his home and pray for him. When the leader prayed for Sanjit and his mother, they both received immediate healing. Sanjit has now been completely transformed and he, along with his whole family, have accepted Christ.

**The CLC Vision**

God has called us to pioneer planting fellowships among whole communities. CLCs have opened countless doors for accomplishing this goal. A CLC enables leaders to focus on lost people and effectively connect with them. Through the CLC, we reach out and “incarnate” Christ’s love to people who would otherwise never hear the good news or see it lived out in their context.

Our first CLCs opened in 2008, and these have changed the playing field for leadership development. We train local leaders: (1) to act as change agents, (2) to use the CLC programs to do good to all people (Galatians 6:10), and (3) to locate the “person of peace” (Luke 10:5; Matthew 10:11) within their local communities. By meeting needs in the community and solving local problems, CLC leaders build strong relationships in the community, always with the objective of advancing God’s Kingdom.

CLCs embody a holistic approach to serving. Each CLC aims to provide access to the community, discover the person of peace, provide resources, implement locally relevant holistic service, and meet the needs of people where they live. When needs are being met, the good news of the Kingdom finds fertile soil, and CLC leaders can begin the process of disciple making and multiplication. Using the CLC approach, the good news has been planted in places that were previously barren ground.

**A Simple Reproducible Pattern**

1. The CLC leader and assistant go together (usually two by two) to an unreached village or other location.

2. The CLC team interacts with community leaders to learn about unmet or marginally met needs in the community.

3. The CLC team identifies a location to rent or lease. This becomes the CLC base camp.

4. The CLC team works with community leaders to establish training, education, and/or other programs that will address the needs of that particular community. They also explore what government assistance may be available for any of these programs.

5. As the CLC team and community begin to implement these programs, doors open and men and women of peace are drawn to the CLC.

6. Men and women of peace are identified. Relationships are established and discipleship begins.

7. The person of peace and their family are trained to reproduce – to make more disciples who will make more disciples. A grassroots multiplication process begins in that community.

**CLC's Relationship to Other Work**

The CLC serves as an access point through which we connect with people and build good relationships within the community. People come to the Community Learning Center to talk about their issues and problems, and the CLC leader guides them in how to access government resources that will meet their needs. Those who receive help recommend the CLC leader to other people.

This differs from other patterns of the Lord’s work. Over the years many people have observed that when an evangelist goes to a place just for evangelism, no one wants to help him when problems arise or someone objects to what he’s doing. But the CLC approach establishes a positive connection with people in the community. Then if somebody raises a problem with the work, those who have been helped defend the CLC leader.

The CLC leader doesn’t begin by doing spiritual ministry. They focus first on meeting the community’s felt needs. During the months while starting the CLC they note who seems spiritually open, but they don’t share the good news at that time. The CLC leader only stays in a location for six months to one year, then moves to another location. During the leader’s time on site some local people often ask him to come to their home saying, “I would like to know why you are here. I sense you are genuine and you have something more to tell me.” On other occasions a prayer for healing or deliverance triggers an opportunity for discipling an individual or a whole family. When a person shows interest, the CLC leader begins sharing the good news. As the Lord works in the person’s heart through the Scripture they become believers. With the new believers and those who are open to the Lord, the leader starts a house fellowship and raises up local leaders to shepherd the group.

The CLC approach can be adapted in countless ways, depending on a community’s needs. It has also given us opportunity to train, empower and mentor people in large numbers, unlike the traditional pattern of training. Many organizations have approached us to learn and apply the CLC strategy in their respective work. CLC is like an umbrella, which provides protection from several unwanted problems and minimizes oppressive persecution. The CLC provides a non-formal atmosphere for the training of workers, training new disciples, CPM (Church Planting Movement) trainings, and leadership training.

**Launching and Staying Connected with CLCs**

When we launch a new leadership training at the field or district or state level, we contact leaders and ask if they have any new leaders they would like to send to the training. A training for CLC leaders lasts just one day, and presents the concept and strategy of CLC. Most CLC leaders continue to open new CLCs after one is successful. Most leaders who have worked with us for at least six months have opened at least three CLCs. If they move to a different area, they train another leader to take over the holistic work when they leave.

We have hundreds of CLC partners, including two or three (sometimes four or five) in every district of the movement. We maintain periodic contact with CLC leaders. For some it’s once every three or six months, for others just once a year. The contact often happens at their initiative. Sometimes we call them or meet them at a training or a meeting. Conferences also serve as a good tool for maintaining relationship with many leaders.

**Key Outcomes of CLCs**

The fruit of the CLC strategy has been abundant and diverse. Key outcomes include:

* Easy entrance into restricted-access areas
* Simple avenues for building relationships
* Christ “incarnated” to local communities in a simple manner
* Impact through meeting felt needs
* Progress in the midst of persecution
* Rapid multiplication of disciples, fellowships, leaders, and teachings
* Exponential growth in church-planting movements
* Multilayer leadership development
* Social intervention and transformation
* Positive benefit to multiple organizations
* Eliminating the stigma of proselytization
* Minimizing persecution
* Involving community leaders and members
* Building extended relationships with community and political leaders
* Bringing changed attitudes toward social evils
* Reaching all segments of society
* Making complete social transformation possible

A few examples of the Lord’s work through CLCs follow.

**Effective Training Producing Fruit**

One of our CLC leaders, AK, has started worshiping communities in 12 different areas in the past year. He plants these while running his family business, and his wife serves among women. He has trained five others who have started discipling people while continuing to work at their regular jobs or pursuing their studies.

**Women’s Empowerment**

We have run several trainings and groups for empowering women. These trainings include sewing and tailoring, beautician courses and self-help groups. As a result, the women have now started supporting their families financially. Many of them are being discipled at the same time.

More than 160 high school girls recently attended a seminar organized by one of our female leaders. In this seminar, two doctors gave presentations creating awareness among these teenaged girls, especially related to health issues.

**Reaching Youth**

More than 400 youth have been counseled, trained and reached with the gospel through our CLCs in the past six months. They have found solutions and release from depression, anxiety, addictions, pre-marital and marital issues, childhood trauma, family conflict, and anger.

As one example, Nitin\* was caught in illegal activity and jailed. His concerned family approached one of our CLC leaders who prayed for him. Nitin received a New Testament in jail and started reading it. We thank God that he was soon released from jail. Through regular counseling and prayer, we were able to disciple him and guide him away from bad company.

**Reaching Professionals**

Through CLCs we have been able to reach professionals from different backgrounds at various levels, including lawyers, nurses, and sports leaders. Our leaders are now discipling these professionals. One leader started a fellowship group among 15 nurses in her city.

**Reaching Children**

During the 2016 summer vacation, CLC leaders conducted about 67 programs for children at various locations. These programs included Summer Camps, VBS and one-day retreats, which impacted about 2000 children.

**Miraculous Healing**

A 35-year-old man from Varanasi had been suffering from HIV/AIDS for over a year. During the last six months he fell into despair, as the doctors said there was no hope for him to survive. One day his health seriously deteriorated and he was on the verge of death. His relatives brought him home, and according to Hinduism’s last rite before death, they started trickling a few spoons of Ganges River water into his mouth.[[10]](#footnote-10) Then the CLC leader and a couple of others came and began praying for him. They continued for eight days of prayer at his house and he was healed! Twelve people in the neighborhood came to faith and now our leader has started a new worshiping community in this village.

**A Morning Walk**

One of our CLC leaders had the habit of waking up at 5:00 am every day for a 45-60 minute morning walk. His example encouraged his neighbors, and 10 other people from his village began to join him for his daily walk. During their morning walk they often stopped in one place to do some additional exercises, then they gradually began discussing issues related to their area: politics, agriculture, and various other topics.

After some discussion, this leader encouraged them to pray for the issues, but they had no idea what to pray for or how to pray. So he taught them to pray. Then he began to share one Bible verse each day and close with a prayer for each of them. This has now become a regular routine: a group of more than 20 people gathering every morning, praying and praising God. Some of these have become believers in Christ while the others are open to the gospel and being discipled toward faith.

**A Sewing Center**

Das, one of our CLC leaders, runs a sewing center in the SP area of Delhi. Twenty women from diverse religious backgrounds receive vocational training there. Das has poured his heart into serving these women, and through this relationship the women gradually began to open their hearts and share their burdens. Slowly and steadily Das began to speak into their pain by sharing the good news. He explained that only through Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross can a person be redeemed and have eternal life. He said, “If you believe with your whole heart, your life will be changed.”

Out of the 20 women, seven have come to faith. Since accepting Jesus, their lives have completely changed. They have started two worshiping communities in their area and are in the process of starting a third. One of the women also ministers to over 100 children. Through these fellowships and God’s continued work in their lives, more and more people are putting their faith in Christ. Though this group started with women, it now includes many men and they focus on reaching whole families.

**Freedom from Debt**

Debt is a terrible economic problem in India. Loan sharks here have made it easy for people to become stuck in inescapable debt. If a person borrows 6500 Rupees ($100) from a money lender, the lender takes 10 percent first. So if the person borrows 6500 Rupees, they receive only 5850 Rupees ($90), but the record says they owe 6500. The next month the borrower has to pay the lender another 10 percent: 650 Rupees ($10 in our example). If they can’t pay that 10 percent, they might borrow that much more from the moneylender and get further in debt. Very soon they come to a point where they can never get out of debt. Once a person gets deeply into debt, it becomes a generational problem. They just keep feeding the loan sharks, who bite and bite hard.

In one community, we did research a few years ago and discovered their main problem: everyone in the community was in debt. In the CLC there we started talking about this issue. We said, “For now we won’t even think about other possible programs (health, education, etc.); let’s just focus on helping people get out of debt.”

We began working with one middleclass family in the community. They had three daughters and were heavily in debt. We said to them, “Let’s work on your finances. How much can you save? How much can you pay? How can we get rid of your debt?” We counseled them and helped them, then started helping many others in the community. We found that along with financial challenges people usually have other personal problems as well: family problems, demonic problems, sickness, or some other issue. So we used a holistic approach in helping these families.

One woman in the community became the leader of the whole savings plan. At the same time, she also became a believer in Christ. Prior to this, we had talked with her about the Kingdom of God and its impact on every part of our lives. After she came to know the Lord, she led many others to Christ, and a worshiping community was born.

**CLC Service**

* One of our CLC leaders reaches out to drug addicts, and counsels and disciples them.
* One of our leaders helps arrange funeral services for those who cannot afford it.
* CLC leaders assisted about 200 people in the process of getting their national ID card (called an *Aadhaar* card, which provides a Social Security number).
* Hundreds of people have been delivered from demon possession. This is a vital part of discipleship, since many had been involved in witchcraft and black magic.
* CLC leaders have partnered with many government agencies in a wide variety of projects. These have included building roads, providing public toilets, bringing electricity to villages, helping people find jobs, and helping people obtain free medical treatment. CLCs have also helped hundreds of children gain admission to various schools, which can be very difficult in India.

This is just a sampling of the fruit from the Community Learning Centers.

**Conclusion**

Community Learning Centers serve as a flexible tool the Lord has given us to meet the needs of the lost, open doors for the gospel, and lay foundations for effective leadership. We give God all the glory for his work through CLCs to touch people’s lives, facilitate and accelerate Church Planting Movements, and bring transformation to this part of the world.

**Chapter 5. Transforming Communities**

Two years ago we began serving in a small portion of Yarpur slum, near Patna in Bihar State. At that time, it was very unpleasant to enter the slum because of the people’s lifestyle. The place was very dirty and the children played outside naked. The youth of the community sat around all day with nothing to do; there was no work. We saw potential to start a work there. After our initial planning, we started a health and hygiene program. We empowered those living in the slum, and taught them the value of human life, the importance of keeping healthy, and how to keep healthy. We also taught them how to clean their living area – their houses and their village.

After a while some of the youth became interested to sit and talk with us. We didn’t start by talking directly with them about the Bible. Most of them were illiterate but very talented, skillful people. We wanted to focus on developing their skills. They loved games, so we started a sports ministry for them. That brought a breakthrough for that area. As we gained their respect, the young people came to us and said, “We are ready, sir. Lead us!”

One of our members is a sports coach, so we asked him to come and coach them, especially in football (soccer). Within one year they developed a great team and other teams started to recognize them. When we organized tournaments with other teams, this team did very well.

We wanted to keep encouraging them, so we contributed funds toward the purchase of uniforms, boots (soccer shoes) and soccer balls. They also contributed. At the same time as the coaching, our coach started teaching the youth about morals and lifestyle: how to live a healthy life. He taught the importance of health and hygiene and the youth were encouraged. Then we expanded to engage the youth in the whole Yarpur slum.

We also started many programs for women and children. This slum was near the railway station and had a great many children around. During the days, all the children used to go to the railway platform to beg and collect bottles. When we started our literacy program in Yarpur, this diminished the number of children hanging out at the railway station. They became very interested in learning. The women also got interested in learning hand-working skills, so we started a sewing program there.

Within two and a half years, we saw a change in the whole society of Yarpur. Not just the women; not just the children. Not just the youth, but everybody. Now anyone can go there and feel, “Oh, this is a good place to stay.” A person can sit comfortably with the people and talk with them. God brought a tremendous change in two and a half years; this is just one example of community transformation.

God is using holistic service to transform whole communities. People can see the power of his love in their everyday lives. God’s children are living in ways that bless the community around them – as a *door opener* for the good news, a *witness* to the good news and an *outworking* of the good news. We don’t have a tension between social work versus spiritual ministry. Both fit within God’s love for the whole person.

The church-planting movement has become a community-transformation movement. The church has made an impact in areas of compassion, change, and helping people. Even though it’s an economically poor church, it’s a lively, vibrant church, bringing socio-political change in the society. We can’t say what will happen in the future, but up to the present the movement is bringing substantial, sustainable social transformation.

Even before this movement began, Christians in India did community service. However in the past these ministries were always based in a mission compound. Local people felt intimidated by the four walls of the compound and felt reluctant to enter. In contrast, our approach is community-based; rather than invite them to us, we go to the community. We assess each situation, like Paul did in Athens, and see what opportunities and challenges each location has. Every context is unique, so we don’t use the same approach in every area.

**Across Many Social Spheres**

Many of our believers are eager to learn, but can’t read or write, so we started an oral Bible school. We created a six-month course, using picture Bibles, drama, narrating stories and oral learning approaches. Every participant in this training learned to read the Bible. This, in turn, has had a great influence in the society because they can now share Bible stories and their testimony. This course has become a very effective tool for increasing literacy and also for spreading the good news. In the early stages of our work, according to government statistics, literacy stood at just 30 percent. Yet among those who participated in our oral Bible and listeners groups, the rate of literacy soon rose to 70 percent.

The impact has come not just in education and literacy. The Bhojpuri movement has also impacted people’s economy. Today the Bhojpuri church is a self-supporting, self-sustaining, self-propagating church. It’s not dependent on me or anyone else. If I’m not there tomorrow, this movement is not going to stop.

Through the Bhojpuri movement, men, women and children have experienced transformation in literacy, economy and health. This transformation is rooted in obedience to the Bible. Being Jesus’ disciple means applying his teaching by loving and caring for one another.

The Bhojpuri movement has also had a huge impact on gender equality in everyday life. Gender issues are a huge problem in north Indian society. Men and women treat each other very differently after accepting Christ than they did before. They now exhibit love and caring that defies all previous customs and traditions. Men and women share equal responsibility in sharing the good news and carrying it forward. They also share equal responsibility in multiplying disciples, leaders and churches.

A community can’t be changed in an instant. So we normally start with an individual. Following Jesus' model in Luke 10, we begin by finding a person of peace. That person opens the door to their family. From that family, the doors open to a whole community. Starting with one person requires only minimal risk, whether you succeed or fail. So the process generally goes from individual to family to community.

Access (such as a CLC) works at the practical level and builds a bridge to the community. It also lays a foundation for transforming the community. The holistic approach brings transformation, because it impacts people’s body, soul and spirit. God created all three, so we keep all three in focus. We don’t want to limit God and say people can only come to faith if someone preaches a three-point message.

To impact people holistically, we need to consider life from their perspective. This is a real key to effectiveness. Not everybody wakes up on Sunday morning and thinks about going to church. Some people take their children to football matches, visit relatives, and do all kinds of other things they consider important. Christians often undermine many of those things, so people react negatively because Christians don’t listen to what’s important to them. Even though we have the good news, it doesn’t come across as good news. It comes across as a nuisance.

Being sensitive to people’s needs makes a difference. That’s what happened in the community described in the previous chapter: they needed freedom from debt before the good news could be effectively manifested. The good news includes that kind of liberation; it sets people free. The good news becomes real and alive from *their* perspective. Then as people get transformed, they become agents of transformation and start helping others.

**Love and Relationships**

Bringing transformation to a community requires genuine love. It shows in a leader’s actions and the time they invest in people. It doesn’t work to just send someone to evangelize or to have a pre-planned agenda. We go to a place and connect; we spend time with people and try to understand them like Jesus did. It’s very relational.

We hang out until we find a person of peace like the Samaritan woman. *She* will be the person who will lead people to Christ. The Samaritan woman didn’t have special training; she had just met Jesus. When commitment is fresh, passion is contagious. That’s why we talk about “disciples immediately making disciples.”

**The Physically Challenged**

Our service among the physically challenged pioneered a focus on community rehabilitation – a community-based program – rather than housing people in institutions. We demonstrated the importance of mobility, social contact and income generation for the physically challenged. Our work has shown that handling these three factors well yields much better results than sending handicapped people to institutions. We discovered that in order to be recognized and become a contributing member of the family and society, handicapped people need mobility and they need income. Those things change the situation dramatically. And social contact is important for every human being.

When we applied for a license to minister to the physically challenged, the government official said, “We won’t give you a license unless you get a building and house them.” He suggested we build a center as other Christian groups have done.

I said, “No. If you bring all the handicapped people to one place and keep them there, you become their caretaker for the rest of your life. Their family will wash their hands of them and won’t make any effort to take care of them or ever take them back. And the people themselves get used to the facilities at the institution, so they can never go back to normal life. I’m fighting against the mindset and the attitude people have toward the handicapped.”

He just stared at me and said “Good luck to you!”

The next question was “What am I going to do in reality?” I found a couple of very helpful men. I hired them and they did a good job implementing my ideas. We started a microloan program and had a recovery rate of more than 90 percent from those loans. And we saw handicapped people living productive lives and getting married, thus paving new paths of possibilities for the physically challenged.

**Transformation through CLCs**

CLCs have worked in many different places and contexts. When a leader goes to a new area, the goal is more than just making disciples. Our holistic approach is a genuine approach, not just an excuse to evangelize. The social transformation is real. In one village where CLC leaders went, the head of the village and almost everybody in the village was addicted to alcohol. People spent most of their income on alcohol and the situation was very debilitating. In villages like that the village chief plays a strong role, so the CLC leader first approached the chief, as a key player for the whole village. In this case, the chief was actually the person selling alcohol to everyone else in the village. So when the leader changed, he stopped selling alcohol and the change in his life brought transformation to the whole village. Today that village is alcohol-free.

One of the CLC leaders in Delhi helped 6500 families get clean drinking water and set up toilets for them. He accomplished this through advocacy with appropriate government officials. He contacted the local Member of Parliament, who contacted the relevant government department and recommended they supply clean water. So the government took care of fixing pipes and setting up toilets. Places like this have such great needs that whenever possible, CLC leaders connect with available government resources. We couldn’t afford to do all these projects by ourselves. So we start with obtainable government resources and then supply whatever else we can. Through basic facilities like clean drinking water and toilets, God brought complete transformation to this area and many others like it.

In December 2015, two young leaders in Delhi (one 16 years old and the other 20) said, “We want to do a Christmas program in our neighborhood. We want it to be a program for everyone, not just exclusively for Christians.”

I said, “Good. I don’t want to discourage you, but I don’t have any money for that.”

They said, “No, we’re not asking for money. We’ll take care of it!” So they worked together with the community to arrange everything and make it happen.

One of the ladies in the area said, “I’ll pay for the tents.”

Another woman said, “I’ll cook food for everyone.”

There was a local temple nearby, and the temple leader said, “We’ll bring our PA system and set it up for you.”

Ninety people attended, and it was the first time in their lives attending a Christmas program. These young men had never before put together a program, but they organized everything and made it happen by working with local people. We have many testimonies like that, of local communities taking ownership of programs. Local initiative and local resources are keys to the reproducibility of this movement.

The Lord’s work in those events bore other good fruit as well. One of the ladies who helped with the Christmas program had had trouble getting her two daughters married. Within 10 days she received good proposals and they both got married. The woman who had paid for the tent also got blessed. She had had a property dispute ongoing for 30 years, and it got resolved within a month. Wonderful things like these started happening, and as a result these young men who put together the program became leaders in their community.

**Works of Power**

In another area, a pregnant woman had a lot of complications and her doctor said, “It’s very possible she won’t survive.” Two of our leaders went and prayed for her as the Lord led them, day after day.

On the second day, while they were on their way to the hospital to pray, they fell off their scooter and had scrapes and bruises all over. They said to each other, “This is bad, but let’s go and pray first, then we can come back and get some first aid.” When they finished praying and left, they found they had no more bruises! They were completely healed!

For four days they went regularly to pray for the woman, then said, “Tomorrow morning everything will be okay.” And that’s exactly what happened. The woman was healed and had a normal delivery, which opened a door for the good news. The patient next to this woman in the hospital, seeing and hearing all that happened, put her faith in the Lord.

One of our leaders is a young girl working for a very rich man who owns a huge amount of property. She shared these stories of the Lord’s work: “My top boss’s son was very sick and had not eaten for quite a while. So his parents took him to the doctor. While they were there, I happened to meet them there and I offered to pray for the son. After I prayed, he was immediately healed and began to eat and drink, and this made an impression on the parents. Within a couple of days the boss called me and said, "My wife wants to spend some time with you, because when she talked with you she felt peace. So we’re sending a car to pick you up and bring you to my house."’ So I went, because I wanted to make disciples, and the wife wanted to know: ‘What exactly is this all about?’ This gave me an opportunity to share the good news.

“I had also been sharing the good news with the woman who is my immediate supervisor (not the top boss) and praying for her. One day she called me and said, "‘I want to meet you this evening."’ So we went to McDonalds and there she said, "‘I want to accept Jesus, as you have been sharing with me. Today you will not leave me unless I meet Jesus."’ So we prayed, and she prayed for the first time in her life.

“As we opened our eyes, we were surrounded by all the people in McDonalds who said, ‘What are you doing? The temperature has changed. Even though the air conditioning is running, it’s hot in here. We’re all sweating! What kind of prayer is this?’”

God’s works of power have opened doors for many people to see and hear the reality of his good news. It’s like what we read about in Acts, that people saw the great works and they were amazed and feared God. Many people have opened their hearts to the good news because they see the power of God.

We see these amazing things happening, and the best part is that I don’t spoon-feed them. I don’t tell the workers, “This is how God will work.” These things can happen spontaneously when people are empowered. They experience his power and see what God can do in and through their lives. In Christian ministry, most people call their leaders to share problems and struggles. But most of the time these leaders call me excited to share the great things God is doing!

Deliverance from demons also plays a role in opening doors for the good news to advance. For example, at the Bhojpuri conference in 2014, a woman began to manifest demonization. She wanted to believe in Jesus but was struggling. In her home village, people feared her because she used to run around with a knife threatening people. So when she began to manifest at the conference, some people tried to lead her out to the prayer tent so she wouldn’t disrupt the meeting. But she was so strong she threw 10 men off of her. I was on the platform speaking at the time and she challenged me to fight her. The leaders began to pray over her and then managed to take her to the prayer tent and pray for deliverance.

When she went home, her whole village changed as they saw the transformation in her life. One year later, she brought to the Bhojpuri conference 250 people she had won to the Lord through her testimony and discipled.

Laydaar is one of the key leaders in the Church Planting Movement. He has planted churches in over 200 villages in North India and trained many other pastors and leaders. He is an ordinary man doing extraordinary things for God's Kingdom. He is extremely humble and dedicated to obeying the commands of Jesus. Once he prayed for a child and the child was raised from the dead. The child had been dead for a few hours, but after Laydaar laid his hands on him and prayed for him, God brought the boy back to life. Through this miracle many people came to Christ and received not only physical healing but also eternal life.

God's Kingdom is advancing daily through the obedience and dedication of men and women like Laydaar. Village people observe everything that happens around them, so when miracles like this take place, they see it and they believe in the power of the living God. It opens the doors for many unbelievers to hear and receive the good news, and people who are being discipled become more serious about really following the Lord.

**Local Initiative**

The transformation happening in communities is not only physical but also a transformation of people’s hearts and attitudes. In the beginning of our work in Yarpur slum, our staff organized programs for special occasions like Independence Day. But after about two years, the young people who had been mentored took initiative to organize the Independence Day program. They arranged everything and made all the advance preparations. They invited a chief guest, arranged for chairs and PA system and organized a dance program. They collected money to cover the expenses and told us, “We have prepared everything. You just come and be the master of ceremonies.”

The entire community participated, and we praised God at seeing such a change in the whole community. Everything was so well organized; it was amazing. Slums don’t normally produce such local initiative, quality leadership and community participation. God brought a great transformation to Yarpur.

When we talk about programs, we focus on impacting people. We aim to reach each and every segment of the society. When we want to start a program in a certain village or panchayat, the first and most important thing we do is to find a person of peace, as described in Luke 10 (verses 5-7). As we interact with that person, we encourage him or her to identify the need(s) of the people in that community. They might need a better access path or road, a facility for drinking water, help cleaning up a dirty environment or developing cooperation among the community’s people, or something else.

The program leader finds things he or she can help with and arranges a program. For example, to empower a community in cleanliness, they would organize a meeting and invite a teacher or some doctors to speak. As they set up programs, they become known to the people and address small needs.

Then the program leader might come back to us and say, “I think it will be good if we have a literacy program there so we can prepare the children to go to school.” If we have the funds, we provide a small amount to employ a local person (maybe not highly qualified, but it has to be a local person) to teach the children. We then give them some pre-schooling education. We tell the local worker that the training is not just so that they can educate the children, but to help them get admission into a good school. We encourage the parents of the children to pay for their fees and writing paper.

In our comprehensive approach, we focus on adults and families by organizing awareness programs and cleaning and such. At the same time we also focus on the children’s needs. In addition we sometimes organize a vocational center for training women – to teach them how to make something. We focus on empowering women. For the young people we have the sports ministry. We send our coach for a couple of days to organize a team in that village and teach them some things about how to play the game and also good ethics (sportsmanship) in playing the game.

We focus on individuals and various segments of society but treat the community as a whole. So the community sees the CLC leader as a good person who has a burden for their community. That way the leader gets recognition in that place. For example, when he has plenty of people from the community behind him, he may take five or six of them and go advocate to the block[[11]](#footnote-11) office or the nearest district administrator’s office and claim government assistance to things for which the community has a right. This advocacy process completely changes local people’s mindset, as they realize they can claim their rights and government assistance for the slum area.

In this way, the entire community gets transformed. The whole community becomes united as they see the benefits of working together. When five or six people go together to the public office or hospital, these entities begin to care for the needs of the community in a much better way. The public distribution system already exists, and the person in charge of disbursements begins to honestly give the community their rightful portion. This shows people the benefit of being united and working together to improve their community.

Usually within a couple of years everyone can see dramatic changes in the whole community. It’s not just individuals who are transformed; the whole community gets transformed. Sports changes the behavior of youth and the children start going to school. Women become empowered. The government gives needed benefits. Through this the CLC leader becomes more popular and attracts business people and political leaders in that area. They then start hiring more people from that area. This provides a general description of what often happens. Below are some specific examples.

**Child Literacy Center**

Four years ago Gena D, her husband and their six children moved to Delhi in search of a better life. Gena and her family suffered a lot in Delhi. Her husband was not a skilled laborer, which made it difficult to find work in this large city. He found odd jobs that brought in some income for the family, but it was often insufficient. The family's finances got stretched even thinner when one of the daughters became chronically ill. They spent most of their income on her medical expenses. Gena and her husband also carried concerns about the educational future of their children.

Around this time we opened a literacy center in the slum area of Delhi where Gena and her family lived. Gena joined the center as an assistant. She worked diligently and gained favor with many families in the slum. Her situation greatly improved. She testifies: “My family’s condition has changed. After I joined your team’s literacy project, I always felt a warm family atmosphere. The leaders prayed for my daughter and she got completely healed from her illness. My older son and daughter are graduating from high school and they also volunteer at the literacy center. I no longer worry about their future. Through your counsel they have gained a better education. My family lives in peace and happiness. Above all, we have found favor with the Almighty God. Now as a family we sit together for prayer, reading Scripture and fellowshipping.”

Gena's friends have noticed the change in her as well. They come to her for prayer and counseling. She feels honored to play a part in the Lord’s work through the literacy centers.

**From Slums to Medical School**

Hasina comes from a slum near the Varanasi railway station. Her parents earn their living as rag-pickers. They never thought that someday they would see their daughter going to school. Through our work, Hasina attended school and her situation improved radically. She now attends college and all her teachers describe her as a very bright student. She hopes to become a nurse or a doctor.

**Transformation through Schooling**

When we started work in some of the villages, education was almost nonexistent. In the camp slums along the tracks of Delhi, none of the children used to attend school.

Parents who are rag pickers have an unhappy life and wish for something better for their children. But they need inspiration and a clear path to give hope for something better. After we helped them understand the value of education, we set up several centers to prepare the children for school. Some of them were eight or ten years old and had never been to school. So we first prepared them to learn in a classroom.

Today hundreds of those children attend school. That’s part of what God has done in the past six or seven years. We’ve educated children, emphasized human worth, and taught parents the importance of sending their children to school. The parents have started doing better at their jobs, as they saw their children getting an education. Schooling has brought great transformation in this area.

**Radical Transformation**

We train communities in basic hygiene – teaching the importance of regular bathing, wearing clean clothes, and so on. In every area of life, people see transformation. It touches not just one sector, but numerous facets of people’s life and community.

We worked with an illiterate woman who gained recognition in her community through her involvement in the child literacy program, the sewing program and the health awareness program. She takes ownership in doing these things and shares, “I used to be a nobody, but because of this work I have become a somebody.” She now has self-esteem. When she walks through the area, everyone greets her with, “Good morning ma’am.” We have started a fellowship in her community.

About six months ago, two of our female staff conducted a program for young girls in the slum near the tracks. The program was held outdoors, a very basic and public setting. About 20 girls attended, and something supernatural happened during the meeting. All the girls started crying bitterly in the presence of God and confessing their sins. Other women who stood by also began weeping. The Spirit of God worked and many people came to faith and a fellowship was established there. Now the staff’s primary task there is to raise up local leaders for the fellowship. They go back about twice a month to lead the fellowship, and the local group often meets without them.

**Anoop’s Story**

Before I got connected with this organization I was involved in ministry, but I didn’t succeed at working in the community. I didn’t know how to connect well with people. Then I learned from them how to connect well with a community and its leaders. They started a school in my area, and trained me to give education to the children. I started meeting with the children’s parents and giving them counsel about things like how to raise children and the role of family in helping children grow up well. Slowly I became a well-known person in the community. Because of my role in educating their children, the parents respected me.

I also started a counseling center, a literacy center, a savings program and other programs, with the result that I now have great favor in the community and the people respect me. People recognize me as their leader because of the work I’m doing on behalf of the community.

**Essential Ingredients**

Transformation belongs to God, but we need to always be available and listening to the Holy Spirit and to the community. Sensitivity to the local context and needs lays an essential foundation. Each area and person is unique, so the work has to fit the context of each area.

Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit gives us unique insight into God’s perspective on an area. We always need to remember who’s the hero and the boss in this work: the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if a worker does everything right, they might not see results, because it is God’s work, not ours. It doesn’t depend on us; it depends on God. At the same time, ministry is partnership with God; and in this partnership, one of those partners is never wrong. So if we don’t see fruit, we have to be willing to evaluate and ask the Lord: “Is something wrong? Could we be doing something better here?”

**Sustainable Church-planting Initiatives**

We aim for transformation according to biblical commands and the values of God’s kingdom. We don’t want to extract people from their families or change their lifestyles to match the patterns of a foreign culture. We don’t try to change people’s culture because that doesn’t help proclamation of the good news; it hinders it. Biblical transformation advances the spread of the good news whereas importing foreign patterns hinders it.

In 2010 we hosted a discussion on sustainable church planting and invited leaders to share. Our intent with “sustainability” was not financial issues, but rather sustaining the church planting initiatives in their context. However, those who attended were more concerned about financial issues. A great number of grassroots leaders and organizational leaders came and discussed various issues of sustainability, and we had three subsequent consultations on the subject. That resulted in giving useful ideas to some leaders of large organizations. Many of them started micro-finance programs along with their church planting, which helped leaders to start opening shops and schools. In one organization, the leader now helps his workers to set up businesses and make a living at those so that in the future they will not be dependent on him.

Many good things came out of that sustainable church-planting initiative, such as micro-business, raising bivocational leaders, confidence in the holistic approach, and helping communities to take ownership of their issues. The initiative created awareness and more effective engagement.

Our discussion also included issues of sustainability in cultural context. Many of the workers come from traditional churches. They had been trained and mentored in traditional church patterns. When they shared the good news and someone believed, they tended to extract the person from their cultural context. To solve this sustainability problem, many leaders thought, “We need a list of do’s and don’ts for leaders, and organizations working in this area.” But we clarified that just having a list wouldn’t accomplish the goal. Workers need to know how to connect with people and be sensitive to them and their context, using Scripture as the standard rather than their own cultural background.

For example, many church people have come from South India and are very conservative. When someone becomes a believer, they tell them not to wear bangles, colored saris, the *bindi* (a red dot worn on the center of the forehead, commonly by Hindu and Jain women)[[12]](#footnote-12) and so on. In North India such prohibitions are very culturally insensitive. In Bihar, for example, if a woman goes about town without those things, people stare and look at her in a very bad way. Insensitivity on delicate issues like that sometimes invites unnecessary persecution.



*Indian Woman with Bindi*

Sustainable church planting includes connecting with the culture well enough that the good news doesn’t look or feel like a foreign religion. The sustainable church-planting initiative helped many workers and organizations begin ministering in ways that better fit the local context. We just started the discussion. God used it to help many groups move toward more effective work.

**Transformation through Prayers of Blessing**

Before the CLC started in his location, Vipul\* used to lead worship services using a lot of instruments. The villagers opposed him. Then he got CLC training, and started using the CLC approach, including literacy training, sewing centers, a self-help group and a counseling center*.* He met with the village chief and other community leaders and invited them all to participate in these programs. Through this approach he became very popular in the community, even though everybody knew he was a Christian and he ran the worship center. During an election campaign, one of the candidates asked to meet with Vipul so he could pray for him and ask for God’s blessing in the upcoming election.

Vipul prayed for him, and by the grace of God he won the election. People started saying, “This man won the election because of Vipul’s prayer.” Because of that he gained favor in the whole village. The man who won the election started helping him, and he became quite famous throughout the area.

When the next election came around, a lot of people running for office thought, “I will also ask for Vipul’s prayer of blessing.” Most of those who asked for prayer won their election, and so the whole area began to believe there’s power in Vipul’s prayer. His prayer brought great change to the area. Many worshiping communities started and many people accepted the Lord.

**Transformation in Haryana State**

Haryana is one of the least evangelized states in India: a spiritually hostile land with a strong caste system and medieval mindset among the people. Most of India’s honor killings take place in Haryana. Dalits receive very bad treatment there. Not long ago (2015) some Dalit men drove a small truck through a village and the people suspected them of transporting cows, so they burned them alive.[[13]](#footnote-13) Dalit man drank water from a high-caste's cistern so they threw acid on his face. Many girls, especially from the Dalits and lower castes, get raped and burned alive.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Ironically, while Haryana is quite rough, it’s also one of the most developed states in India, with abundant resources and wealth. It’s very rich in agriculture and industry and a lot of multinational IT companies have their call center bases there.

When Delhi expanded, Gurgaon (a major city in Haryana, just 20 miles southwest of New Delhi) became the hub of many IT companies and other multinational companies. Many farmers around Delhi and Haryana sold their land at a very high price, and became instant millionaires. This caused their children to grow up proud and idle, with money and power nurturing a criminal mindset. As a result, a lot of crime came to Delhi from that area. Delhi was branded the rape capital of India, with many incidents of brutality and related crimes.

Haryana was very tough when we began working there, much tougher than most other areas. I sometimes doubted breakthrough would happen in Haryana. But faith overcame my fears and the CLC approach gave us a breakthrough there. Through the CLC, we started our work there with two people and we now have 150-160 worshiping communities in Haryana. If we talk about 150 worshiping communities among the Bhojpuri, it’s not a big deal. But in Haryana, it’s a big deal. Going from 0 to 100 is a very big deal in an area which has never seen a church-planting movement and has no idea about these things.

**Opening Doors in Haryana**

After we started our first CLC in Haryana, a Christian-background man came and told people in the village: “Be careful of these guys; the CLC is a means of bringing conversions.” So that particular CLC center had to be closed.

What should we do when things fall apart? Give up? Or think of something else? We believe leadership needs to be proactive. So we aim to never back out; we try to think of something else. That’s one reason our holistic approach has many aspects, depending on the context: the needs and opportunities. After that CLC closed, the leader told me, “In my discussions with people here, I’ve noticed that wrestling is very popular.”

I said, “Why don’t you do something with that?” So he organized a wrestling tournament. A state minister donated all the funds for the training of the wrestlers and he attended the tournament. It was a big event and 26 wrestlers came from all over the area. The brother who organized it became an instant leader. Instead of using a CLC, he facilitated wrestling. Today all 26 of the wrestlers have become church planters.

One of the wrestlers in the local wrestlers’ fraternity couldn’t participate in the tournament because he was paralyzed and had a facial palsy. He had become depressed because he could no longer wrestle. He also had a stigma in his village because of his handicap; no one wanted to associate with him. He couldn’t sleep at night, even though he was taking a lot of sleeping pills. Then two believers shared with him that Jesus could heal him. They prayed over him but nothing happened. That night, in the middle of a sleepless night, this wrestler prayed and said, “Lord Jesus, I don’t know who you are, but if you are really the Lord, heal me and I will serve you.” In the morning he got up and he could walk! Today he has a photography business and has started three worshiping communities.

Another brother was struggling because his new bride had died soon after their marriage. Because of issues of dowry[[15]](#footnote-15) and family honor, her death brought a huge problem between their two villages. A big council of 10 villages[[16]](#footnote-16) met to solve this case. In the meantime, our local leader went to the father of the bride and asked, “Now that your daughter has died, what do you want?”

He said, “I gave 20,000 rupees to the groom’s father. I want that money back, because they didn’t give her the treatment she needed to get well.”

Then the leader went and talked to the groom’s father and said, “What will it take to resolve this?”

He said, “I’m ready to do anything, but this man’s not listening.”

The leader brought the bride’s father and groom’s father together and they resolved the case. Then they went to the council of the 10 villages and informed them: “We don’t have any problem; we have already solved the problem.”

Some people on the council became furious because they had hoped to get some money out of the deal, but the case was already resolved. As a result, our leader became very influential in those 10 villages. In India, if you help someone with one thing they think you can help with everything. That opens the door for people to come to you with their problems. That helped this brother start many worshiping communities.

Through holistic access we have seen many breakthroughs like these. We now have worshiping communities in almost every district in Haryana.

**New Faith**

Most of the time, the agents of transformation are local people, not organizational staff. When people see life change in persons they know in their community, their lives also get touched and transformed. In one of the areas where we started a worshiping community, some of the youth received counseling and came to faith. When other parents saw the lives of these youth change, many of them started coming to the leaders and saying, “Whatever it takes, I want my son to also become like that. My daughter should also become like that.”

Now none of the young adults in that area waste their time. They all have jobs and the community has become completely different. Everyone is responsible and working at a job, instead of freeloading and engaging in harmful activities. The change in just a few people’s lives inspired other families in the community to look to God and to God’s people for widespread transformation.

**The Role of Everyday Believers**

Besides providing access, the CLC also empowers believers to share their testimony. Sometimes the testimony of the CLC leader draws people toward transformation. But wherever there are believers, most of the initial work of bringing people to faith happens through the testimonies of people they already know.

Over the past five years, 80 percent of those who have come to faith have come through the testimony of local believers they knew. Only 20 percent have come to faith because of a leader’s initiative. If a pastor or leader goes somewhere and shares his testimony, people may think “He came here to share this to try to convert us.” But any local believers can share their testimony as part of everyday conversation. People feel more inclined to listen to those testimonies. Everyday witness plays a very important role in the spread of the good news.

**The Pastors’ Role**

The CLC approach has been very helpful to pastors who have experienced persecution and protests when using a direct approach. Wherever they go, people think, “He has come here to convert people,” so it’s hard for them to make any headway in ministry. But when they use the holistic CLC approach, people become more accepting. When the work transforms people for the better, they don’t mind spiritual interaction as well.

When a place has new believers, their testimony often brings others to faith. Brand new believers often don’t realize the importance of sharing their testimony, so their leader equips and encourages them to share. Their testimony is simple; it consists of their life before Christ, how they met Christ, and what their life is like since meeting Christ. After they learn how to share their testimony, their witness often plays the most vital role in bringing others to faith. Consider a flock of sheep: a shepherd takes care of the herd, but reproduction is done by the sheep themselves, not by the shepherd.

When a person enters an area to start a CLC we just call them a “leader.” Some people would prefer to be called “pastor” rather than known as a “community leader.” So after a while in the work some people get the designation of “pastor,” probably because that earns more honor. It’s a human psychological thing. But we encourage them to be known as a community leader rather than as a pastor.

**A Variety of Skills**

If a volunteer comes to us from another country, we can use whatever skills they have. They gain an opportunity for first-hand experience interacting with non-Christians in a way that aims toward transformation. They can build relationships here and experience service that’s part of a CPM.

Some people have come as short-term volunteers and both helped the work here and gotten better equipped themselves. For example, a nurse who came here from Texas found out how to make disciples, then went back to the US and became very effective at it. She was so effective at making disciples, she left her job and joined her church’s staff as a disciple maker.

Many people went back to the US saying, “Ah, now I know how to share my faith and make disciples!” then started doing it. We want to provide that kind of opportunity and exposure to the global body of Christ: come, be a blessing and be blessed. Instead of handing out tracts, it’s better to be teaching something, like videography or whatever skill the person has. This can serve as part of an access project or a way to equip believers.

**Transformational vs Traditional**

Anirudh is a CLC leader and a very simple man. He has little education and he’s a Dalit (outcaste), so he used to have very little influence. When he first began in ministry, nobody wanted to talk to him. He says, “In 2009 I came to a CLC training and learned about access: awareness programs and empowerment programs. I wanted to try applying this, so I began running a CLC and organizing awareness programs in a number of villages.”

Anirudh’s area had a very low literacy rate. All the women and most of the men were illiterate. The government had announced many programs for people below the poverty level. But because the people couldn’t read, they didn’t know about the government programs. So Anirudh started telling people in the villages about the government programs to which they were entitled. He also taught them how to fill out applications and access the programs. Through this he built good relationships and gained people’s confidence. He became a very effective community leader and everybody started recognizing: “He’s doing good things for us!”

Although he is a Dalit (an untouchable outcaste), he gained respect from everyone in his community, including the high-caste people. His whole community experienced a noteworthy change. Everyone in the area benefitted from his work. Within a few months he had started three worshiping communities.

He became so popular that during a state election campaign the political leaders invited him to speak at their rallies. They even gave him the use of a vehicle to come to their rallies and speak on their behalf. He told them, “If I come, I want to start the meetings with prayer. I’m a believer in Jesus Christ, and what has taken place in my community has happened by the grace of God. So whatever we do, we always start with a prayer to Jesus.”

“They said, 'OK, no problem.'” So at all those rallies he started his public speech with a prayer.

On one occasion he was sick and the doctor, a high-caste man, recognized him and gave him free treatment. The doctor said, “You’re like my brother, so I will treat you for free and cover the expense.” This reflects the deep level of respect Anirudh had gained.

Two years later, we thought he could work independently, because he had respect from all the people in that area. We said, “Go ahead, and we’ll stay in touch and invite you when we have a training coming up.”

But then he got hired as a staff member by another mission agency. They offered him good money and education for his children. He thought, “If I work with them for a couple of years I can earn some money to provide for my family.” So instead of working as our partner he became their staff, and began using their ministry approach: preaching directly and distributing tracts and Bibles. He testified: “They offered me money and I got really distracted. So I joined that organization, but I was not happy with the ministry.”

On one occasion he and some coworkers went to a government school and, without getting any permission, distributed Bibles to all the children and started taking photos. They said, “Show your Bible,” and took photos. This violated India’s constitution, which forbids imposing religion on any children under 18 years of age.

The whole community was so annoyed with Anirudh. Though they had previously loved him, they beat him so badly he had to be hospitalized. He was almost thrown in jail, but because of his previous work, some people came and saved him from that.

A few months later he came back to us and told us the story. He said, “When I was in the hospital I remembered you and that you were my mentors.” He asked us to minister to him and pray for him. He realized he had been in a better place before, so he said, “Please forgive me and accept me again. I don’t want to lose the approach and the effectiveness. I want to go back to starting worshiping communities, using the approach I learned from you.”

He now realizes the difference between the holistic approach and the direct-evangelism approach to service. He has experienced for himself the different fruit of the two approaches, and his community has also seen the difference. The approach employed vitally affects the impact in a community. Our training of workers includes insight about how to work in a community. Sometimes we also have to teach social skills and the best way of connecting with people.

We also teach leaders the difference between church and social intervention. The good news needs to be shared not only with words, but also through one’s actions and character. We combine all these things into a whole package.

Anirudh continues his testimony: “Two years ago I left that other organization and started to rebuild my relationship with the people. The first thing I did was to go to the railway station, because this organization had given me a good foundation for serving the types of people found there. I saw many people at Gaya railway station addicted to sniffing glue. A lot of 14 or 15-year-old boys were sniffing glue and injecting heroin and selling heroin and other drugs. They were also stealing from people to support their drug habits.

“So I went to the railway station and started sharing food with these children. I rented a room near the railway station to teach them, using songs and stories. Then we would feed them a meal. The youth felt very loved by us and they said, “Sir, we want to go with you. We don’t want to stay at the station like this.” I started to pray that God would provide the means to start a home for the children, and he helped me start a children’s home in October 2015.

“Along with the children’s work we do establish fellowships – training leaders and planting worshiping communities. We now have 14 other leaders who go to the villages and plant worshiping communities. In 2016 we mapped the location of 83 fellowships that have been planted by our group (not just by me). These 83 are all new (first generation) fellowships. Some have second generation believers.”

**Conclusion**

God uses holistic service to transform whole communities. When God’s love becomes visible in everyday life, the power of the good news becomes tangible. When God’s children live in ways that bless the community around them, that lifestyle opens doors for the good news, proclaims the good news and manifests the good news. God receives the glory as holistic service touches people and transforms whole communities.

**Chapter 6. Breakthrough with Persecution**

Just before Christmas in 2005, after a complaint by anti-Christian elements, the police came to a church gathering and took everyone in the church to the police station. The officer began to question them: “What do you do at the church?”

They said, “We sing songs.”

He said, “Okay, sing some of the songs so I know what it’s about.”

So they sang some worship songs.

Then he said, “What else do you do?”

“We pray.”

So the officer said, “Okay, pray.”

The leader raised his hand and started praying for the officer.

The officer soon shouted, “Stop! Stop! What are you doing? What kind of prayer is this? I’m getting goose bumps. We also pray, but not like this!” Then he asked, “Can you come to my house?”

So all the people were released and the leader and a couple of others were taken to the officer’s house. The police officer said, “My wife has been sick, and all kinds of shamans have been taking my money, but nobody’s able to heal her.” The believers realized she was demonized, so they prayed and she was delivered. Now the police officer and his wife are part of that church.

**Responding to Persecution**

The Bible says that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Persecution comes not because someone simply *believes* in Christ but when they *practice* what Christ said: when they become obedient and apply his teachings. That starts a person moving against the tide.

In our context, persecution doesn’t last forever, so I don’t favor pulling people out of persecution. Occasionally, in a life and death situation we need to remove people from a location, at least temporarily. We have a safe house, especially for work among Muslims. But in most cases persecution is a reaction to people’s new life in Christ. It’s like when a new baby arrives in a household: some people get disturbed by the new baby’s noise, and the disruption of old patterns. So I don’t want to dramatize persecution and say how bad it is, but at the same time I don’t want to make light of it and sound as if it’s not a challenge.

Satan wants to destroy the work of God, and one of his favorite methods is to discourage God’s people so they lose heart and give up. Persecution is often part of Satan’s strategy to bring discouragement, and it comes in many different ways.

Though none of our people have been killed, some of them have been beaten up and put in jail. Others have had their property damaged. For example, just before harvest time 20 or 30 people have come and trampled believers’ fields, so their wheat or rice couldn’t be harvested. It’s quite a shock when a person wakes up in the morning and finds the whole acre of crop they have worked so hard for has been ruined. All they can do is try to collect by hand whatever can be salvaged. That’s a tough situation, but most believers in the movement are used to experiencing some persecution. Peter said if you suffer for Christ, you are blessed (1 Peter 3:14-17).

Many of our people have gone through persecution: being put in jail, being beaten up, having their property damaged, and so on. Usually those things last for just a couple of days and then fizzle out. But if the person runs away, the persecution can last forever. Satan uses their absence to build a wall between them and the community. When they try to come back, they can’t return to their own community. I’ve seen this happen all too often. So I usually encourage people to just lay low and hold on until the persecution passes.

A bigger problem arises when an outsider jumps in and provides immediate rescue. We do need sensitivity to the situation to know when somebody really needs to be rescued. But not everybody needs this, and many times our well-meaning soft-heartedness causes a bigger problem. The person already has a problem; they don’t need us to move in as the arbitrator. They just need moral and spiritual support.

We give moral support when we can, but not on the same day. Reacting too quickly would produce dependency. Then every time they had even a small problem they would run to us for help. That would create a vicious cycle from which we could never escape. Every time anything happened to the person they would expect someone to rescue them by giving them some money, or doing something else to help. Either option is not good: becoming dependent on outside money or on other assistance.

To see a movement flourish requires wisdom and self-control. It’s important not to create dependency. We can give spiritual support, like praying for them (not just *saying* we’ll pray). As Jesus said, “When two or three of you agree on something, consider it done” (Matthew 18:19, paraphrased).

Since India's law allows freedom of religion, it’s appropriate to go to the police and report persecution. That way the persecutor becomes aware that they can’t just get away with it. As citizens of the land we have equal rights and freedom of religion.

At the same time, we shouldn’t harp on our rights all the time. If we only focus on human rights, we might forget the role of biblically appropriate suffering. Some international groups have great material on human rights, but the local leaders get confused and don’t know what to do with it. Once the outsider leaves, all they have is a manual, which the police don’t recognize. Most Indians are oral people, and it doesn’t work to just hand oral people a manual. They need to be mentored.

I don’t encourage our people to get involved in street demonstrations against persecution. Considering how much persecution we have, if we fought for our constitutional rights every time, it would only make things worse. We need God’s wisdom to know when to apply which approach.

**Strength through Persecution**

When persecution happens, we don’t jump in to provide help immediately. God’s people need to learn to survive and face it. Whenever possible, people should remain and not run from persecution. In our experience, communities eventually accommodate people’s new faith.

I learned a great lesson a few years ago. In a village with a group of new believers from a low caste, some high-caste people didn’t like these people following Jesus. The houses in this village all had thatched roofs, and during the hot season a hot dry wind started to blow from the west. In the middle of the day when everyone was resting, the high-caste people got a crazy man to go start a fire. They figured, “What will anybody do to a guy like this? Everybody knows he’s crazy. The police won’t want to arrest him and put him in jail; they have enough problems in the jail!”

The crazy man went and burned down the believer's house. It burned very quickly with the thatched roof and all. Everything inside started to burn: all the food, all their clothes, everything they owned. It burned so fast they didn’t have time to get anything out.

I was traveling quite close to that village at the time, so I went there the next day with a couple of other leaders. I didn’t know what to say or do. I arrived there looking sad and said, “I’m very sorry.” I thought they would probably ask for money, and I didn’t have any money. I wondered, “Who can I ask for money to help them rebuild their house?” I looked at the situation and had tears in my eyes, because everything they had owned was like charcoal: their rice and wheat, all their food and all their possessions. I said, “I’m really sorry this has happened. I don’t know how to help.”

The father said, “What help? We’re not suffering because of you. We’re suffering because of Christ.”

I felt like somebody hit me with a hammer. I thought, “Wow, I don’t have faith like this man! If my house had been burned down, I wouldn’t be able to say what he just said. This man is a new believer and I’m supposed to be a mature Christian, but he has more faith than I do!”

People in the movement gain that kind of maturity and faith in a short time and it’s very powerful. I believe the Holy Spirit spoke to that brother and saved me from all kinds of burdens. People find a way to deal with their problems. And when they face problems, it’s better if they come out of it themselves with God’s help rather than someone else pulling them out. Once a person survives the persecution, they won’t be the same. They shake off their embarrassment and their fear and apprehensions. They become very bold.

We hear powerful testimonies from some of the believers who have been arrested and beaten up and all. If some asks, “Aren’t you afraid of what could happen next time?” they say, “What can they do to me? Take me in again? Beat me again? I’m ready.”

I think, “That’s definitely the work of the Holy Spirit. Because if *I* had told them to suffer like that they would have beaten *me* up after they came out of the police station!” But they do it for Jesus, so they become even bolder. They say, “The most they can do is kill me. So what?”

And I think, *You’re on the right track. Keep going!*

God has called us to be his coworkers. Which means it’s *his* work. We do our part and God does his part. Addressing persecution belongs first and foremost in God’s hands. We can’t do God’s part. Sometimes our attitude is, “Okay God, I’ll take care of this,” so we get ourselves and our disciples into problems.

I think in terms of the church as the bride of Christ. I may be your best friend, but once you meet the bridegroom, I need to not get in the way of that relationship. If I try to meet all your needs, I will create friction and misunderstanding between the bride and the bridegroom. Once people get connected with Christ, they run first to him, like the man whose house burned down. He got hit hard, but he didn’t run to me. He ran to Christ, the one he chose to follow as his Savior.

Focusing just on prevention and rescue from persecution hinders growth of individual believers and of movements. We need to pray for God to strengthen his people to endure and multiply *through* the persecution.

On the other hand, I’ve heard people say, “Maybe we’re not growing much because we don’t have persecution. Maybe we need more persecution.”

I say, “No! If you don’t have persecution at the moment, enjoy your freedom. Be thankful and make the most of the opportunities you have. You don’t know how it would be if you had to endure persecution.” It’s like the disciples telling Jesus: “I can drink the cup you drink.” Jesus told them, “You don’t know what you’re talking about” (Matthew 20:22, paraphrased).

Here are just a few examples of ways God has allowed and used persecution in the growth of this movement.

**Nanhelal’s Parade**

“At one point, 70 people came to persecute me, but they started fighting among themselves. They wanted to shame me by putting me on a donkey, blackening my face, putting a garland of shoes around my neck,[[17]](#footnote-17) and parading me around the village. I just kept praying and then they started fighting among themselves.

“Some said, ‘He’s not such a bad guy, that we should blacken his face.’

“Then others said, ‘He’s not such a bad guy that we should put him on a donkey. But we should still parade him around the village so people know to watch out for him.’

“They finally agreed, ‘Okay, let’s take him all around the village.’ So I folded my hands like a religious leader and they paraded me around the village with 70 people following me. People in the village thought I was a respected religious leader! Sometimes God uses persecution for his benefit. I’m blessed to say that the man who brought the garland of shoes that day to insult me, now loves the Lord and plays drums in my church.”

**Ravi’s Testimony**

Before I moved into leadership, I did church planting. One day after I had moved into a training role I was teaching people about church planting and one of the students said to me, “It’s easy to teach, but have you done it?”

I said, “Yes, I really have.” But I was no longer *directly* involved in church planting. I kept busy focusing on training and leadership and other things, so that brother’s challenge touched me. I decided to start a new church plant at the same time as everything else I was doing. I immediately started mentoring people, but found it very difficult in the beginning.

One of the people I mentored was a widow, a local leader in that area and open to church-planting principles. It took about three months to equip her, then she began to mentor two or three more people. I started a fellowship at her house with just a few people for the first couple of months. In the next couple of months the fellowship at her house grew to 18 or 20 people, then growth stagnated.

During that season a couple with twin boys came to the fellowship, one of whom was mute. He had been normal until the age of three. But then he became possessed by a spirit and unable to speak. He would often shake his head in a strange way and have seizures.

I and a few others began to pray for this boy. The deliverance process required about two months of prayer. The boy had many demons. Every week a new demon would come out of the boy, and his twin brother also was delivered from demons. During our worship meetings we often said “Hallelujah,” and when the mute boy first began to speak, his first sounds were bits of “Hallelujah.” Then he became able to say the whole word and began speaking normally. He was completely healed! The news of his healing spread like wildfire and people started coming to the widow’s house for prayer and healing. The fellowship had a fresh beginning and doubled within the next two months. I became very influential in that area and a lot of miracles happened here.

But we had a new problem. Whenever I left the village, the high-caste people in the village would threaten the widow. Finally she (feeling powerless) told us, “I’m sorry, but please don’t hold the fellowship at my house anymore.” So we moved the fellowship to another man’s house.

Then the high-caste people reported us to the police, saying we had a big plan for converting people to Christianity. So the police came to our gathering, planning to arrest me and close down the prayer meeting. They asked, “What are you doing in this village? Why are you running a fellowship here?” But before arresting me the policeman sat in the fellowship and listened to what I was sharing. He was so impressed that he said, ‘It seems you are doing good things; I don’t see you doing anything wrong. But I still need to ask you not to do this, since you don’t live in this village and the political situation is very sensitive. If you come back here I’ll need to arrest you and charge you with breaking the anti-conversion law.”

The local people, especially the parents of the twins, protested and said, “You have seen our children. You know how bad off they were. Through the prayer of this brother they are now healthy and happy. He has helped us so much! Why are you persecuting him?”

But the authorities insisted: “Don’t come back here or we will arrest you.”

Some of the local people wanted to keep meeting, while others wanted to stop. And I had a warning not to come back. The persecutors got the issue published in the newspaper in order to threaten me. The report said: “A pastor from Varanasi came to convert people. We have beaten him and sent him back to Varanasi” (even though this hadn’t happened). I told the people in the fellowship: “Let’s stop meeting for a couple of months and let things settle down, then we can start meeting again.”

But they said, “No! We don’t want to stop. We want to continue.”

I stayed away for two weeks and sought the Lord. Then I felt the Lord saying to go back and tell the local people to get permission from the government to have a worship gathering. So one of the local brothers went to the police and asked for permission.

The police said, “We’re not authorized to give this permission.” So the brother went to the local courthouse and applied to the District Magistrate for permission to hold a fellowship. Within about 20 days he received permission. During that time, the fellowship had continued to meet quietly.

After they got permission, no one had a way to protest because they had an official permit. The police were still reluctant, but they allowed them to meet, yet with a warning not to convert anyone. When people heard that our group had official permission, the church started meeting again regularly and I was able to join them again.

A couple of months later one of the women in the fellowship said, “I have a very sick cousin in another village. Can you go and pray for her?” So I went and prayed, and a week later I went again. She was healed, and four more people came over to her house for prayer. That’s how a new fellowship started in that area. So then I had two fellowships in that area. I selected four or five people from those two gatherings and mentored them in how to lead a church. After that I gave them responsibility to lead the fellowships. Now local people lead those two groups.

In the next two years, 23 worshiping fellowships started in that area. We now have 13 good leaders running these groups. The brother who had boldness to apply for official permission for the group has now taken over responsibility for work in that whole region.

During those two years, we had two big conventions in that area supported by local people. In one of the conventions, 900 people came from the 23 fellowships. I continue to mentor people in that area and I hope this year we will have a convention of 5,000 people there.

**Kingdom Kindness**

In 1998, a devastating flood hit Eastern Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and Western Bihar, causing massive damage. We took up the challenge to do relief work in the two regions. This provided us an opportunity to connect with community leaders and government officials. They all cooperated well and paved the way for us to bless the suffering communities.

In one village we visited, a group of believers was being harassed by the village leaders. When we arrived, the believers knew who we were due to the Bhojpuri conference, the Audio Bible and the songbooks, so they greeted us with great joy. Upon seeing our connection with the believers and how they related to us, the village chief came and apologized for “misunderstanding” between him and the believers. He then promised that they would be allowed to worship freely. We distributed the relief materials to everyone in the village, and the believers joined us in giving away relief supplies to their persecutors.

**Pressing Ahead**

In 2014 Vinod was persecuted and jailed for making disciples of Christ, but he didn’t get discouraged. He continued sharing the good news. During the following year he started 13 new house churches in the same area and raised up 11 new committed and self-sustaining leaders.

**Savender’s Testimony**

“In 2001, I had been leading house fellowships for just one or two years. At that time an organized persecution began near Varanasi. There is a large Buddhist temple there, where Buddha preached his first sermon. Persecutors started searching out locations of all the churches meeting in the area. I had work in a village not far from there. Because some of the believers there had relatives in my fellowship, the persecutors found out about me and my work.

“One of my house fellowships met daily. A media person from the Hindu nationalist party came to spy it out. He heard some people singing so he came into our fellowship and said, ‘Don’t be afraid, I really like hearing your music, so I came in to hear your songs.’ He recorded all the songs as people sang. Every day we met in a different house, so he got to see how many worship places we had in the area, and he gathered more information every day. He kept talking to the believers and asking for more details about other fellowships in the area.

“Then he published a report in the media and said: ‘This whole city has been converted to Christianity by money and other allurements!’ So attackers started going around and persecuting all the churches. It was a well-organized persecution and I came directly under attack. People harassed me and I was driven out of the area and not allowed to return. The work stopped in that area because of the severe persecution. I focused on work in other locations.

“Then six years later (as described in chapter four), I started a CLC which enabled me to again begin work in that area. Interestingly, the new church consisted almost entirely of new people. Of those who had previously been involved in the house fellowship, only 10 or 12 came back. The rest who had suffered persecution didn’t oppose us, but didn’t join in either. They’d say, “We’ll come, we’ll come,” but then never show up.

“I praise God for the hundreds who have now come to faith in that village in the years since then. Over 300 people now worship openly at the community building. The persecution had a devastating impact, but the Lord’s power is even greater.”

**Persecution Becomes Celebration**

In the 2001 persecution, one group of believers received threats that they would be forced to reconvert to Hinduism in a ceremony called *Ghar Wapsi*.[[18]](#footnote-18) The people threatening them said, “On a particular day, we will come and re-convert you to Hinduism.” So on that day, five Hindu priests came from Varanasi. Their team set up a tent, prepared food, and readied cow urine for purification of the Christians reconverting back to Hinduism. They arranged everything and forced everyone to come out of their houses and attend the gathering.

As the ceremony began, the priests used a public-address (PA) system to make abusive speeches against Christians. Suddenly five women in the crowd became demon possessed. They were very violent. The priests threw water on them to try to get rid of the demons. But the women became even more violent. So the five priests got scared. They packed up their things, got in their car and returned to Varanasi.

The stage was set up, people had gathered, they had the tent and PA system, and the food was prepared. Everything was ready for a celebration. So the believers cast out the demons and the five women were delivered. Then the believers went up on the stage and used the PA system to preach the good news and share their testimonies. They said, “We followed Jesus because of our own free choice; not because of any inducements or any other reasons.” Many people came to faith through this and many others became sympathizers of the good news. Meanwhile the newspapers printed a picture of the tent that had been set up and falsely reported that 200 people had been reconverted back to Hinduism!

**False Believers**

In one of the villages near Varanasi, some men came holding Bibles in their hands, up against their chest. And to everyone they met in the village, they said, “*Jai Masih Ki*” (“Praise the Lord”), a normal greeting among Christians here.

After a while the believers started coming out, thinking, “These sound like believers; let’s go meet them.”

Then suddenly the men started making all kinds of threats against Christians and saying abusive things against Jesus. They said, “If you don’t reconvert to Hinduism within a week, we’ll kill you.” First they wanted to know: “Who’s the leader?”

The believers said, “We are all leaders! Sometimes this guy leads, sometimes that guy, sometimes that lady also does. We are all leaders.”

Then the men wanted to know, “Who’s the outsider behind this?” But there weren’t any. So they got very angry and left, saying: “We’ll come back and kill you if you don’t return to Hinduism.”



*Durga Kund* Temple *Photo by Kusum Sanu from Scrapbook- A Travel Blog*

On a festival day, the group plotting against the believers gathered near the famous 18th century *Durga Kund* Temple (also known as the “Monkey Temple”) in Varanasi. They gathered to plan what they would do to the believers. But strange things began to happen during their meeting. First they started fighting among themselves. Then suddenly a thick black cloud rose and came right over the temple. On the roof of the temple was a trident, and out of the cloud came lightning that struck the trident and broke it in the middle. After that, people in that area became very scared. For the next while they didn’t threatened the Christians at all.

**Testimony Overcomes Persecution**

One of our leaders was planning a Christmas celebration in his village, but before he could get it organized, someone complained and the police came and arrested him and put him in jail. When the police started to question him, he shared his testimony with them and explained why he shares the good news with people. While he was talking to the police, some other believers from his church arrived. They also started sharing their testimonies with the police. This continued for a long time. It had such an effect that they kept him at the police station all day and all night, talking to him during most of that time.

Finally they were convinced by his testimony and his description of his work. So they not only released him, but they returned to his village the next morning and called the local leader who had complained. They gave him counsel and told him they had listened to this brother’s testimony and he wasn’t doing anything wrong. So although this leader couldn’t celebrate Christmas on the scheduled day, he later organized a festival in the village and he now has the support of the local police.

**Persecution Brings a Strategic Shift**

In another village in the same district (about 28 miles from the village in the above testimony), Ram Das used to lead a large fellowship with about 300 people gathered to worship. One day a mob of 50 or 60 people came with sticks and badly beat all the believers and the leaders. Those of us in leadership tried to protect the people and to protest, but it was a big mob and couldn’t be stopped. We lodged a complaint with the police, but such incidents continued. So we still meet, but no longer in a big group with 300 people. We now meet as small house fellowships in that district.

**From Near Death to Multiplication**

An Ayurvedic (holistic) doctor named Prem lived in Varanasi. After he accepted Jesus in 2004, he stopped his practice as a doctor in order to serve full-time. Within three years, he had work in 28 villages. Organized persecution arose against his churches and all the churches were attacked simultaneously. Prem and one other leader were insulted and beaten up in front of the believers. They were beaten so badly they lost consciousness and almost died. All the disciples there became very afraid because of this violence. For a while it seemed like that would be the end of the work in those villages.

Prem had very serious injuries. He had a broken leg, a broken hand and a fractured skull. Many doctors said they didn’t expect him to survive. But he didn’t give up. It took six or seven months for him to recover physically, but he made it. He had been the breadwinner in his family and had no one to help him financially. We stood by him and helped him a bit, because it cost a lot for all those months of treatment. But the needs far exceeded the available resources.

When a person goes through persecution, the problem is often not just the physical pain or loss. Prem also experienced emotional trauma from the violence. And, as sometimes happens in such cases, other leaders didn’t want to associate with him, because they didn’t want their work affected. As in Prem’s case, the aftermath of persecution often involves isolation, rejection, suffering, and financial loss.

After Prem recovered, he started his medical practice again and shared the good news through it. He always told his patients, “When you take this medicine, take it in the name of Jesus,” and everyone who got medicine from him was healed. Then he attended CLC training and began also applying that concept. Today he mentors more than 25 leaders in multiple generations.

The other leader who got beaten up at the same time as Prem backslid for several reasons. He struggled with a lot of questions and doubts like, “Why did God allow this?” His focus became misplaced, and he backslid and fell into sin. He never recovered from the effects of the persecution.

Prem, however, kept his focus in the right place and God helped him recover fully, including his spiritual life, his finances and his ministry. The 25 leaders he mentors had previously been members of the house churches he led. At that time they were regular church members; now all of them serve bi-vocationally, leading worshiping communities and multiplying themselves. Some are studying at the graduate level with one working on a PhD.

**Persecution and Nationalism**

Nationalism often connects with fascism, communism, or religious fanaticism. Some governments take away freedom of speech and justify violating human rights, imprisoning, and even murdering people in the name of nationalism.

The church is often the first to get attacked. This has a spiritual as well as social logic, because the church stands for justice, equality, and care for the poor and downtrodden. The church aims to eliminate evils in society, in direct contrast to some other ideologies. Wherever a church starts, it begins a process of transformation with individuals, their families, and the community. This process comes in direct conflict with whatever evils have existed in the community, which leads to spiritual warfare.

Consider what happened on a large scale in Hitler’s Germany and in the Soviet Union, and China. Or what happened on a smaller scale in Vietnam, and in Cambodia with the Khmer Rouge killing 25 percent of their own people.

Many people don’t understand that something like that could happen anywhere overnight. We have aimed to design the church so it can quickly go underground if needed, yet also continue to be active and reproducing. What happened in China during those Communist years might not happen here, but we need to be prepared for the worst.

**Diminishing Persecution**

Many times, Christians get persecuted because they attack other people’s religious practices and speak against their gods and goddesses. Some people spend more time criticizing the culture than they do preaching the good news. We teach believers to respect the culture, not destroy the culture. We encourage people to celebrate events and holidays with their neighbors and share their concerns. If their neighbors are vegetarians, we encourage believers to respect that.

Some Christian groups have big buildings and big facilities. This creates jealousy and makes them an easier target for persecution. This happens especially when they don’t have much relationship with the local people or if their connections mainly focus on business matters. We prefer to use existing (normal) buildings in the community and utilize any of our facilities as community resources.

Some groups of Christians wear a special religious uniform. If any problem arises, others can easily identify and attack them. The groups involved in the Bhojpuri movement and related movements tend to live pretty much like everyone else–in their everyday clothes and with the food they eat. Someone looking from the outside can’t easily see the difference. The difference is in heart, attitudes and godliness, not external markers. This helps believers avoid unnecessary persecution. Enough persecution comes because of obedience to the good news; we don’t want to do things that make it easier.

**Conclusion**

Most believers in the movement have experienced some form of persecution. But it usually doesn’t last forever. And the Lord strengthens his people through persecution. We encourage believers to share Christ and live for him in culturally relevant ways. And we aim to be a blessing to all people in every community. This diminishes unnecessary persecution, so when persecution does come it displays the glory of Christ in our midst.

**Chapter 7. Breakthrough with Railway Children**

In hundreds of railway stations throughout India live hundreds of thousands of children who have been kicked out of their homes, abandoned, and even thrown off trains by their families. These children, some as young as three years old, struggle for daily existence. They have become part of the landscape of society in Indian railway stations – forgotten and discarded by the world.



God has a plan for these children. We want to be the “hands and feet” of our Father in heaven to minister to these forgotten and abandoned children. We want to rescue them from a destructive homeless lifestyle and give them hope and a future.

In 2004, we started serving railway children, beginning in Gorakhpur. When we first began, we found the children very elusive because they were scared, abused and vulnerable. A few coworkers and I started building a relationship with some of them and then they disappeared. I asked, “Where did they go?” After some poking around at the railway station, we figured out where they could go. So we went to another station, and then another, looking for them. As we pursued one boy we ended up in Kolkata (West Bengal) – over 560 miles away![[19]](#footnote-19)

**West Bengal Background**

I’ve been praying for 40 years for West Bengal. This region has a very high culture, yet Christianity has made very little progress there. The Bengali people tend to be very proud, religious and intelligent. Most people ministering among Bengalis are not Bengali. They come from other states. I thought: “Why can’t we raise up local leaders in Bengal?”

I also noted that most people working among Bengalis work with Bangladeshi refugees, who are marginalized and in great need. These refugees would accept anything because of their vulnerable position. People say, “We are working in West Bengal; we have a Bengali church,” but in reality very few Bengalis have ever come to faith.

I wanted to see something happen in West Bengal, to see Bengalis experience God, get trained in leadership and take up leadership. So when we began working with railway children in West Bengal, we wanted to also establish worshiping communities. We introduced Community Learning Centers (CLCs) and Church Planting Movement concepts through seminars for pastors and leaders. This gave us access to many, many areas of West Bengal and Kolkata.

We took up the challenge to find a man of Bengali origin who understood his own people and culture. We wanted someone we could train and work alongside. We found such a man. He has done good work there and we now have about 20 worshipping communities in one area of West Bengal.

**Life at a Railway Station**

In Kolkata we began our work by mainly focusing on railway children and missing children (mostly runaways). Most of the railway stations in India have children sniffing glue and involved in other bad habits: smoking, alcohol abuse, and sexual abuse. Our first challenge was that the children didn’t want to talk with anyone. They lived in their own world, sniffing glue and very addicted. We struggled to get them to interact for even five minutes.

To make a living they would collect empty water bottles and resell the plastic, or sometimes they would steal. Then they would spend the money to buy glue for sniffing. Sometimes even when they had money they didn’t buy food; they would buy glue instead. If they kept money with them some people who walked past would snatch it from them.

The older youth at the railway station often forced the younger ones to work for them. They would collect money from them and in exchange provide glue to sniff. They didn’t provide food or clothes or anything useful. They just taught the younger kids how to get money, and then provided them with glue.

The stations have a hierarchy of unhealthy activities, with older children functioning as self-appointed bosses at the top. The bosses quickly recognize newcomers and try to recruit them to work for them. Weak or scared children more easily get controlled by a boss. Some of the very smart kids survive by themselves without a boss. Often, though, they end up becoming a boss themselves.

Even up to the present, when we come to serve, the bosses don’t usually confront us directly and physically. However they threaten us indirectly, so we need to stay alert. When we do meet up with them, we warn them: “Mistreating these kids is illegal,” but they do it discreetly. They also threaten the children and say, “Don’t tell anyone I’m your boss or I’ll damage your hand or your eyes or I’ll sell your kidneys to someone.”

In this difficult context we need to work very carefully. Through experience we have learned where and how these bosses operate. They stay outside the platform, and we don’t go there. We don’t try to change what happens outside the platform. We can’t transform all the people and all the cities at once. We start with addressing what happens on the railway platform and we try to handle that well.

**Serving at the Railway Station**

When we began reaching out to children on the railway platform, we initially just visited and built friendships. One of the ways to make friendships was providing food, because sometimes the children hadn’t eaten for a day or more. We would sit with them and ask about their problems and listen to them. Usually nobody paid attention to them, so we would spend time listening and they started sharing their troubles. They would tell how the police used to beat them, people would snatch their money, and other struggles. We began telling them about the dangers of sniffing glue, and we provided a lunch for them each day we came.

They gradually began to trust us and concluded, “These are good people.” Whenever we visited, they would come and surround us. We started to teach them the alphabet and numbers – right there on the station platform. We wore ID cards, so the police and others would know who we were and that we had approval to interact with the children on the platform. We now have very good rapport with the various government agencies, local political leaders and local hospitals.

**Undergirding Principles**

Over the years I have seen that most orphanages function like a warehouse. Instead of criticizing, I wanted to find a better way to do that type of service. From the very beginning our foremost guiding principle has been: “When we deal with children, whether orphaned or semi-orphaned or street children, we don’t want to create a warehouse of children.” Secondly, in every child I see a future adult and I see a family. My heart asks, “How can we nurture this beautiful life, so it can become what I see? A handsome young man[[20]](#footnote-20) with a beautiful family one day.” We aim to see that happen.

Our work with children has given us a good reputation with the government because we work together with the police and government officials and obtain proper licenses. When we started work in Kolkata, we weren’t novices. We brought expertise from our head office in Uttar Pradesh. We had sharpened our holistic approach as described in previous chapters.

In our service to railway children, we focus primarily on restoration to their families. We engage with them to find out where they came from, who they are and how they ended up in this place. Then we work together with the government and the police and do what we can to restore them to their families. We started with the railway children, and that work expanded into many other areas, including a children’s home, slum work, education and establishing fellowships.

God has clearly blessed the children we serve. We’ve had government officials say, “You take better care of these children than many others do.” Many government agencies now refer people to our children’s home – as a learning center where they can come for a study tour. If someone wants to start a children’s home, the government tells them, “Go and visit this group’s home.” We thank God for that testimony. Whatever we do, we try to make it praiseworthy, so that people turn to God and say, “Praise God, you did a great job.”

**The Children’s Home**

We always have at least one adult on site 24/7 at the children’s home and others on call in case they are needed. Our staff love working with the children and they do it very well. Some of the children stay there just until they can be restored to their family. Others have no parents and stay for a longer time.

When a child first comes to the home, we usually do the initial process and paperwork in Hindi, since everyone who is literate is literate in Hindi. But sometimes children come from different language groups, so whenever possible, we use a counselor who can talk to them in their mother tongue. That helps the children be more open as we get to know them, their background and where they come from.

Everyone on staff at the children’s home has training in processing the initial intake of children. Then we have counselors with a masters’ degree who follow up with the children. Counseling plays a major role in getting to know the children and helping them process what they’ve experienced. They need to feel safe with the counselor and know the counselor has their best interest in mind, like an older brother or a friend.

If a child has never been to school, we work with him for three or four months to teach him the basics and get him ready to enter school. If a child has run away from home, we don’t send him immediately to a regular school, because he might run away from the school. So we first teach those children at the home for three to six months.

Whenever possible we aim to restore children to their families. This month in Patna alone, four children were restored to their families, and three last month. We have regular turnover at the home; the number of children constantly increases and decreases.

Sometimes the children stay at the home only three or four days before we can reunite them with their families, but usually they stay for between 15 days and a few months. They learn things in the children’s home setting that they can share when they go back to their family.

We aim not only to return the children to their families, but also to counsel them and give them family values and teaching about Christ. Several CLC leaders follow up with the families after the children return home. This has resulted in many families coming to Christ. The follow-up is a long-term process, even though the children may only stay at our home for three or four days.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

We always try to help the children get back to their families. But when children first come to us, they sometimes don’t tell the truth about themselves. They may fear we’ll take them to the police or force them to return to a bad situation. They might have run away from home, maybe because of a cruel stepparent or punishment by their parents. Some children have been used for child labor. At age eight or ten or twelve, they get sent to work in a private house or a hospital, and the work is hard, [[21]](#footnote-21) so they run away and come to the railway station.

Sometimes three or six months pass before they trust us enough to tell the truth about where they’ve come from. While the children live at the home during those months, we use that opportunity to share the good news. We pray for them, and they start to learn prayers and Bible verses and have devotions. We don’t force spiritual activities on them, but we are very open that we’re believers and our staff are dedicated to the Lord. So we have devotions and they are welcome to participate if they want to. We consider it a great privilege to share the good news and pray for them.

We give children a family atmosphere at the children’s home, quite different from what many of them have experienced at home. We don’t beat them or punish them harshly. We know they have issues, and that’s why we opened the children’s home: to serve them and help them have a better life.

Sometimes the government calls and asks us to help with more children than we can handle. One time 80 children from Bangalore (South India) were rescued from working in a glass factory in Bihar – over 1300 miles from their home! The Social Welfare Department called our staff at the children’s home and said, “We’ve rescued 80 children; how many can you take?”

Our staff said, “We can take five.”

He said, “No, no. Five kids is not nearly enough! Why don’t you take 20?”

The staff responded, “Our funds come from donations and we have a limited capacity. If you give us government funds for a bigger place, we’ll take 20 or 50. But with our current funding, we can only take five.” We have to be realistic about the limitations of our facilities.

**A Teller of Tales**

Some children run away from their home, then after a few months they miss their home and want to return. Sometimes, though, it takes months before they trust us enough to tell us the real story.

A few years ago the CWC (Child Welfare Committee) sent an eight-year-old boy to our children’s home. The boy told us, “My father was a police officer and a terrorist came and killed him and my mother. They tried to kill me, but I escaped. Now I’m an orphan.” We took his story at face value and comforted him and prayed with him and all. After three months of working with him at the children's home we put him in school. After six months he came to me and said, “Uncle, in my life I’ve made some big mistakes. In school I learned that a man who admits his mistakes is the bravest man of all.”

So I asked him, “What’s on your heart?”

He said, “I lied to you. The story I told you about my parents is not true. My father is actually a hawker selling snacks in the railway station and my mother is a housewife.”

I said, “You’re a brave young man to tell me this. But why did you tell me the other story before?”

He said, “I was afraid that if I told you I had run away from home you would send me back. I ran away because I didn’t want to go to school. But now I want to go home.”

We rejoiced at this development and we went to his village with him. His family was thrilled to see him, because they thought he was lost forever or had been killed or used for body parts. They couldn’t believe it, and we seemed like angels to them. We explained that they needed to prepare all the proper documents for government approval of his return. So within two days they collected all the documents and we got to enjoy the great moment when the family was reunited. His mom cried and the boy cried and we all rejoiced at the Lord’s kindness.

**A Lost Boy**

About eight months ago a six-year-old boy went to a very big market with his mother. While the mother was busy buying things, her son got lost in the crowd. He started crying and said he had lost his mother, but people didn’t help him.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Somehow he ended up at the railway station and started to beg. Some people gave him a little money, so he boarded a train and ended up in Varanasi. From Varanasi, the people at the Help Line[[23]](#footnote-23) found him and referred him to the CWC (Child Welfare Committee) who referred him to our children’s home in Varanasi. When they counseled him, they found that he came from Bihar (a different state), so we had to follow special interstate rules. Restoring lost children to their families is not easy. The Varanasi CWC needed to work with the Patna CWC, who contacted the Patna children’s home, who took him in. He told us his village name and parents’ name, which was all the information he knew.

We had never heard of the village he was from so we searched on the Internet and found it: a full day’s journey from our home in Patna. That village, though, had a police station nearby. We contacted the police there and told them we had a lost boy who had come through the government CWC and we needed help. We gave them the boy’s name and village.

The police contacted a family who said, “Yes, we have lost a son by that name.” But it turned out this boy was not their son! This was a different lost boy with the same name as another lost boy from that village. We talked with the boy some more, and he told us the name of the school his older sister attended. We passed that information on to the police and they went to the school and then located the boy’s actual parents. They then made arrangements for us to talk with the parents by phone.

We explained to them the procedure they needed to follow to come and claim their son – to bring proof of identity and a recommendation from the village chief and the local police. They brought all that documentation to the Patna CWC. We brought the boy there, and he was restored to his family.

Thankfully we can network well with the police and CLC leaders and partners in various places. That enables us to help more children. To physically go and search for all the families and make all the connections ourselves would require huge expenses and investment of time.

**A Beaten Runaway**

A sixth-grade boy ran away from school because his teacher had beaten him. He didn’t want to go home and tell his parents about the beating, out of fear that his parents would also scold him for what he had done wrong. He took a train from Darbhanga and ended up in Patna railway station, over 100 miles away. After some time, he realized he would be better off back at home. The Help Line received a call about him and sent him to the Patna CWC, who reported him to our children’s home. We did counseling with him and he gave us family phone numbers and other important information. We called his older brother, and his family filed a case against the school and the teacher because his teacher had beaten him.

The school authorities and the boy’s family had been trying to find him, so they were very relieved when we called. We let them know he was safe with us and if they came with all the needed documents, they could take him home. The head of the education department came personally to our children’s home and interviewed him. He explained that the rules forbid a teacher beating a student and promised it wouldn’t happen again. We praise God that we could reunite this boy with his family.

**An Unwanted Child**

We have had a few cases of children whose parents didn’t want their child back. In 2011 we rescued a boy about nine years old from the railway station. We took him to our children’s home and informed the CWC and the police in our city. We gave him all the usual medical tests[[24]](#footnote-24) and found no serious diseases, but one of his eyes was damaged, so he couldn’t see properly. After about three months of counseling with him, we learned his home address.

We learned that his father had left the family, then his mother had married another man. This stepfather used to beat the boy for no reason except that he didn’t like him. So the boy often ran to the railway station.[[25]](#footnote-25) We learned that his village was just six miles away, so we took him to his house. His mother was very happy to see him. We thought, “Now our job is finished.”

But then his mother started to cry and said, “Sir, I humbly request that you take my son with you. Because if you leave him, tomorrow or the next day he’ll leave again and go to the railway station. This is the nineteenth time he has run away! So please take him with you.”

We said, “The boy has a right to be with his mother. Why won’t you take him?”

She said, “My husband isn’t home. He doesn’t like my son, and he’ll beat him again. I can’t bear to see that.”

So we informed the CWC of the situation and the CWC said, “OK, you can keep him.”

Then last year (a little more than four years later), the stepfather died. The mother came to us and said, “Now there’s no problem; I’d like to have my son back.” So he was finally restored to his mother.

**A Recent Runaway**

When Govinda was 13 years old, the Help Line found him at Patna railway station. They referred him to the CWC who referred him to our home. I began to counsel him, spend time with him, and ask him some questions. He shared that he had run away from home, but not because of any problem with his parents or family. While he was riding his bicycle, he accidentally hit an old woman and injured her. He got scared and didn’t know what to do. He thought, “If I go home, my parents will get beaten and my village will have big problems.” So he threw the bicycle away and fled, eventually ending up at a railway station far from home.

I asked if he had a phone number or a way to contact his family. He was illiterate and had never been to school, and he didn’t know any phone numbers. But he knew the name of his home village, near Gaya, about 60 miles from Patna. We have partners working in Gaya. So I contacted our partner, and told them the story, including the name of the boy and his village.

When I said the name of the village, our partner recognized it and said, “I know that village very well. I’ll visit there soon and see what I can find.” The very next day he visited Govinda’s family and talked with his parents. He told them “Your son is in Patna, safe and sound. He’s at the children’s home run by this organization.”

We talked to the parents by phone and explained the situation. We said, “Govinda is here and we want to have him return home. We just need you to bring the right documents and we’ll go through the procedures with the Child Welfare Committee to get your son back to you.” Another lost son was reunited with joyful parents.

**Partnership in Restoration**

Whenever a child goes missing, their parents need to file a report with the police, giving them basic information about the child. When we find a child, we check with the police to see if they have information about a missing child that matches the description of the child we have found. We also post on the web the names and photos of the children at our children’s home. If someone has lost a child, they can check the web to see if we have found their child. We work with the police, the CWC and government agencies in this process. We have good rapport with them. They know we are followers of Christ who care about the welfare of the children. This is part of our witness within the culture.

When we connect with a child’s family that’s not too far away, we go visit the child’s parents in person. In Govinda’s case our partner in Gaya district visited his parents. We have partners in almost all the districts in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. We don’t pay our partners. We train them, equip them, and fellowship with them. They consider this more valuable than money.

When a child gets returned to their family, we connect the family with our partner in the area. If we don’t have a partner in the area, our nearest leader will visit them and pray for them. So two kinds of interaction continue. First, loving contact with the family to follow up with the child. This enables us to see how the child is being treated and diminish the likelihood of him running away again. Second, both the child and our partner or CLC leader share the good news with the family. In this way, many families have accepted Christ. In Govinda’s case, his whole family started to attend the church pastored by our partner.

**Railway Work to Slum Work**

The railway platform in Patna has 200-250 children living on it. Every day, three to five new children come to the platform. When we analyzed our data to see where these railway children came from, we found that a high percentage of them came from the slums.

One time we helped a boy get back to his family in the slum near Patna railway station, and a week later we saw him on the platform begging again. That really disappointed us. We thought, “If we only work with the children on the platforms, this effort won’t succeed.” So we started working in the nearby slum and counseling the parents. We told them, “Your children are going to the railway station, a very dangerous area, and getting addicted to bad habits damaging their bodies.”

Sometimes the problem is simple neglect, but some parents send their children to do jobs like petty sales at the railway station. We teach them about the Child Labor Act[[26]](#footnote-26) and the punishment for parents who send their children to work at outside jobs: they could go to prison. We do it lovingly and try to advise the family for their benefit. We also conduct many awareness programs in the slum on an ongoing basis. As a result fewer children now come to the railway station from the slum.

When we do an awareness program, it lasts for just one hour. We put up a loudspeaker and invite people; usually 100-200 people gather. We use posters and include issues of hygiene, effects of smoking on the body, and awareness of the dangers of alcohol, glue sniffing, and child labor. People don’t like to be lectured, so we use drama and pictures to share the information. We also do skits about child rights and the value of education.

**Serving in the Slums**

When we go to a slum, we first meet the children and gather them together. We listen to them and find out about their needs and their desires. Then we see if there’s some way we can help. If they want to study, we begin to teach them at our literacy center there. They always enjoy games, so we help them play games. Along with the games we teach lessons related to good values. We also address issues of cleanliness and teach them about hygiene.

The parents in the slums are mostly illiterate, with a lot of child marriage including forced marriages. Sometimes the parents fear we’ll misguide their children, so we interact with the parents to help them understand what we’re doing, and allay their fears. We clarify that we haven’t come to mislead their children but to guide them on a good path. We tell them about children’s rights and education. Because the parents are illiterate, they tend to not value education and they sometimes force the children to work. Besides telling them about the Child Labor Act, we explain that for children to grow up healthy, they need time for study and play and sports.

We recently held a painting program for the slum children and invited the police and government officials to come and see the creative paintings the children had done. The officials were very glad to see the children creating paintings instead of committing crimes on the street. We have a drama team of about 15 young people from the slums, from ages six to sixteen. They perform dramas in the streets and sometimes in government places. This has been very well received.

We have organized a football (soccer) club with some of the teenagers in the slum near the railway station. It’s now a recognized football club with a good reputation. Some of the players are still in school and some of them have jobs, but in the evenings they come to the field and play football. Along with football, we give them moral teaching. All of the football players have left behind their bad habits – smoking and taking drugs and so on. If any of them are caught smoking or using drugs, they get released from the team. If they apologize and promise not to do it again, they are accepted back onto the team. This shows God’s grace. We have a sports coach who comes from another city to help out. When he’s not around, our local staff does the coaching.

We also pray and sing songs with the slum children, but there is no pressure to participate in any of the spiritual activities. It’s entirely optional. We’ve never heard any child say they didn’t want to be part of the prayer time.

We’ve not experienced any problems with our slum work because of different religions. Some of our staff come from other religious backgrounds. Legally no one can force any religion on children in India or try to convert them. Yet we have freedom to practice our own religion and to live out the good news.

**Children’s Rights and Education**

In our awareness programs in the slums, we tell people about children’s rights.[[27]](#footnote-27) We try to help people understand that basic food and clothing are fundamental human rights for a child. The provider may be their own parents, a government agency or a children’s home. The four basic rights of children are:

1. Right to survival

2. Right to protection

3. Right to development

4. Right to participation.

Education is viewed as a subset of the right to development. In addition to these basic rights, we also know specific articles of the UNCRC related to children’s rights. This helps us when we talk with the police about a specific case. We can reference the relevant articles as we encourage them to take appropriate action on behalf of the children.

Many children drop out of school because their parents are illiterate. They can’t get help with their homework, and their teachers punish them for not doing it. As this keeps happening, eventually the children decide they would rather stop going to school than keep getting punished every day. Illiterate parents often don’t see much value in education. They often think, “If I keep this child at home, they can help with the younger children. Then I can go work and earn a living.” They also sometimes have the older children help them with their job.

Our literacy center in the slum provides a basic education for children roughly six to ten years old. The center works with them for three to six months to prepare them to go to school. Our teachers teach them in a kind way, including using games and songs. When the children are ready, our teacher then goes to a nearby school and tells the headmaster: “I have some children I want to enroll in your school. If you need a letter from our organization we can provide that.”

In 2015, in each city where we have children’s work we prepared and sent an average of 50 children to formal school. Along with that, we keep encouraging the parents about their children’s rights. We teach them: “For right now you may not have them working at a job, but if they study, they can get a much better job in the future and have a better life.”

For teenagers, after their education class, we conduct counseling and hygiene classes for girls. Many in the slums have very poor hygiene, which leads to a lot of infections and diseases. After attending the counseling and hygiene classes, the girls clean their personal living spaces and teach and encourage those around them to do the same. This diminishes the incidence of various diseases. We now have a girls’ team networking in the slum who have moved to the next slum to do the awareness program. The slums where we do these programs have around 1200 families each.

**Impact on Church Planting**

Our work in the slums has had a positive impact on establishing worshiping communities. When we first started serving in the slums, we focused on children and teenagers. Then we started a CLC, which now has a broader impact.

After six months one worshiping community started directly through the CLC in that slum. A woman had been healed of a sickness, and wanted to hold a prayer meeting in her house. We started the prayer meeting in her courtyard. People started to come because they were curious to see what was happening. Many who attended received healing and other blessings. Then the group began having weekly meetings with between 10 and 15 people.

When the group grew to 25 people, they didn’t have room for more people, so they started another meeting in a different house. (People in the slums don’t have big houses.) We also have a youth worship center and three worshiping communities in that slum. We plan to establish more worshiping communities there, so more people can come to know Christ.

**Rescue Work**

With so many vulnerable children, human trafficking is a huge issue in India, and our work includes restoring children rescued from abuse and human trafficking. Many children get trafficked from Nepal to Bihar. Gorakhpur is on a direct route from Kathmandu to Varanasi, so it has become a crossroads for human trafficking.



While we interact deeply with the rescued children, we don’t directly rescue them. Anti-human trafficking involves uniquely high-risk work for which we don’t have the capacity. When we find that a case involves human trafficking, we report it to the police. We also have staff serving on the government committee in Gorakhpur. This group helps address policy matters and increase cooperation related to human trafficking.

**Conclusion**

We believe God gives children as a gift and a blessing to the next generation. We long to see as many children as possible have opportunities to reach their God-given potential. This includes opportunities for nourishment, education, freedom from addiction, healthy family life, and a saving relationship with their Heavenly Father. We can’t save everyone, but we do what we can with the resources we have to see God’s Kingdom planted and transform those most in need. God has opened great doors for service and we believe he intends to do even greater things.

**Chapter 8. Breakthrough in Urban Areas**

When we wanted to begin work in one of the large slums in Delhi, we contacted the leader of the slum area. She was very anti-Christian but her daughter was very sick. So we said, “We’d like to pray for her; is that okay?” We prayed and her daughter was healed. That supernatural intervention touched her heart. God used it to open the door for our work. This woman became a believer and became one of our leaders. We asked her, “Why don’t you lead the work here?” We now have a viable worshiping community in that slum.

Delhi is the seat of power for India, the world's largest democracy. It’s a rapidly developing urban center, and among the five most populous cities in the world.[[28]](#footnote-28) As one of the world’s oldest continually inhabited cities, Delhi currently faces the dual pressure of development and ever-increasing population. India’s urbanization stands at 40 percent, predicted to soon reach 50 percent. The country has 497 cities with a population over 100,000, including 46 cities with more than a million people each.[[29]](#footnote-29)

As God blessed the movement among the Bhojpuri and we shared with others about that work, some people gave us this challenge: “All your ideas work in the village but they won’t work in the city.” When I led seminars in Western countries, I could see people thinking, “It won’t work here.” With this challenge added to the statistics on rapid urbanization, I thought: “I want do something to reach the urban areas. But how do I start? Relocate to Delhi? That’s not what God wants.”

**First Steps Toward Delhi**

I often travel through Delhi in transit to somewhere; I land there at all kinds of hours. So I started to pray about the challenge of this great city. One day as I was having breakfast at a hotel in Delhi the Lord said: “How about eating breakfast with someone, to talk about it?”

I thought, “That’s a good idea.” So I asked the hotel where I was staying, “Since I’m a regular here, would you allow me to invite one guest to join me for breakfast?” They agreed, so I started to mentor people over breakfast when I was in town and we would talk about disciple making.

For me, considering Delhi felt like David standing before Goliath: with no direct experience yet hoping to overcome the giant. So I started by just picking up our “five smooth stones.” Around this time, God introduced me to Prakash, who wanted to work specifically in Delhi. He didn’t want to continue what he had been doing with youth, so I said, “How about starting something new?”

He said, “Okay. I’ll recruit some more people.”

I had only asked God for one person and it turned out to be a lot of people! The group Prakash gathered came up with the idea of offering a seminar with me as the speaker. Four or five people came forward at the end of this seminar and I talked to others. I met a lot of people, but I had nothing to show them about *how* to do urban work.

At that point I told Prakash “I think you’re ready to lead our work in Delhi. If you’re willing, resign formally from your current role and I’ll take you through an "unlearning process" as you’ll probably need to let go of some of your previous ministry patterns.”

By then we had been working with railway children for four years in other cities, so we felt confident about working with railway children. But we discovered that a lot of organizations already worked with railway children in Delhi. So we decided to focus on a different area.

A slum nearby had more than 800 children and we thought, “Can we shape these people?” So we contacted the leader of the slum, the woman whose story we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

At the same, I mentored Prakash into a new model of leadership. I exposed him to new principles and he became very excited. He absorbed a lot from me and started mentoring others.

While still negotiating the details of urban work, we started two worshiping communities in Delhi. We handed those over to local leaders and they continue to grow.

**Urban versus Rural**

Urban work differs from rural work in many ways. Rural work is community based, with more socially homogeneous groups, so in one way it’s much easier. Urban work tends to be fragmented and disconnected. Most people aren’t local; they have arrived from villages or other states, so the community has many layers to consider.

In rural areas, you often meet the same people in the same places, and change occurs slowly. Even when people move away, their families remain. Cities are more transient. In urban work, when someone moves, they disappear; the whole family relocates. We had to overcome this major challenge.

**Prakash's Steps toward CPM in Delhi**

When I began doing ministry in 1991 I did all kinds of things: street preaching, crusades, everything possible. Then somebody told me: “To really do ministry you have to go to seminary to get trained.” So I went to seminary, and came back more confused.

I had a burden for youth, and was involved in youth ministry for the next nine years. We later did a survey and learned that the majority of India is young people: 35 percent of the population is under 15 years old, 54 percent is under 24 and 60 percent is under age of 30. Back then I didn’t know that; I just had a burden for them.

In those days, when I reached young people, I encouraged them to go to a church. But the churches weren’t ready for those new disciples and those new disciples weren’t ready for the culture of the church. So they would go once or twice and then drop out.

They loved the fellowship we would have once in a while. And I wanted to do something to keep them growing in the Lord, but I had no idea of “What’s next?” While I was wrestling with that I met Victor John.

God had planted a vision in Victor’s heart to see a Church Planting Movement in Delhi. Hearing his vision brought the clarity I had been looking for. He shared this vision with several people in Delhi, and I also began to spread the vision. I thought I would join something that was already happening but Victor said, “No, you start something new in Delhi.” As we continued meeting to discuss this, our group became larger. Soon a team of four people was built to start urban work in Delhi.

This was a huge challenge, but we felt: “Better to try and fail than to not try.” We remembered the story of David and Goliath, how David drew confidence from what God had already done in giving him victory over the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:34-36). In a similar way, we remembered what God had done among the Bhojpuris. So we took up the challenge of applying CPM principles in the very different urban context. We saw, more than ever, that victory comes from complete trust in God.

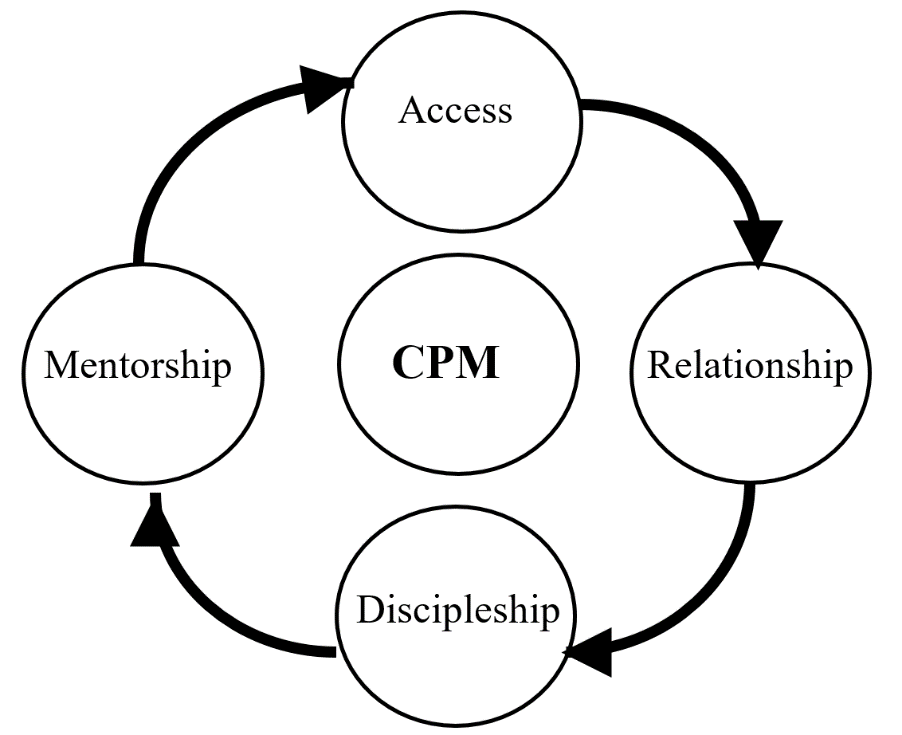
We began with prayer and research, which worked together. Prayer guides the research and gives wisdom to interpret and apply the results of the research. Each group and area is unique. Research reveals vital information about people’s main issues of concern and corresponding points of potential access. Meanwhile prayer prepares the way, and prepares the workers.

Our research showed young adults to be the most strategic group to prioritize. First, they are more than 60 percent of India’s population. Second, youth have the spending capacity. Advertising for any product targets young adults. Whatever they want to succeed becomes successful. We thought, “Why not make use of this dynamic for the Kingdom?”

To begin creating awareness, we held an introductory meeting in Delhi. At this meeting, we introduced the concepts of disciple making and CPM to the 25 young people who attended.

Our process aimed to impact three groups of people:

1. *Equip the interested.* When people show interest, we quickly begin equipping them.
2. *Empower the initiators.* We immediately empower those who are starting something, so that they can lead others.
3. *Engage the stayers.* We fully engage those who stay longer in a given location.

**

*First comes access, then building relationship.*

*This leads to discipleship, then mentoring and multiplication.*

**Focus on Urban Youth**[[30]](#footnote-30)

God is a God of generations, not simply two-year plans. This perspective allows us to walk with urban youth through the passages of life. We help them see the bigger picture of God’s work: not only within them, but in their entire families and networks, for now and for the generations to come.

In 2009, after much research by our urban ministry team, our Urban Youth Ministry took up the challenge to introduce Jesus to this generation of urban youth. Our research showed that the fast-paced lifestyle and rapid development of the city had fostered a number of serious social problems, including depression, suicides, rapes, divorce, juvenile crimes, murders, broken families, and immoral relationships. We wanted to prepare youth, who are vulnerable to such evils, to become a responsible generation.

We aimed to equip urban youth as effective leaders and disciple makers. To accomplish that, we focused on starting a movement among the youth, to reach the unreached in their communities. The Urban Youth Ministry extended the pre-existing model pioneered among the Bhojpuri from a rural to an urban context.

**Action Steps**

Our research found huge numbers of young people migrating to Delhi for study and other reasons. Many faced loneliness, isolation, stress, identity crisis, and culture shock. They had a hard time coping with these things and often engaged in high-risk behaviors. They would frequently turn violent or withdraw into themselves. Many came from troubled homes and families, making it hard for them to succeed in life. Without a support system encouraging and challenging them, they tended to float through life without any ambition or skills.

We concluded that the youth needed counseling and group support. Attempts to start a regular conversation always met with the response: “I don’t have time.” But through counseling they started hanging out and wanting to talk. Counseling became a tool for reaching young people. It met a need and helped us start worshiping communities among them.

We opened a counseling center at a nearby mall, where over 1700 young people have visited annually since it opened. Through counseling, we began support groups to address the issue of isolation. These functioned as evangelistic pre-discipleship groups, which resulted in breakthroughs.

In subsequent years we started a skill development program, English courses, and a tutoring center for weaker students. These helped us gain additional access to young people. The Counseling Center and the Urban Youth Ministry Centers became our most effective access points in Delhi outreach.

**Holistic Outreach**

Along with Community Learning Centers (described in chapter 4), Urban Youth Ministry Centers (UYMC) serve as key components of our strategy to reach the urban youth of India. The UYMCs first began in Delhi and have since opened in other major cities in India.

In light of urban youths’ unique problems and issues, simply sharing the good news with them doesn’t touch their situation. A typical worship service with preaching also doesn’t address their needs or perspectives.

Urban Youth Ministry Centers (UYMC) meet felt needs by providing help in times of trouble, career guidance programs, tuition assistance and skill training. They also give a unique place for young people to gather and start meaningful relationships. This provides access to the youth and allows us to find persons of peace (Luke 10). This strategy had already proven effective among the Bhojpuri. Since people in urban areas often have little free time, we have found small gatherings (non-conventional worshiping communities) very effective because of increased flexibility.

**Initiating CPMs in Delhi**

In 2009, we started two CLC projects in Delhi and planted three worshiping communities. The following year we began more CLC projects in three other locations. Political leaders and heads of localities inaugurated the projects, and many medical professionals came forward to support our initiatives. We also started working with colleges, which opened doors for training many young people.

In December 2009, 50 leaders and pastors attended a CPM seminar, which introduced the concept of CPM and shared a burden for the unreached in Delhi. This led to 50 training programs to facilitate and accelerate the CPM process in Delhi. We trained many leaders who were already involved in ministry, but had no idea how to reach out to people. Many of them led stagnant congregations of just 20 or 25 members and thought, “I guess this is as good as it gets.” We trained them in more effective outreach and they now have hundreds of young people in their churches.

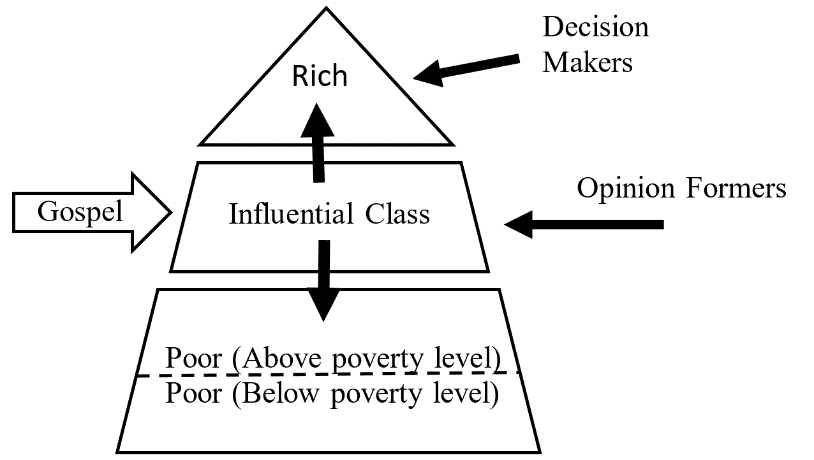
As a result of these trainings many people got involved in church planting. We also worked with other organizations to conduct several leadership trainings. These trainings equipped staff and pastors of many diverse faith-based ministries and churches in CPM principles. Attendees learned how to raise up new leaders and equip disciple-making disciples.

**Three Focus Groups**

We focus on reaching three major groups in Delhi: middle class, migrants and the marginalized. These groups make up more than 90 percent of the city.

India has an emerging **middle class** of about 300 million people. Often young urbanites, they are educated, affluent and influential. Reaching this group calls for new forms of worship, fellowship, discipleship and large-scale leadership development.

Looking from a strategic perspective the country has a few elite people (decision makers), while the middle class are the *opinion* makers. The elite invest money but the middle class decide *where* they will invest the money. The elite set up industry while the middle class decide *where* to set up the industry and where the work force will come from. So India’s middle class is very influential – not only for the elite class but also for the lower classes. That’s why we believe the good news has to penetrate the middle class, so we started a major focus there. We started this work through counseling and mentoring. Counseling became an instant hit and an effective tool for evangelism. Our urban youth focus is part of our effort to reach the middle class.



Second, we began to focus on **migrants**, because Delhi is full of migrants, and when people move to Delhi they have a lot of issues and struggles, including challenges in employment. Reaching this group required a different approach than reaching the middle class. We helped migrants get identity cards and find employment through vocational training. We also showed them how to use government facilities for assistance.

We started two kinds of CLCs in Delhi. The semi-urban CLCs serve slum areas or marginalized/migrant areas, called “villages.” These semi-urban CLCs function almost like CLCs in rural areas. The urban CLCs focus more on counseling, career help, employment, and job placement. They include educational-related information and skill development programs for young people. We had learned from our survey that many people had education but lacked vital skills. So we focused on developing soft skills: interpersonal skills, communication skills, goal setting, and emotional intelligence. We teach these skills to undergraduates, those already employed and those seeking better jobs.

After we started this urban work, the government published a survey validating what we had done. It showed that due to lack of practical skills only 33 percent of all graduates in India are employable. God had already pointed us to this need ahead of time.

Third, we focused on the **marginalized**, which make up another 30 percent of the population living in urban slums and on streets. Our work among them includes the kinds of slum work described in previous chapters. Things such as awareness programs, encouraging children’s education and assisting adults to get national identity cards so they can be employed.

We started work among all these groups simultaneously, but our major focus was urban youth and the middle class. That began yielding results in all the sectors.

**Flourishing!**

The urban work became very successful for the following reasons. First, because we had a proven model working among the Bhojpuri. We applied CPM principles and used access to bless people and look for a person of peace, who then became the key to reaching their network of relationships.

Second, God helped us do research and prayer and move in the right direction to learn effective means for access. Urban access approaches clearly needed to be different than rural ones.

Third, we didn’t wait for people to come to us. We actively reached out to people. Through the counseling work we went to schools and colleges. We gave awareness programs there on relevant subjects like child abuse, sexual abuse, and career options. These programs found a warm reception among the young people.

Most of the Christian youth with whom we connected felt unappreciated in their churches. They wanted to do something useful, but the churches just wanted them to keep attending regularly. We told them: “You can serve in many places; not only in the church. You can take initiative to reach out, rather than just waiting for opportunities to come along.” They really liked that, and some of them started fellowships.

For example, one nursing student started a fellowship in her nursing institution. Some young men started a group at their BPO (Business Processing Outsourcing – call center). We had no set model for what an urban church should look like. We had people starting worshiping communities in cafes and malls and all kinds of places.

The youth really liked these creative approaches, so we created a WhatsApp[[31]](#footnote-31) group with all kinds of resources. We wanted to connect well with the youth. Since they used Facebook and WhatsApp and hung out in cafes and malls, we used those means to connect with them.

At the same time we trained and equipped pastors and leaders who took ownership of the new model and began doing very effective work. We used a multifaceted approach because abundant sowing brings abundant reaping.

God has built our team and brought much fruit. In the past six years we have seen a couple of thousand worshiping communities planted in Delhi. I won’t try to cite an exact number, but we know the groups have multiplied to the 5th and 6th generation. These fellowships reach groups as well as individuals.

Both the group and individual approach have borne great fruit in Delhi. In both cases finding a person of peace is key. If I find one person who’s open, I want to help them view their workplace or school as their harvest field. So that person of peace begins reaching a group of their contacts. These urban “communities” are completely different from rural communities, yet the good news is spreading among them.

**Breakthrough among Drug Addicts**

Our work among drug addicts took place in an area close to the border of Haryana. The area had many small-time criminals and drug addicts. People would get addicted to drugs then get involved in crime to fund their drug habit.

Victor George was among the pastors who came to us for training. It took six months for him to unlearn some things and learn new patterns. Then he started connecting with people in this area through a CLC. He found many parents upset and sad because their children had gotten involved in crime and drugs. He started reaching out to these addicts and criminals – counseling them and loving them.

God did amazing things through his work. I had never before seen someone come out of drug or alcohol addiction without going through some sort of detox program. But it happened consistently through Victor George’s work, although he was not a professional counselor. Through counseling and prayer alone, he baptized 65 former addicts and criminalsin the first two years. A huge breakthrough! With minimal facilities and very little investment, God used him in a special way to reach these people.

Victor George became a model for his whole Baptist denomination. People started learning from him and asking: “How do you do that? How do you gather people?” He shared how God accomplished these amazing things. God used him powerfully for four years – the last four years of his life. In 2015 he passed away from kidney failure. He had started 15 churches before his death, and those he reached still carry on the ministry. By God’s grace some of the addicts who came to faith now lead the churches.

We don’t claim this work as ours, but we do what we can to help. The important thing is not whether or not someone belongs to our organization. We celebrate the huge breakthrough among drug addicts and criminals and the church planting among them, which still continues.

**Release from Drug Addiction**

Dhaval\* was a drug addict and a local criminal in his area of Delhi. His life was spiraling downward. He felt hopeless to overcome his addiction. Then he entered a counseling center and met one of our leaders. After much prayer and counseling he gave his life to Christ. Today, after being discipled by our leaders, Dhaval has started a church among his family and friends. He has also become a powerful witness to other drug addicts and criminals in his neighborhood.

**Challenges**

We have had some major challenges and setbacks in urban work. First, many organizations and people came to trainings thinking we would give them financial assistance. We said, “No, we’re trying to help you serve effectively.”

Some of them could not understand and started complaining: “These guys don’t help financially, they only give training!”

We explained: “We’re not a funding agency. We can’t give you money.”

Second, urban people often have a lot of transitions, and frequently relocate. We might only have two or three years to impact a person before they move away. When we start a church in a rural village, people don’t generally move away without some special reason. The village is their home. But in an urban area, people often move around. Maybe to pursue higher studies, to take a better job somewhere else or to get married. They are always on the move.

That could be seen as a setback: we prepare people then after a while they move away. They did well, but then they left. So as we work among urban youth, we can’t always count how many people we have. At the same time, this mobility can become an advantage. Wherever these people go they can start something new. They spread the good news and the CPM concept wherever they move to next.

A third kind of challenge has come from traditional churches. For example, we trained a girl from a traditional church who started six groups within a few months. Then, in about half a year, those six groups became eight groups. At that point she came to the attention of her pastor, who completely absorbed her ministry. Her church considered it a big deal to have eight groups get launched. But out of eight groups they could only maintain two churches. And now that girl no longer does disciple making at all. She completely lost her passion for this when the church people gave her honor and status. We consider that a setback – not because she doesn’t work with us, but because she no longer does the great work she could have done to make disciples and launch groups of new believers.

A fourth challenge: sometimes pastors, when they became “successful,” felt satisfied and lost interest in seeing the good news spread. Some of the pastors we taught about CPM felt very happy when their churches got to 200 or 300 members. When they reached 300 they thought, “That’s enough; no more is needed. I’ve got enough to survive,” so they didn’t continue with serious outreach. Once their church filled up, they stopped focusing on CPM.

On the other hand, we have also had some pastors who, though resistant at first, followed through very well. For example, we trained one denominational pastor who initially was not very receptive. He said, “I’m a pastor; my job is to conduct the worship service.”

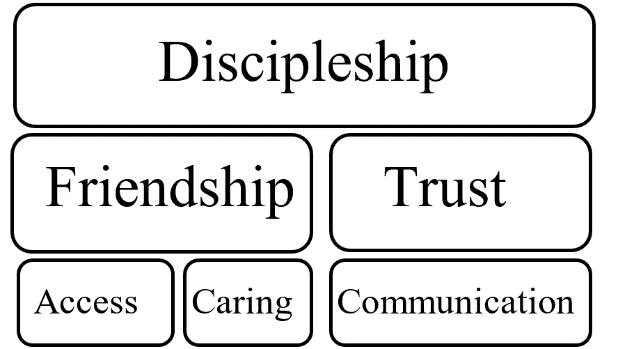
I said, “No. You’re called to make disciples.” It took six months for him to understand. But then he grasped the concept, baptized 65 new believers and started 14 churches. His ministry was transformed.

A great many leaders have had their lives changed from the way they used to think and the way they used to do things. The Lord has given greater fruit than they ever dreamed of!

**Five Guiding Principles**

We apply five guiding principles in our urban work:

1. **Context**: As already mentioned, India is urbanizing rapidly, with huge migration to the cities. Though India has historically been a nation of villages, urbanization already stands at 40 percent, predicted to soon reach 50 percent. Children under 15 years old make up 35 percent of the population and those under age 24 make up 54 percent. We serve in a way that fits each unique context and its needs.
2. **Character**: Character develops through relationships. Building relationships requires non-threatening interaction. This is essential to discipleship. After a relationship has been established, intentional discipleship can grow from it.
3. **Connections**: Partnership is a key aspect of the work’s expansion. We foster relationships with like-minded partners who co-labor with us. This facilitates and accelerates the CPM process. We also partner with other organizations in training and we organize CPM seminars in various locations. We intentionally do these trainings with groups of 25 to 30 people rather than in large gatherings. In building partnerships with local believers, we encourage them to start with whatever they already have (as in the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 with just five loaves and two fish).
4. **Creativity**: We encourage innovative tools such as counseling and other holistic approaches, with the ultimate goal of making disciples. We also provide community events and community education. Programs have included tuition assistance, counseling, music training, mentoring, tutoring, and assistance with government application processes.
5. **Custodianship**: We ensure that local urban youth leaders “own” the CPM, making the movement sustainable for the long term. We safeguard the long-term sustainability of the work by developing a culture of empowerment rather than dependency. We focus on equipping leaders among tentmakers (bivocational workers) and passing on the DNA of CPM. We also maximize the services of volunteers.

**

*Relationship is foundational to discipleship*

In order to connect well with the urban community, we train our leaders to do five things:

1. *Change/adjust your priorities.* The service we enjoy doing or have done before may not fit the needs of the people we want to reach. If we don’t adjust we might miss the opportunities God gives, like the priest did in the story of the Good Samaritan. We need to prioritize activities that move us effectively toward the goal.
2. *Change/adjust your schedule.* We need to adjust to accommodate people’s schedule. For example, it might be more convenient for us to meet someone in the morning, but they may only have time available at night.
3. *Change/adjust your expectations.* We typically want others to come to us and do things our way. We might assume, “If this person is interested in spiritual things they’ll meet my expectations.” But their perspective may be, “I’m caught up with all kinds of problems. Can somebody help me in this situation? Can somebody love me?” We need our expectations to match the realities of their life situation.
4. *Engage people before you equip them.* Discipleship begins with relationship. The first thing Jesus said to his disciples was just, “Come and see,” or “Follow me.” These guys had no idea *why* they were following Jesus. They just spent time together first, *then* he began equipping them. He first involved them, then equipped them, then empowered them.
5. *Go where people are.* Instead of waiting for people to come to us, we go where they are. This is what Jesus did: before calling us to come to him, he came to us. So instead of waiting for young people to come to church, we take the church to them.

We also train leaders to focus on four essentials that each church needs in order to reproduce itself:

1. Discipleship should multiply itself.
2. Leaders should multiply themselves.
3. Churches should multiply themselves.
4. Teachings should multiply themselves.

If any of these don’t reproduce themselves, the movement suffers.

Leaders also need to make sure the entire church planting process is:

1. *Simple*. Not something complicated that only a few people can do. Jesus taught things that anybody can understand and follow. One of the best compliments we have ever received on our CPM teaching is: “It’s so simple!”
2. *Doable*. It doesn’t help to portray the process as something spectacular, saying things like, “For 500 days I prayed. I fasted for weeks.” Instead, in social interventions we encourage leaders to initially do something that will bring fruit in just a couple of days. That increases their faith so they can later do something with the whole community that will bear longer-term fruit. All kinds of people can plant churches. If the process is simple, educated people can do it as well as illiterate people. But if it’s complicated, only a few experts can do it.
3. *Reproducible*. Work must be done in such a way that it reproduces itself. Otherwise, everything will die with the first generation. We aim to make it so that people say, “I can do this too,” not so they say, “I could never do what you’re doing.”
4. *Sustainable*. We always aim to take ourselves out of the picture. We serve in such a way that the work won’t collapse when we’re not around. We tell leaders: “If others aren’t doing what you’re doing, it will collapse without you.” We need to equip others to do what we do. Jesus didn’t create dependency; he gave his disciples authority. We don’t want to do anything that creates dependency on us. Jesus is the bridegroom; we’re just his friends. The best man helps out until the wedding but he doesn’t go on the honeymoon! People need to depend on Jesus from day one.

**Dynamics in Other Cities**

In Delhi we started both the urban work and the youth work. Then these expanded to other cities, like Kolkata, Lucknow, Jaipur, and Gorakhpur. There we reached out as we had done in Delhi.



We tried a similar approach in Patna but it didn’t succeed. Patna, as an educational center, has hundreds of hostels in the city for young people. So we tried to develop a group of young workers to go talk to young people in their hostels. But we couldn’t find educated young people willing to do that ministry. Everyone seemed more concerned for their own careers.

In Patna we developed outreach that related to the young people there. If they liked to play sports, we would provide someone who could coach them. If they liked music, dance or drama we provided somebody who could help with that. In the beginning these things started slowly, but following our simple, reproducible patterns, these works soon took off.

In Kolkata we started English courses, and through those we slowly reached and discipled 150 youth. Over the next few years, additional English courses opened doors to establish worshiping communities in many neighborhoods. We now have planted about 20 worshiping communities in those areas and leaders are taking initiative in planting groups all over the city.

**Conclusion**

Our God is the God of urban areas as well as rural areas. Revelation 21:2 describes the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” He is building a new city for the redeemed. No matter where we live, if we apply God’s principles and commands, he will work. The Great Commission starts by saying “All authority in heaven and earth...” That covers *every* kind of place on earth: urban or rural. The fruit we have seen in urban church planting shows that God delights to work in all kinds of places. He has helped us overcome the unique challenges of the city: busyness, short attention spans and high mobility. In spite of obstacles, the good news is penetrating and changing the cities.

**Chapter 9. Breakthrough Beyond the Bhojpuri**

Some people have asked, “Why don’t you stick with reaching the Bhojpuri? There are so many of them! 150 million[[32]](#footnote-32) is a *huge* number of people! Why don’t you just stay there until that job is finished?”

My first response is the pioneering nature of gospel work. Doing apostolic/pioneering work involves always looking for places where the good news has not taken root: looking for opportunities to make Christ known where He is not yet known. That’s one reason we expanded our work to other language groups. We looked at the numbers of UPGs and surveyed who works where and who has no one working among them. We saw what needs to be done and we want to play a role in doing it.

Second, these various languages overlap in their usage, one with another. There’s no clear-cut demarcation: “At this line use of one language ends and another begins.” One can easily wander into a different language group. Also, believers often move because of relationships. Maybe they get married or their mother comes from a different village or an uncle offers them a job in a different area. As people in the movement have traveled or moved, the good news has traveled with them. When the good news traveled, some people came back and said, “We see God working in this other place. We would like to start a work in that area.”

So we told them, “Go ahead!”

So they came back a year later and said, “We’ve planted 15 churches there.” We were amazed and blessed, because it happened organically. There was no agenda, no preparation, and no funding. Suddenly these guys reported all these churches and asked, “What should we do now?” My concern as an apostle (a pioneer worker) was, “How can we help these new believers quickly mature and get grounded in the Word of God?”

This second factor combines relationships, overlap of language, and people moving and taking the good news with them.

Third, we started training centers, which expanded the work, both intentionally and unintentionally (more God’s plan than ours). Sometimes people from a nearby language group would come to a training and then return home and work among their own people.

A fourth reason for expansion: sometimes people have come to us and said, “We need help. Can you come help us?” We assist and encourage them as best we can.

**In a New Area**

When we move into an area, we do three things. First we do research: “Who are they? What is their background? Do they have a Bible in their language? What do they like and dislike? What is their culture like? How do they interpret various things?” Because India has so much diversity, there’s nothing here called “Indian culture.” India has 92 different cultures and more than 440 languages[[33]](#footnote-33) with several thousand dialects. We need to understand each local culture in order to communicate effectively with people. As part of our research we also find out if someone in the movement has connections: either relatives or someone they know in that particular area. In Indian villages, you can’t enter without an introduction. People want to know who are you and where you come from.

Second, we mobilize prayer. We do prayer walks in areas we want to focus on and we gather people to pray. We ask existing local Christians to join us in prayer. We want to include them as much as possible, not condemn them or accuse them of not doing anything. We ask God to provide a leader for the work – a person of peace. If we don’t have a leader we don’t start anything. When the leader is in place, other things follow.

After research and prayer we find a way to gain access to the community – how to enter the area in an easy way. We first do a baseline survey to find out the needs of the community. This helps us see if we can start an access approach such as a CLC to help us build relationships. Access approaches play a major role in connecting well with lots of people. We believe the Scripture that says, “If you sow much you will reap much; if you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly. And God makes all things grow.” These have been the key factors in moving into neighboring areas beyond the Bhojpuri.

The work began among the Bhojpuri in 1994, then spread into other languages and areas in this order: Awadhi (1999), Muslims (2002), Bengali (2004), Magahi (2006), Punjabi, Sindhi, Hindi, English (in urban communities) and Haryanvi (2008), Angika (2008), Maithili (2010), and Rajasthani (2015).

We praise God that the movement has spread in a variety of ways to different language groups, different geographic areas, multiple caste groups (within those language and geographic areas), and different religions. The power of the good news keeps breaking through all kinds of boundaries.

When we work in an area, we don’t specify “We’re only going to reach this kind of people or that language group.” We focus on language to help bypass the caste system, but we don’t try to exclude anyone. I think of the parable Jesus told (Matthew 13:47-50) about the kingdom of heaven being like a net. When you fish with a net, you catch all kinds of things and all kinds of fish. We can’t predetermine who will respond to the good news.

Some people try to focus on a specific caste group, like Brahmins or barbers or something like that. To a Westerner it might sound very systematic and strategic. But you can’t sort it out that easily. In a village of 2000 people you might have only one barber. Or if you focus on just one caste, Brahmins may speak 100 different languages. By focusing on a specific language our workers can reach all kinds of people who speak that language.

**Akash and the Awadhi**

I grew up in a non-Christian home. Since 1997, I had been very sick, vomiting blood. After seven years (in 2004), my brother-in-law told me to pray to Christ so I would be healed. I did pray to Jesus and I was healed! I came to faith in Christ through that healing, and though my family was not Christian, they were very happy, because I had finally been healed!

Then I met a leader who started a training center in my district. He invited me to join the training with seven others. All of us were Awadhi speakers,[[34]](#footnote-34) and all of us were new believers. During the training, which continued for four months, we did outreach. Then we went to different villages to share the good news. The eight of us became the team that started working in our district.

When we went to the villages, we saw people coming to faith. Whenever four or five people in a village came to faith, we started a fellowship. From 2004 to 2006 it continued like this. In the first three years, the eight of us who had been at the first training founded three house churches. I didn’t know of anyone else reaching the Awadhi at that time. After 2006, the eight of us started working separately. We all started living and mentoring people in the areas where we had started house fellowships.

I had training in electronics repair, so I returned to my home village and built relationships while doing repair work. I shared a lot of my own testimony and life; I didn’t do direct preaching. People took note of my lifestyle and seemed impressed by the testimony of my healing. Also, we used a holistic approach, though CLCs had not yet started. Among those I ministered to was my brother-in-law who had told me to pray to Christ for him to be healed. He later became a committed follower of Jesus. I had the privilege of baptizing him. Now my immediate family and my whole extended family are believers.

After 2006, another round of training started in the Awadhi area. The 12 or 13 people who attended that training all became significant leaders. From 2006-2008, two more house fellowships were planted and in 2008, we introduced CLCs. We started thirteen CLCs and added six more house fellowships. Then in just two years we added eight more fellowships for a total of 13.

By 2010 the Awadhi workers spread from the first district to many other districts. In 2009 and 2010, other organizations started coming to that area and sharing the good news as well. Some of the workers who had been with our organization became independent at that point and started their own ministries in that area.

By 2011, there were 25 house fellowships in just this one stream – almost double the previous 13. The work also spread to new areas as well. Then our main leader moved from the area to Patna to help begin work there. So after 2011, we no longer had a senior leader based in the Awadhi area.

In 2013, we moved out of the Awadhi area and continued assisting workers there whom they had trained to run CLCs. The Awadhi leaders there now continue on their own, leading self–sustaining ministries.

By 2013, we had around 150 fellowships among the Awadhi, consisting of at least five to seven believers. Twelve of the fellowships among the Awadhi are larger, with about 150 members each. But none of them use special church buildings. They just use a common building like a community center. These fellowships still continue up to the present. Some of them have become very large organizations.

Through our work in the Awadhi area, we have seen church multiplication of up to 10 generations. The average is two or three generations of churches. The initial district alone now has about 100,000 believers.

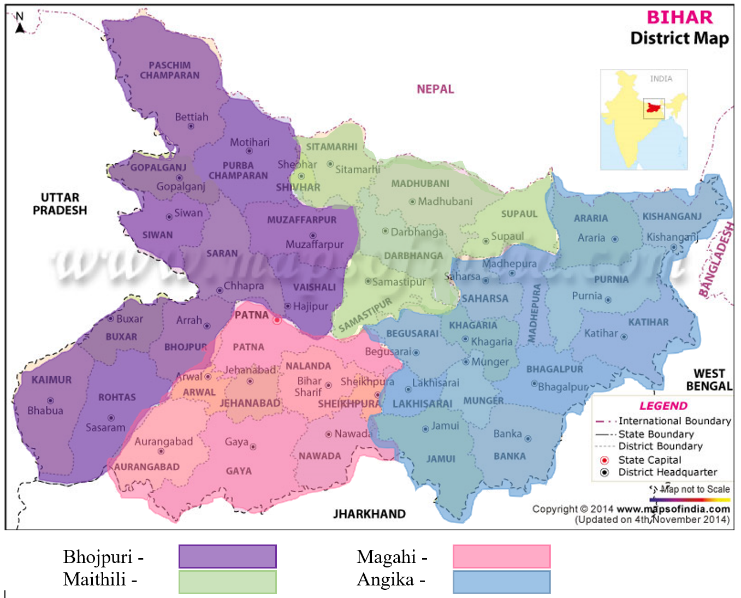
**Manoj and the Nirankari**

While I was studying at university I became friends with two sons from the potter tribe. They followed an offshoot of the Sikh religion – *Nirankari* (which means “God is shapeless”). I started sharing the good news with them, but they were very staunch followers of their religion. They didn’t want to listen to what I said about the good news. Then their father suddenly fell ill and became paralyzed. Another believer and I prayed for him continuously for a week and he was completely healed. After the healing the father said, “Every Monday we will meet here and pray.” The prayer group turned into a worshiping community among that tribe. As the message spread and people got trained, they started more worshiping communities. They now have 20 fellowships among that group.

**Bihar Beginnings**

We started working in the state of Bihar[[35]](#footnote-35) in 1995 with a relief program after a huge flood in the state. Initially leaders from Varanasi (in neighboring U.P.) went to the Bhojpuri area of Bihar and served there. When the work started becoming visible, we enlarged our office in the capital city of Patna. The primary work at that time was training, mainly helping new believers grow in Christ and get started serving the Lord. That work slowly grew and covered all the districts in the Bhojpuri-speaking areas of Bihar. Not every village was covered, but every district had at least two or three leaders whom we mentored. The work continued to gain momentum.

In 2008 I (Satish) joined this organization. I had a concern for people who are already Christians and for mainline churches. At that time, work was scattered all over, with no one to care for the believers and mentor the leaders. I said to Victor John, “We are both natives of Bihar. Why don’t we help some of the local leaders to emerge?” At that time, most leaders in Bihar worked as staff of various organizations led by people outside the area. Some of them did good work, but it was all controlled from the outside, which hindered their growth. I wanted give some local leaders the opportunity to grow and be entrusted with some of the work. So we focused some work in the Magahi-speaking area and from 2008 onward, we held Magahi conferences to strengthen the work among that group.



**Early Magahi Testimony**

Buddhism and Jainism emerged from the Magahi area. It’s a very rich area culturally, with deeply rooted traditions, many gods and goddesses, and huge temples all around. These presented a spiritual challenge to outreach among the Magahi.

*In the words of Anil:* In 1995, I had finished high school (10 grades) and two years of pre-college. I wanted to go on for higher education, but I couldn’t afford it. My parents said, “We don’t have money to give you for further studies. You should come back and help your father in farming,” so I agreed to do that.

At that time, my whole district was ravaged by Naxalite guerilla warfare. The Naxalites were a Communist insurgency that originated in the village of Naxal. Every day brought more bloodshed and criminal activity, with two private armies warring in Bihar. The high and low castes each had their own armies.[[36]](#footnote-36)

One of my uncles was very involved in criminal activities. Although he was illiterate, he was an area commander. When I went back home, he asked me to help him. In those days, our area had no phones, so people communicated by sending letters. My uncle asked me to read letters for him from other commanders and write his responses to the letters. Little by little he tried to involve me in all his activities. He taught me how to fight and make bombs and do other criminal activities. Those years were a black time in my life, as I got involved with those things. Many nights I was out, away from home, and thought, “This might be my last night alive.”

Then a local pastor came to visit my family. When he saw me, he said, “Anil, you’re wasting your life, but Jesus loves you. You’re making a lot of money, but you’re wasting your life.” I got angry and yelled at him. I sent him away but he came back again and again and said the same kinds of things. He said, “I know you want to study further and I’m running a small school. If you want, you can come help me as a teacher in my school. I’ll cover your expenses and give you some pocket money so you can study.” I said, “Thanks, but I can’t decide immediately. Give me some time to think about it.”

For the next three months, I didn’t take any action, but I had no peace in my life. I kept busy with all kinds of evil activities, but I felt something missing in my life. Finally I decided to work with this pastor. For almost two and a half years I worked with him, seeing his lifestyle. He prayed every day for other people: for the state, the district, the sick, and so on. I thought: “I’ve never seen anything like this before! Most people just pray for themselves, but this man prays for others.”

Every evening he showed the Jesus film in nearby villages. One day he said, “I’m going to the village to show the Jesus film and I have only one bicycle. There’s too much stuff to take alone.” (He had a small generator and a TV and a big VCR.) “Could you use your bicycle to help me take stuff? We can go together and get good food in the village.”

I said, “Okay. No problem.” To make a long story short, I saw the Jesus film more than 50 times. I ran the generator and the projector, and the pastor would share the good news and pray for people. But one night was very different. During the crucifixion scene, I became convicted when Jesus prayed: “Father forgive them; they don’t know what they’re doing.”

I realized, “This God is something different. In spite of all the evil things they’re doing to him, he’s praying for them and asking God to forgive them. I’m a great sinner. I’ve done many bad things in my life. Can this God forgive me also?” That thought stuck in my mind and I felt God come into my life. The pastor then mentored me and taught me about the Bible. In 2001 I accepted the Lord and got baptized, and the pastor gave me a year of biblical training. In 2003 I began doing ministry.

**The Magahi Movement**

In 2003, the movement was thriving in the Bhojpuri area. Many people accepted the Lord and were making disciples and planting worshiping communities. I (Anil) heard all kinds of testimonies and reports. I thought, “If God can work like that in the Bhojpuri area, the same God can work in the Magahi area as well. If we are available and ready to work with God’s plan, surely God will work!”

So with that understanding I started working among the Magahi. From the very beginning, God directed me through the word from Nehemiah. When he heard that Jerusalem’s wall was broken and he started weeping. God’s word spoke to me about my own people – the Magahi people. So I started praying for the Magahi area.

During those days, many others were like me: they had been involved in Naxalite activity, but then left their old lifestyle and started following the Lord. When I started serving in 2003, there were only eight mission organizations in the whole Magahi area. When I counted most recently (in 2014), there were more than 75 organizations working in the area. Most of the former fighters who had been involved in illegal activities have become leaders in God’s work.

From the very beginning of my service, God taught me and used me to mentor and guide people. Sometimes I had opportunities to counsel whole families. It helped that I had had some past field experience working with the pastor.

When I shared with Victor John that I had a vision for the Magahi, he said, “I have been praying for the Magahi for many years. I’ve been trying to find a suitable person to lead this work in the Magahi area and work toward something like the movement among the Bhojpuri. I think God has answered our prayer and you will lead this movement in the Magahi area.”

I said, “Praise the Lord. I think God is answering my prayer as well!”

My own involvement in the work continued the work in the Magahi area. The initiative had started in 1998, when the first group of people (from one family) accepted the Lord. But the real first fruits of harvest started in 2003. Before that, people said, “Bihar is a very difficult place for the good news. Nothing works there.” But a great breakthrough came in 2003.

Suddenly people became open to the good news. We could go anywhere and preach the gospel. We experienced no opposition or persecution. Even the state government showed favor toward us. We could do open air sharing. We felt, “This is God’s time for Bihar.”

That was a turning point for the Magahi people as well. Many people accepted the Lord. Now more than 500 Magahi leaders lead the movement in the Magahi area. Most of them are very mature and some of them are self-sustaining.

Many Magahi people, especially in rural areas, don’t speak Hindi. This means the lack of Magahi Scripture had left them without access to the good news. When I was in the process of joining our organization Victor told me, “We are translating the New Testament into Magahi. And you are Magahi. So you can be part of our team producing the New Testament.” In 2015 our organization published the New Testament in the Magahi language. That was a great breakthrough for Magahi speakers. Previously many people had translated one book or a few chapters of the New Testament, but none had ever completed it until that point.

I used to often talk about spiritual things with my grandfather in Hindi. He always just said, “OK, that’s fine. I hear you.” But he gave no response beyond that. After we printed the New Testament in Magahi I read to him from it and the first thing he said was, “Are you reading a book or talking to me?” He could really understand everything I was saying! That illustrated the importance of translating and publishing the New Testament in Magahi.

As we started sharing the New Testament with people, we noted the very low literacy rate. Oral learners really like to hear stories and have things read aloud. So we thought, “Let’s record the whole New Testament in audio format.” In December 2015 we finished recording a dramatic reading of the whole New Testament, which is now available for Magahi people.

As we work to overcome literacy challenges we’ve changed our training method. We used to give lectures, like a three-point sermon or classroom training. Now we use a discussion method that involves everybody. They give their suggestions and opinions and they actively participate in the learning process. We also use stories and testimonies of God’s work in other areas. We use Bible stories, pictures and audio, along with Magahi songs and local instruments. These methods enable us to overcome the challenge of illiteracy so that Magahi people can understand, memorize, and obey God’s Word.

After publishing the New Testament we published a Magahi songbook. We plan to record a CD of Magahi songs and make it available to people inexpensively, so they can hear and understand God’s message to them. The songs use the Magahi language and our distinctive Magahi musical style. The book has 25 songs, but there are many more songs not in the book. I can’t even count the number of Magahi worship songs now being sung.

At this point the movement has taken root in the Magahi area. We do systematic training for all levels of leaders, starting from the basic discipleship level. First we have the discipleship-training program, then a pioneer CPM training seminar. Next we have the CLC training program and then the Advanced Leadership Training program. We offer all these programs to emerging leaders who are interested in serving. It doesn’t matter where they serve; we are very open-handed. Our attitude is: “Here is an opportunity; these are some resources. If you need these resources, we will happily help you.”

Last month we conducted a training program in the Magahi area and many leaders came. Some gave testimony: “I’ve been blessed by this organization; the things I’m doing today I learned in this group. That’s where I learned about CLCs and the holistic approach. Because of that our work is now flourishing.”

**Kumar and the Next Magahi Generation**

I came to faith in 2003. I first heard the good news during my tenth year of school, just before graduation. I walked to school, a two and a half mile walk. Anil worked in a nearby village and one day he met me and greeted me politely. He gave me a tract and said, “I’ll come to your house in a week. Read this first and we’ll discuss it.”

After a week, Anil visited and shared with me. I didn’t like what he said and I didn’t believe it. A week later, Anil came again. We talked and he invited me to church, where he pastored. I went and after listening to the songs and the message I liked it. God did a spiritual work in my heart but I didn’t yet believe.

Anil kept meeting with me once a week and after a while I started to accept what he said. I believed: “This is the right God.” I came to faith not because of a healing or miracle. The Scripture just worked in my heart. I saw its reality lived out in the life of the pastor and the believers in the fellowship.

I was the first person in my village to believe in Jesus. Before I met Anil I used to be very tense and worried. When I worshiped gods and goddesses in my house, I never had peace in my heart. But after I began to follow Jesus, I experienced peace.

After I graduated from high school Anil told me about the organization’s training center in our province. I wanted to learn more about Jesus and more from the Bible, so Anil recommended me to the organization. I attended the training in 2004. My parents didn’t want me to go to the training. They tried to discourage me, but I was determined to go. Then when I experienced the tight schedule at the training I couldn’t stand it! So I ran away after two days, but I didn’t have peace. Then Anil came and encouraged me and convinced me it wasn’t good to run away, so I returned to the training. Praise God I had a mentor who cared about me!

I had one year of biblical training with the organization. After the training I went back to my own village to disciple my family members, but they didn’t want to believe. So I started praying for them and through prayer God gave a breakthrough. They started slowly coming to faith – my father and mother and sister and brother – and Anil baptized them. I started a fellowship in my own house in 2005.

I come from the Sadhu caste (a low caste), and my whole village is low caste. So they have experienced a lot of social pressure and oppression. When I started the fellowship in the village, our neighbors got interested. They wanted to come and sit in on the fellowship. They asked me if that would be okay and I said, “Sure!”

Our village had no school; the nearest government school was almost two miles away. Since the children in our village didn’t attend school, I started a literacy center with the organization’s help. We began serving the children in my community. The literacy center played a crucial role in advancing the work, because the parents gained confidence in me. Then I started sharing the good news with the parents.

In 2006, I was leading the fellowship I had started, but I lacked confidence. I thought, “I don’t know what to do next. I wish someone would come and advise me and encourage these people.” I wanted someone from the organization to visit, and I shared this desire with Victor John. God stirred Victor’s heart, and he himself came.

I arranged a meeting for people in the village. About 25 people came, and Victor shared with them from the Gospels and encouraged them. When Victor shared, the people felt very blessed and peaceful. They said, “This is good. We want more people to come to our village and share from the Gospels.” That also encouraged us in going to other villages to minister and share.

From among my friends I mentored five young people to accept Christ and go for training. I sent them to the training center. The training wasn’t long, and during breaks in the training they visited their villages. I encouraged them to reach their friends and relatives in various places. Whenever I went to a neighboring village I would take some of these young people with me to share. Whatever work started in a village, I handed it over to my friends in that village. I then went on to other villages to concentrate on expanding the work there.

Later in 2006, I wanted to arrange a Christmas festival in my village. I shared this with my friends, and with their support I arranged a big Christmas celebration. This was a totally new thing for the village. It was such a success that ever since then, we have had a grand Christmas celebration every year in my village. I save money for it myself, and my friends and some of the villagers also contribute. Every year about 300 people come to the celebration. They enjoy the food, the choirs and the preaching of the good news.

After the first Christmas celebration, I began going to many other villages. I started twelve fellowships in different places in 2007 and 2008. In 2008 our organization started the CLC program. I helped 25 leaders from my area to get CLC training and start CLCs in their villages. All the fellowships I started up through 2008, I handed over to leaders I had prepared.

I also started a micro-loan program in my village. We provided loans to five people in my district and five in a neighboring district. In my district all five were successful in running enterprises and fully repaid the loan. In the other district, three recipients could return only part of the loan, but the others returned 100 percent of the loan and their businesses still thrive. We also did microloans in some other places, but most of those loans never got repaid. The program succeeded best in my own area.

In 2008 I joined our organization as full-time staff in Patna. Since then I have been working as a *Sahyog*[[37]](#footnote-37)*-A-Child* supervisor, along with other responsibilities. But I continue to host the Christmas festival in my village every year, up to the present. I still have an evangelist’s heart. Whenever I have time I go back to my village and share the good news with people.

**Satish’s Among the Maithili**

We didn’t have much work in the Maithili-speaking area in 2010 when we met Baiju, a church leader in that area. He really wanted to serve his own people, but he was using old ministry paradigms and struggling. He wanted to remain independent and not compromise with any traditional outside organizations. He had his own way of doing things and he didn’t believe in holistic service, so he didn’t want to use the CLC concept. He viewed CLCs as just social work with no connection to establishing fellowships. He didn’t understand the importance of gaining access through CLCs. We kept interacting with him, though, because we saw his potential. He had his own small organization, with about 15 leaders he had mentored and didn’t want to lose. We met them, and he eventually agreed to work in partnership with us.

We had had some negative experiences in the past, in partnerships where we didn’t all entirely agree on the approach to use. So we wrote up an MOU (memorandum of understanding) with Brother Baiju, clarifying that either side could end the partnership if it didn’t work out. With that precaution in place, we began a partnership to work in the Maithili area. Baiju sometimes used the language of CLC, but he did the work his own way, and he limited his leaders to doing the projects he had for them. He called his people church planters, and didn’t like calling them community leaders or CLC leaders.

After two years of mentoring him and arguing with him, I told Victor, “This isn’t working. I don’t think Baiju understands the concepts. I think we should end the partnership.”

But Victor said, “No, let’s continue one more year and see what will happen.” In the third year Brother Baiju saw a breakthrough in holistic work that changed his mindset completely. He realized that his 15 workers had been his whole world. Suddenly, he caught a vision for having many *more* leaders, without paying them. He saw the potential for 1500 leaders.

One of the leaders from this area came and said to me: “I have come to the Lord and I have some agricultural land that I’ve been cultivating. I was advised to stop cultivating the land and go start preaching full-time. I’m confused; I don’t know what to do. What do you advise?”

I told him, “Keep sharing the good news, but don’t stop doing cultivation. Before you plant and water the field, pray over it and keep working hard. Pray for rain and pray for the field’s safety and fruitfulness. I’m confident your field will be greener and give a greater yield than your neighbor’s field. Then keep praying faithfully and working hard. And when your field gives a better yield, your neighbor will come and ask, ‘Why? What kind of seed did you plant? What kind of fertilizer did you use?’ Then you can tell him your testimony: ‘This is God’s blessing.’ That’s your evangelistic approach.”

That brother has now told his story on several occasions to several leaders. He’s now a very good farmer and a very good church planter. Brother Baiju saw this kind of fruit and saw the potential to impact his area.

We started encouraging Brother Baiju to come to the Bhojpuri conference, to see God’s work among the Bhojpuri. I had previously worked in marketing. If something worked, I would see if we could replicate it elsewhere. I applied the same strategy to this work. I said, “We have a very good strategy in the Bhojpuri movement. We know how it started and how it grew. We have some experience with this and we have seen the fruit. Let’s apply it to another language area, customize it a bit for the culture and traditions, and see if it will bear good fruit there as well.”

When we advised Brother Baiju to start a Maithili conference like the Bhojpuri conference, he asked, “Where will we get the finances for it?”

We said, “You find the support locally. We’ll pay our own expenses to come help with the conference, but we don’t want to give you financial assistance. If you go into deficit at the end, though, we’ll try to help you as much as possible.” So we gave him that much assurance and he started by faith.

He invited 150 leaders to attend the first conference. He was blessed when he saw people’s response and how they contributed. The excitement of the 150 who participated was thrilling. He said, “I will organize this conference every year. Next year we’ll plan a conference for 500, and after that thousands.”

When Brother Baiju used the old approach, his work didn’t influence many others. But when he started using a holistic approach he saw much more fruit. Suddenly other leaders wanted to be mentored by him and learn from his example.

Baiju has emerged as a key leader in Northern Bihar because of the fruit from using a holistic approach. Nobody can stop him as long as he follows biblical principles. He still has leaders reporting to him, but he has allowed many of his leaders to become independent – no longer under his direct organizational control. We mentored him; now he in turn mentors his own set of pastoral leaders. He also mentors other key leaders who have their own ministries and their own leaders whom they mentor. This chain of mentoring leaders now includes several generations.

Brother Baiju learned how to mobilize more and more people without getting directly involved with each and every one. In this way the work continues and grows in many areas at the same time. The work among the Maithili serves as a very good example of partnership.   
Everyone has the same objective and all work together toward that goal.

In a sense, our partnership with Baiju was an experiment in expanding the movement. It resulted in another breakthrough in the movement. Instead of us opening our own office with our own staff, we accomplished the same goal in a more reproducible way. God has blessed the experiment such that if our organization pulled out tomorrow, nothing would fall apart. But it’s not yet time for us to pull out, since we currently help strengthen the quality of leaders.

Brother Baiju now knows that if you train people, care for them and allow them to grow, you don’t have to control them. Money isn’t required to keep the relationship alive; the love of Christ binds them together forever. He told us, “Now I realize my mistake and I understand the CLC vision. It has given me so much fruit in my area. I can go and serve anywhere among the Maithili and take my work to every corner of the Maithili area.”

Because of the principles he has adopted, Baiju is the only successful top leader in the Maithili area today. Many other people have worked there for many years, but have not seen nearly as much response as he has seen in the past five years. He has been blessed and we have been blessed as well. In 2015 we had a great Maithili conference and in 2016 a larger conference. Now there’s no turning back. Baiju doesn’t ask for much financial support. He instead says, “I need your partnership, your guidance and mentoring always.”

The Maithili movement is still small, but it’s rolling by itself. The momentum lies not just with one leader; common people own it and are doing the work. When broad ownership starts, the movement starts.

**Baiju’s Story**

I come from a high-caste family. I had heard about Jesus, but I had no interest in him at all. A pastor used to come from a neighboring village and share, but I wasn’t interested. I said, “That’s your religion; I’m from a different religion.” Honestly, I wasn’t interested in any religion. I wasn’t even interested in my own religion. I figured, “Do good works and God will bless you.” After graduating I planned to get a good job. I thought having a good job would be great because it would bring good money and respect. So I studied until late at night to do well on my exams.

One night, which became a turning point in my life, I was studying until midnight. My wife and children were sleeping, and when I went to bed they began to shout. My wife was screaming: “Please save me! Somebody’s trying to cut me and burn me!” My son, who had been sleeping next to my wife, began screaming the same thing. They both grabbed hold of me, screaming, “Save me! Save me!”

They didn’t listen to anything I said and I couldn’t figure out what to do. I was so confused! My parents started knocking on the door, saying “What happened? What happened?” But I couldn’t get to the door because my wife and son were holding onto me. After a while my son settled down a bit, so I was able to pull my wife and get to the door. But she was still screaming so loudly that the whole village gathered. They were trying to figure out how to help, so they called the shamans to apply their healing power. The shamans did what they could, but nobody could stop her from screaming; she was in so much pain. The priest also came and couldn’t do anything.

One of the shamans said, “She’s got some physical sickness. We should call a physician.” So my brothers went and called a doctor.

The doctor checked her over and said, “There’s nothing physically wrong with her.”

So then we had a bigger problem, because nobody could figure out what was wrong or do anything to help her. My family was in a horrible state and I wondered if my wife would survive. Then I remembered the pastor from the neighboring village who used to come and share about miracles. So I told my brothers: “Go call that pastor.”

Within an hour the pastor and another brother came. He asked, “Can I pray for her?”

I said, “No.”

Then everybody in the village said, “Why are you saying ‘No’? Let him pray! Otherwise something terrible will happen!”

I said, “The priests are here. Why can’t they save my wife from this problem?”

The priests said, “No, we can’t do anything.”

I said, “If you can’t do anything to help and Jesus can help, I will go to Jesus and I will have no more involvement with you.”

They said, “OK, do whatever you want to do.” Then I allowed the pastor to pray.

He prayed, and when he said “Amen,” she immediately calmed down. The whole village was there, the doctor was there, the shamans were there, and everybody was amazed! That day I decided to follow Jesus.

I had some problems after that, but I remembered: “If God can rescue me from such a big thing he can take care of all these problems.”

One day I had this thought: “Somebody prayed for me and my whole household came to the Lord. Why don’t we also go and do this and bring peace to many other families?”

I shared this idea with my wife and she said, “This is a very good thing. We need to do this.”

I said, “This will not be easy. I have you and three children to take care of. Not everyone will like it and we’ll face some opposition.”

She said, “Whatever happens, I’m with you.”

This impressed me and prepared me to serve the Lord. My wife also went through many challenges, but I reminded her we need to trust Jesus. Sometimes she had to wear ragged clothes because we didn’t have any money to buy her clothes. But I praise God that she never complained, no matter what we went through.

Whenever I feel discouraged or struggle with issues in the work she says, “Why are you worried? Jesus is here. He’ll take care of it.”

**A Transformational Pattern of Service**

Before I met Victor John, my pattern of ministry was “If you have 25 people in your church, maintain that. If two people leave maybe two more will join. So you maintain that and focus on that; nothing else.” I had around 50 churches so I thought I was a really big guy because I had so many churches around this whole region. In those days I interacted with other leaders who refused to give freedom to their underlings. Back then my biggest struggle was when I talked with Victor: I found it very difficult to break away from my old mindset. But when I heard about the Bhojpuri movement, I felt very encouraged. I thought: “The same things could happen here and every village will have a worshiping community.” But I struggled for two years and never agreed with Victor during that time.

The turning point came in late 2013 after I visited Patna and talked with Victor. I came back home and didn’t do anything for 15 days. I just kept asking the Lord whether what Victor said was correct or whether I was already on the right track. After 15 days I felt peace and sensed the Lord directing me: I needed to listen to what Brother Victor was saying. That immediately brought a breakthrough in the whole work. We have seen unstoppable growth since then.

Previously, we would only focus on spiritual work. We also did some social work, but never focused on it. Now we do social work and reach out through that. In the past, people in the communities perceived us as “Christian workers.” But now they consider us community development workers. They treat us with respect and take advice from us and they want to participate in what we are doing. Previously I would say to people, “Do you have a minute? I’d like to talk to you,” and they would run away. Now they call us and say “Please come to my home and speak to us.” What a difference!

I used to think 50 churches was a lot. Since I met Victor and learned this new way of doing things with a CLC and aiming for CPM, I now have 350 churches and I think, “That’s not nearly enough!”

In our fellowships, the whole gathering takes place in the Maithili language: worship, message, testimonies, everything. The fellowships usually meet once a week. The day of the week varies, according to the availability of the disciples.

People are coming to Christ both individually and as families. Sometimes one person comes to faith and then brings the rest of their family; sometimes the whole family comes to faith together. Either way we see whole families coming to faith. We usually baptize people as soon as they come to faith in Christ. Although previously we experienced some negative reaction when people got baptized, these days the baptisms don’t usually trigger any problems.

The believers call themselves “Followers of Jesus.” We don’t want to get stuck with outsiders’ religious categories. We explain to people: “We’re not Christians; we’re not Hindus. We’re followers of Jesus.” We don’t say, “I’m going to church.” We say, “I’m going to a spiritual fellowship. For the sake of those outside we use a variety of different words instead of ‘church’.” The majority religious community around us has begun to accept the identity and practice of the Maithili believers.

In my earlier years of ministry, I used to think, “We will try to reach whoever will listen,” but now I focus on Maithili-speaking people. We are also reaching Maithili-speaking people in the diaspora – in different states of India. One of the Maithili CLC leaders trained another leader who runs a CLC in Punjab (over 700 miles away) among a Maithili-speaking group there. He just started that work and recently baptized three people.

We now have five generations of leaders among the Maithili who have trained other leaders and five generations of worshiping communities that have planted new communities. At the recent Maithili conference (attended by about 300 leaders), we couldn’t bring everyone from all the Maithili groups, so we invited just one or two people from each.

I have a very simple and doable ministry strategy. I currently mentor 20 people, who train other leaders who train others. They come each month for training and have ministries of their own. I also go and visit them personally. I tell each of them: “Focus your attention on developing work in three villages, and make yourself entirely available for whatever issues and needs arise in those villages. If somebody needs help, help them. Engage yourself deeply in the community.” The brothers from the organization in Patna also come and help me with training and evaluation.

We do have some challenges, mainly from other existing Christian groups. I always try to show respect and love and build a good relationship. I often meet with their leaders and talk with them, but many of them still don’t want to associate with us.

A couple of big Christian organizations treat me almost like an enemy. The reason: they invest a lot of rupees every month for their ministry team, and they provide big cars and a lot of money for their workers. A while back, the leader of that organization scolded his next level of leaders. He said, “This guy Baiju just has one motorbike and no money and he has done so much! What’s wrong with you guys? I give you all this money and you don’t accomplish half of what he does!”

This top leader feels frustrated, thinking, “I’m doing everything right and giving lots of money. Why doesn’t it work?” Meanwhile the local leaders of that group don’t like me very well; I’m the reason they get scolded.

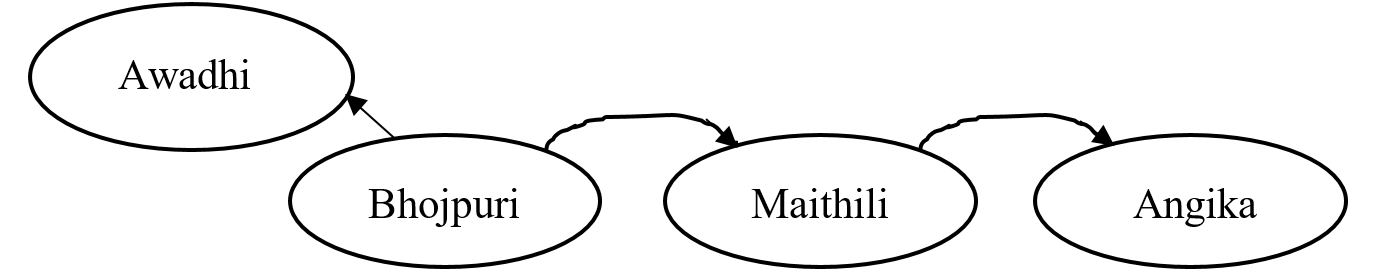
After our recent Maithili conference, though, some of those leaders said: “We have never seen such a conference in this area. You are focusing on the right theme (‘Accepting Leadership Role for Holistic Transformation of Mithilanchal’ – the Maithili area).”

For me, a highlight of the conference was seeing the 300 leaders who attended really grasp that each one of them is truly a leader. We succeeded in communicating that important biblical truth. I have no desire to become a big leader. I desire for thousands of leaders to be raised up.

Our organization[[38]](#footnote-38) doesn’t interfere in the work among the Maithili. We just assist regularly with teaching and training leaders. The local leaders feel ownership for the ministry. They raised funds locally for the recent conference. This local ownership gives the movement sustainability. They have joy and eagerness to learn and take part in the Lord’s work.

*Beginnings among the Angika*

We began some work among the Angika-speaking people in eastern Bihar many years ago, but we didn’t push this because we wanted to mainly focus on the Bhojpuri. We have recently begun more focused training of some leaders from that area. We hope to see God do among the Angika something similar to the movement among the Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi peoples, but it will take time. We have already identified about 15 Angika leaders who we are training in the holistic approach. We’ve not yet started a CLC in the Angika area, but we plan to start CLCs in three different Angika locations in the coming year and raise up more local Angika leaders. Brother Baiju (working among the Maithili) also recently asked prayer for his plans to extend work into the Angika area.



*The movement cascading northwest: Bhojpuri to Awadhi,*

*then east: Bhojpuri to Maithili to Angika*

**Reaching into Rajasthan**

After facing the urban challenge, we saw significant growth to the west, in Delhi. In 2011, we looked further west and considered how God might want to spread the movement in that direction. We began to feel that, while work in Haryana and Punjab could be managed from an office in Delhi, we needed to eventually have a base in Rajasthan.



I knew the Rajasthan context because 40 years ago I had toured around the state sharing the good news. The Christian population hasn’t changed much since then. A militant religious group has its headquarters there. Rajasthan has very rich culture, abundant minerals, and fine marble, but it also has many challenges. I thought, “I love going into troubled places.”

In 2011, we started making occasional visits to Jaipur (the capital of Rajasthan). There we did initial one-day trainings and one-day prayer drives with leaders. We conducted surveys of the city and the state. Teams also prayed throughout the city and met with leaders.

I have a deep desire to raise up more local leaders, which we lifted up in prayer. As we conducted several church planting trainings in Jaipur, we looked to find the right key person to train. Finally on one visit we met a brother named Mahaveer. He remembered meeting us years earlier at a seminar on sustainable church planting. He said, “I met you in Patna [over 680 miles away] years ago. At that time Victor encouraged me to return to my home in Rajasthan and start work there. I didn’t do it then, but now I’m here and I’d like to work with you.”

In 2014 we started a CLC in Jaipur with Mahaveer as the leader. He began by going to parks and asking young people if they wanted to learn English. Through that, he led 80 people to Christ and discipled them. Then he started a music program and other skill development programs, including a sewing program for women and a literacy program in the slums. Through those he started worshiping communities in Jaipur and a nearby town. After one year as CLC leader, Mahaveer joined our staff and we opened our Jaipur office in 2015. In the year since then we have seen a lot of growth; that area now has over 50 worshiping communities.

**Cross-over to Nepali Speakers on the Border**

The Maithili movement in Bihar goes up to the border of Nepal. People also speak Maithili in many border provinces of Nepal. In the past three years the church has started growing along the border among Maithili-Nepali speaking people.

**Broader Impact**

In recent years we have done training on a global scale while expanding the work locally. We don’t want people just focusing inward. We want to continue to pioneer work in new areas, wherever people need our help. We believe that impact doesn’t need perfection; perfection comes from God. He uses us in spite of our weaknesses, so we can take a risk and do something beyond our capacity and resources. Here are a few examples of CPM trainings we have done internationally:

* In 2012 in megachurches in three US cities
* In 2008 and 2012 in Vietnam
* In 2008 and 2011 in Cambodia
* In 2008 in Bangladesh. Those trained have had a great impact. We maintain ongoing interaction with the ministry there.
* In 2003 and a few times since then, in Indonesia
* In 2010 and 2011 in Japan
* In 2010 and twice since then in Tunisia
* In 2013 in Russia
* In 2014 in Mauritius.

**Conclusion**

God has used a variety of means to allow the Bhojpuri movement to spark Kingdom advance and CPMs among other groups – especially in North India and also touching other nations. The movement has spread to different language groups, different geographic areas, multiple caste groups and different religions. The power of the good news keeps overcoming all kinds of boundaries. The process has not been simple or easy, but nothing is too hard for the Lord. The next chapter describes God’s Kingdom spreading into a group that has proved especially challenging. Our God shows himself greater than every challenge.

**Chapter 10. Breakthrough among Muslims**

The area now being touched by our Muslim work had a very high crime rate for many years. A large area adjacent to Nepal is covered by a big jungle where people would often get kidnapped and be held for ransom. If the family didn’t pay the ransom, the kidnappers would hang the person in a tree to die and leave the corpse there until it dried up. The area had become incredibly lawless. The criminals (known as the Jungle Party) who controlled the area would catch and kill anyone they suspected of being a police informer. It was such a quagmire the government didn’t know for a long time how to handle the situation.

One of the pastors in the Bhojpuri movement did itinerant evangelism and ended up in this area by mistake. As he walked along one of the many rivers flowing from the Himalayas, he suddenly stopped in shock. He reported: “I saw with my own eyes men chopping people into pieces and throwing the pieces into the river.”

When the thugs saw him they told him, “You may have come here by mistake, but you’re not going back.” He didn’t know what would happen to him, but he prayed. When he met the leader of the gang, the man said, “Somehow I feel you are a man of peace and you come in peace.” So they let him go.

The first time I went to that area, we traveled with nothing – no cell phone, watch or wallet, and no more than a few hundred rupees (equivalent at the time to about US$3.00) in our pockets. I felt very insecure, thinking: “What if something happens?!” At the same time it felt very exciting, taking such a big risk and facing the threats, even of possible death, by traveling into that notorious area.

We felt God leading us to bring the good news into that very dark area. Through our involvement and prayer mobilization, God has eliminated the worst of the evils there. We started praying and the government started working. About a year after our work moved into the area, the government took action in a big way and took care of the kidnapping problem. Today they have good roads and it’s much safer. Several of the gang members and former kidnappers have become followers of Jesus. Some of the former kidnappers have become church planters, working bi-vocationally as masons and carpenters. I visited them recently and heard some wonderful testimonies of the Lord’s work there.

**Early Work**

During one of our early trips there, the people at the local mosque saw my name (Victor John) and knew that I was a Christian. So they wondered, “Why is he here?” Yet God gave us tremendous openness with local families. They gave us a warm welcome and invited us to eat with them.

We didn’t have a Bible with us on that visit or any “4 Spiritual Laws” tracts. We didn’t say, “Let’s talk about Luke 10 and I’ll teach you something.” We just sat and listened to them.

The following week we learned that a notice had been posted outside the mosque warning people to watch out for Christian activity. So I said, “Let’s pray for the leader of this group and see what God will do.” I went to talk with the leader and I could feel that he was very suspicious.

I explained: “I come in the name of the Lord; I come in peace,” and we made an offer: “We have done a survey and found that your women just sit around between 1:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon, gossiping and fighting. Would you be willing to let us help your community? We can teach them sewing and knitting.”

He said, “Okay, but you have to do it where we can watch you.”

We said, “Fine.” In an open spot with a thatched roof, attached to the place of worship, we set up two sewing machines. Suddenly we had 45 women registered for training. The wife from one of the most affluent families in the village came forward and said, “I will help you.”

She invited us to her house, and I said, “We will come when your husband is at home.” She was very kind and quite wealthy. She was a woman of peace for us and brought us natural acceptance in the community. She also came to know the Lord.

Within three months the sewing training included over 200 women. We also started a financial self-help group, which today has over 500 women in it. We opened a bank account and they finance each other. The program is now running very well and they have over $20,000 in their bank account. When I heard this I thought, “Wow, you have more money than I have!”

**Visiting the Mosque**

A couple of years ago some people from Denmark wanted to see what was happening, because the stories sounded too good to be true. Together with our visitors, we got invited to eat in the home of one of the believers in the Muslim area. His house stood right next to the mosque. When a loudspeaker sounded the evening call to prayer, the incredible volume stunned our guests. They had never heard anything like that before, and it almost blew them out of their chairs! They experienced some serious culture shock. I told them, “Go ahead and eat. No need to worry.”

The next day we got invited to speak in the mosque. I had never preached in a mosque before. I wanted to use language they could relate to, so I asked them a few questions.

I started with, “Which direction do you face when you pray?”

They said “We pray toward the west.”

I asked, “What is there?”

They said, “Mecca”

“What do we call that part of the world?

“The Middle East.”

“Who do you know about from the Middle East?”

“Abraham, David.”

“Who else? What other prophets?”

They mentioned many other prophets, including Jesus (Isa).

At that point I asked, “What did Jesus do?”

“He told stories and made a bird out of clay.”

I didn’t try to contradict them about that point. I just asked, “What else?”

“He healed people and did good; he was one of the best prophets.”

I said, “Yes. He stood in public and said ‘Who among you can find any fault in me?’ and people said, ‘We can’t.’ He stood completely innocent. He alone had the right to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ He alone said, ‘I will come back to judge all people.’ So what should be our response to him? That’s what I do; that’s what I believe.”

They liked that and said, “Please come back again!”

**Relationship to Muslim Culture**

We now have a very good relationship with the Muslim community. A Western missionary with whom we work has been teaching them using Discovery Bible Studies. I told him, “You have a vision for Muslims in one particular area and I want you to be successful. You can do the studies openly, since we have the freedom and approval of the community. But don’t let your guard down. They will watch you closely. Dress and act in a way people can respect and everything will be fine. You don’t have to grow a beard and wear a special prayer cap and all that. Just be yourself. They know you come from a different culture; just be sensitive to *their* culture.”

Almost 10 years ago I held a seminar in a majority Muslim country and among other things I said, “Insiders, local people, are more effective than outsiders.” I meant to encourage believers to remain in their local context and apply God’s word in their local context. This produces better fruit than outsiders bringing a Westernized form of Christianity.

When I went back two years later, I heard they had an “insider movement.” They were totally confused, and there was conflict and confusion among workers there. People asked me, “Do you practice this ‘insider’ stuff? Do you know what they’re doing?”

I said, “That’s not what I meant. I meant people staying inside the culture, not inside the religion.” Every culture has elements compatible with biblical teaching. Those things don’t need to be changed. Things like wearing a beard, or certain clothes, and showing respect for family and the elderly. It’s good to stay connected with aspects of one’s culture that don’t violate Scripture, so you can be salt and light to people in the culture. At the same time, some beliefs and rituals need to be left behind because they are contrary to Scripture.

**Relationships of Different Religious Communities**

The religious communities here overlap each other; their lives are often integrated with one another. I went to one area intending to work with Muslims, and a lot of people from the majority religion also came to faith. We are not exclusive; we are happy to see anyone come to faith in Christ. Jesus’s teachings touch on this dynamic. Consider the following two examples.

First, Jesus talked about throwing a net in kingdom work, then sorting it out later (Matthew 13:47-48). If you go to a lake and say. “I’m only going to catch a certain size fish,” you have to sit with a fishing hook and try to catch fish one by one. But if you throw a net you catch all kinds of things. You might catch a snake, and you don’t want to take that home. And maybe you get an empty Coke bottle. Then you sort it out. To put it simply, you can’t be choosy in our business. You may start with one vision and then God may lead in a way that adjusts your vision.

Second, Jesus told Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it wants.” In other words, “You have no control over the move of the Holy Spirit. You feel it, but you can’t control it. When the Spirit of God moves, be willing to follow.”

In pioneering in new areas, the homogeneous unit principle, i.e. trying to target one specific people group, can sometimes be useful. But we can’t depend on that as a strategy. If you reach a football player, all his friends are football players. And people are usually most effective at reaching people like them. But with the Bhojpuri we have addressed several challenges simultaneously: caste, economic background and educational background. Instead of trying to reach distinct homogeneous units, we’ve used the language and culture to reach people and let them form their own groups. This results in a very beautiful picture. If we had tried to just use the homogenous unit approach, we would have failed.

**Haq’s Testimony**

I came to the Lord in 2009, from a Muslim background. Before I believed in Christ, I lived in doubt. To look for answers, I did a comparative study of the Bible and the Qur'an. Then I began asking questions of my religious leaders. None of them could answer the basic question of salvation.

My daughter attended the same school as the daughter of one of the organization’s leaders. Our daughters were friends and introduced their fathers to each other. For the first six months I knew that this brother, he didn’t share the good news with me or mention Jesus’ name. When I asked him, “What do you do?” he didn’t say a lot.

Then he began to slowly share with me. While I was being discipled but not yet fully committed, he brought me to a training. There I met leaders from a Muslim background, who explained things well to me. I began to understand more of what it means to follow Jesus. I decided people need to know the truth, to follow the right way. I wanted to share this news with others like myself. So I began to openly proclaim the good news.

I began starting fellowships in 2011, after I had been a believer for two years. In the districts where I work, persecution comes from three sources: society in general, certain individuals and some organized groups.

Every village in our district has a group of Muslims that goes around the village to take people to their place of worship for prayer. When they learn about a group that prays in Jesus’ name, they find out who attends the Jesus group. Then they single out those people for persecution and all kinds of pressure.

The believers explain: “We aren’t doing anything wrong, just obeying what the Holy Book commands.”

But their persecutors say, “Why are you following the Bible? The Bible has been changed. Anyone who studies the Bible will be thrown out of our faith.” They use social, verbal and physical persecution and pressure.

So some of the believers from a Muslim background live in fear, including fear of their family members. The persecution is not usually organized. It’s mainly the social pressure of facing antagonistic questions like, “Why aren’t you fasting? Why aren’t you going to our place of worship?”

Sometimes we talk with the religious leaders and compare similarities in our beliefs. They accept most of what we say, but when it comes to salvation, we differ. I have had discussions with five high level religious leaders. I shared with them, for example Sura al-Baqara (2) 62, which says, “Those who believe, the Jews and Christians and the Sabeans—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously—will have their reward with their Lord. They have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.”

When they read it they become quiet. Then they say, “Yes, that’s what is written, so it must be right. But we’re not supposed to believe the Bible.”

I have consistently tried to bless the whole community where I work. As one example, in 2011 I started a school in one block[[39]](#footnote-39) where I work. In the other block where I work I started a self-help group. Then we set up a sewing center for women and a children’s literacy center. They gave us a place for this center right next to their place of worship, so they could keep an eye on us. Then we started working with railway children near the railway station. We began quite a variety of initiatives, including a cleanliness drive, a literacy center, and helping local people get government assistance for the community.

When people began coming to faith in Jesus and getting baptized we initially faced a lot of opposition from families and social pressure. For a while the believers continued their traditional prayer ritual, but offered the prayers in Jesus’ name. Now they still use the traditional *name* for prayers (*namaz*), but do their worship in homes with biblical content. They sometimes still go to the mosque, but they don’t participate in the ritual prayers there.

**Painful Persecution**

One time I (Haq) brought 25 leaders from a Muslim background for an initial training. Everything went well, but later two of them backslid. Then they spread all kinds of negative information against Christians. That night they announced my name and all my activities at their place of worship. They said: “Tomorrow we will have a meeting to deal with this.”

Four hundred people came to the council meeting. They insulted me, but I didn’t give up in front of all those people. I kept boldly responding to their accusations, but they harassed me so harshly that I was badly shaken up. For the next six months I didn’t serve the Lord.

Then Sister Usha Das came and visited me. When we met, she encouraged me and asked me, “If God has called you, what will you answer him when you leave this life?” She challenged me: “What do you believe? Do you believe the Bible is true? If you don’t believe it, you can leave and not serve the Lord.”

Then I started serving again. When I went back to that village, people made fun of me and said negative things and it became impossible to do fruitful work. So I moved to a larger town almost 20 miles away and began serving there.

We have had no significant persecution in the past year or two. We meet some opposition, but no major persecution. The believers have a good relationship with the community, such that the local religious leader doesn’t mind Christians visiting their mosque and sitting in back, praying quietly in Jesus’ name.

**The State of Our Muslim Work**

The Lord has given us good relationships in the Muslim areas. We don’t play hide and seek with our identity there. The community accepts us and we accept the community.

We focus on two Indian blocks of villages, in which we have 23 worshiping communities. Most of these groups’ members come from a mixture of backgrounds, maybe on average 25 percent Muslim and 75 percent from the majority. In every worshiping community I’m raising up at least two or three leaders. I travel around encouraging the fellowships. Seven of them are called *jamaats* (the Arabic word for religious gatherings*)*. They have their weekly worship in Urdu (the common language among Muslims) and use an Urdu Bible. They also pray in a Muslim-friendly prayer style, with raised open hands.

Our basic approach in Muslim areas emulates the CLC approach but with some differences, such as language, phrases used in greeting, prayer style and posture. New believers from a Muslim background also have different discipleship issues and different questions than new believers from other religious backgrounds. They need to work through doctrines that differ from what they learned through their previous holy book. They also have issues of family lifestyle, including challenges of men with multiple wives.

Sometimes they ask if they can continue to wear a beard and a cap and long robe (which we note that the Bible doesn’t condemn). Or they may ask; “Can we continue eating what we have been eating?” We point them to the New Testament answer: in a word, “Yes.” While some of their questions and issues differ from those of believers from a different background, we use a very similar basic discipleship approach. Leaders train all believers to live as obedient disciples, according to biblical teaching.

My area has quite a few leaders like myself, doing this kind of work among Muslims. Some of them used to be connected with us. But when other organizations heard of good work happening, some of them wanted to come and financially adopt these workers. One of our biggest setbacks in work with Muslims has been other Christian organizations enticing leaders to join their staff through financial offers. This has happened numerous times. But we continue to press ahead. I plan to raise up 30 more leaders and plant 10 more worshiping communities this year.

**Conclusion**

We praise God that the Bhojpuri movement has impacted nearby Muslims. In spite of challenges from the religious context and from other Christians eager to get a piece of the work, we see the good news advancing. The same basic principles applied in this uniquely different context are bringing forth a new flavor of fruit. In this we rejoice.

**Chapter 11. Breakthrough in Leadership Development**

Before the birth of the Bhojpuri movement, I (Victor) spent 15 years serving as a pastor, but I was frustrated and discouraged. The attitudes and patterns of church life seemed to have no potential for reaching the unreached. My leadership as a pastor, demanding though it was, did not seem likely to move us much closer to completing the Great Commission. As God has worked among the Bhojpuri, he has clarified for us the nature of spiritual leadership and how it works. This paradigm shift in leadership has set me free to greater fruitfulness than I ever dreamed possible.

Over the past 20+ years, countless other pastors have experienced a similar shift: from frustration to fruitfulness. Many formerly frustrated and depressed leaders now have abundant ministries reaching the lost. The movement includes some pastors previously confined to one location with just a few believers in a small church. Through a simple change of approach and some mentoring, they have grown amazingly and now minister in two or three different districts, mentoring many other leaders.

**Our Leadership Approach**

Getting people to work as a team can be a challenge. Too many people want to work individually and control everything. We have to defuse that and encourage teamwork. To help with that, we only use official titles for official purposes when necessary. I tell the staff: “When you’re responding to questions, you can say ‘I’m an Executive Director.’ That’s fine. You can print a business card if you want. But when it comes to function, don’t get too serious about the title.” Our avoidance of titles intimidates some people, but it works. It’s both radical and biblical.

We’ve found that by focusing on the basics of leadership, everything fits together well. We look for two essential qualities in a leaders: a heart for God and a heart for lost people. These reflect Jesus’ Great Commandment to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39). A leader is a disciple, and a disciple has a life of learning until he dies. You live and die as a disciple of Jesus. That’s how I train people and that’s my expectation.

When people hear about different kinds of leadership models, like Moses, Joshua, David and so on, they get confused. They think, “I want to be like Moses,” or “I want to be like Joshua, but in my practical daily life, I’m missing something.” They can focus so much on form and function they forget the essence of leadership.

We don’t present catchy things like “ten steps to becoming a leader.” We encourage obeying the Word of God, which involves application in one’s character and life. A leader needs a close relationship with God. That nurtures the vision and the shepherd’s heart, and helps them become compassionate and caring. It doesn’t require a three-month course in pastoral care. We do teach that later, but we have a simpler version for all the local leaders.

We aim to do first things first. Trying to teach later principles too soon would kill the movement, because only a few people are ready for high-level material. And ongoing multiplication of groups and churches requires ongoing multiplication of leaders. I emphasize *doing* things until you become comfortable at doing them. For example, “What does it mean to love my wife and my children?” I tend to be arrogant, so I have a hard time apologizing to my children. But as I practice it, I become able to do it. It becomes my lifestyle – taking leadership in doing these kinds of things.

To nurture many believers requires many shepherds who can spend time with them. So we continuously identify potential leaders. God has given us good leaders in the movement. This work doesn’t depend on one person. God’s Spirit is working through a great number of his people who live in his power as they obey him. We have young leadership because we continue to add people and multiply leaders. We have a continuous flow of emerging leaders; not the same people receiving the same training year after year. And practically everyone who has partnered with us has been happy, healthy and successful. We praise God for that testimony.

**Leadership is Not Positional**

A leader doesn’t become qualified because they have a PhD or DMin or something like that. In our organization, leadership is functional rather than positional. A leader is a person who leads someone. We don’t have specialized roles. Everyone does everything. When we have a program in Delhi, I do the cooking. We work as a team; nobody’s special. For the government’s sake, we keep names on file, in case they ask: “Who is your director?” and so on. But the Kingdom perspective is different.

The movement functions with the basic understanding that God uses leaders as vehicles to impart vision and mobilize his people. We avoid the mindset of positional leadership. Our staff members don’t use titles like “Reverend” or “Pastor.” We just say, “You are a leader.” That helps people consider who they lead. First they lead their family. In simple language that means being a godly father or mother. A godly husband or wife. Then a godly brother or sister, a godly friend. It also applies to the workplace: how to be a godly representative of Christ in that context. We encourage involvement in the community, which opens the door to becoming a community leader. When applied in the church, a person becomes qualified to lead in God’s family by leading their own family in truth, righteousness, and godliness.

Right from the beginning we eliminate the idea that you get a position and then you get money and all kinds of benefits. We focus on bivocational leadership and we encourage people to get into some trade in accordance with their skills. If they already have a trade, we encourage them to continue in that and then lead people. A movement can’t depend on salaries and money. A movement has to depend on God and bivocational leaders. If we started paying leaders, it would kill the movement (and we don’t have the money anyway).

We don’t train leaders by using content from a textbook; we use examples from everyday life to equip leaders for living Jesus’ way in everyday situations. We start with life teaching: “What does the Word of God say about the issues you are facing right now?” Sometimes churches think, “We have to make this guy a better leader.” So a lot of books talk about becoming a better leader. But we forget that our culture promotes pride, ego, and enmity. In our culture, humbling yourself means you’re weak. So people don’t want to humble themselves, even when they know they’re 100 percent wrong. But the Bible says we need to do that: be willing to apologize when we’re wrong. So leadership starts there, because Jesus said: “Whoever wants to be great must be a servant of all.” If you won’t go down, there’s no way up. The prime example is Christ himself, who being in very nature God, humbled himself. This changes the whole focus of leadership.

Without humility, people easily default to positional leadership. Then the work gets hindered because everyone tries to boss others around. They don’t want to accept leadership from one another. So some people move up and become an aristocrat. To avoid that danger, we aim to develop leaders in patterns that avoid positional leadership.

**Leadership and Literacy**

The Bhojpuri work has impacted education and literacy. We now have Bhojpuri leaders getting Masters degrees and PhDs, and people doing research.

Not many years ago we struggled to figure out how to do effective sustainable work among illiterate people. The challenge was: “How do you train these people? How do you educate them?” Learning Christian leadership is traditionally a very academic process. Looking at the Bhojpuri leaders’ academic background in the early days, it would have been disastrous to try traditional Christian leadership training. The majority of them are oral learners. Although some of them have a few years of schooling, their aptitude for learning is basically oral and thus quite different than literate aptitude.

To approach things in a Western way, a person has to be literate to be trained as a disciple, leader, mentor, or church planter. In that system, it seems reading is the only way people can learn to do these things. Missiologists offer complex diagrams and numbers, with C1 - C5 levels, E1, E2, and E3 categories and all kinds of other numbers and levels.

Introducing these concepts in the beginning would have brought disaster. Most of the people would have been overwhelmed by the monotony of literate-style learning and learning about different roles of leaders within the church. We aimed to keep it simple: focus on prayer and witnessing and simple learning of Scripture, applied in daily life.

**Patterns of Leadership Training**

Leadership is the engine behind the movement. We don’t start anything unless we have a leader. We don’t try to start a worshiping community and then look for a leader. We train and mentor leaders, then they start the worshiping communities. So we have multilayer training programs – for new disciples, for leaders, for advanced leaders, and for CLC leaders.

We focus on reproductive leadership through mentoring relationships. Mentoring and coaching relationships can be a lifeline for a young person. A few people find the standard one-hour-a-week training approach adequate, but for most, this is not nearly enough. They need something more relational.

After each training we provide ongoing mentoring for leaders and we help them multiply. We seek to continuously multiply four things: disciples, leaders, churches, and teachings. Every training is a training for trainers[[40]](#footnote-40) because we expect everyone we train to train others. Training equips people to facilitate trainings and mentor others, so they can grow and multiply and reach their full potential. That’s our target in training leaders.

We also teach through everyday life lessons. Deuteronomy 6:7 says, “Impress them upon your children.” This teaching happens through being together in everyday life, not just sitting in a classroom. Jesus taught crowds on the mountain, but he also walked alongside his disciples and taught them by doing. They saw him heal people, feed the hungry, and cast out demons. Later, when a crippled beggar asked the disciples for help (Acts 3:1-10), they thought, “What should we do?” They remembered what Jesus had done. So they said, “Get up and walk.” They did just what they had watched Jesus do in the past.

**Levels of Training**

We offer ongoing trainings at various levels. In addition to discipleship training, leadership training, and advanced leadership training, we have CLC level (field) training at the local (village or town) level. When we have 10 people willing to take a training somewhere, we organize it.

We first give new disciples basic training: how to reach out and how to give their testimony. We teach leaders (those who have started one or two worshiping communities) the next goal: how to start multiplying leaders. As the fellowships grow, we provide advanced leadership training twice a month for three months, for leaders who lead multiple house worshiping communities. This advanced leadership training teaches how to start raising “discipler makers.” Not just making disciples or just making disciplers, but making discipler makers. This is a key focus of our overall leadership development.

The CLC training (as described in chapter 4) equips leaders to conduct on-field training. The CLC can become a platform to conduct training anywhere. And CLCs also help leaders get access into otherwise inaccessible places.

A CLC training lasts just one day; basic leadership training may be one or two days. Advanced leadership training takes a minimum of six days – two days in each of three months – and attendees get a certificate after the advanced leadership training.

We also have a training center for new disciples and believers who have just begun a group. This provides on the job training for which trainees who come for three to five days every month, for six months to one year. For most of each month they work in their own context and apply in their personal life and service what they have learned. Then they come back with questions and testimonies and receive more training. This training has a systematic set curriculum.

**Generational Reproduction and Motivation**

We do teaching in different zones across North India. The training happens first in the zone office a few days a month, then the state office, then by areas, then by districts, then in sub-districts, then in villages. So everyone receives training. When I train 30 people in my office, those 30 people will go to different districts and do their own training program. Whoever comes to a district training goes back to their block (group of villages) or village and does training for the leaders they are equipping. Then it goes to the ground level, in accordance with what fits the schedules of those in each group.

We see this multi-generational[[41]](#footnote-41) pattern described in 2 Timothy 2:2. “*The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”* Paul taught younger leaders who already had some experience, like Timothy. Then young leaders like Timothy could also teach a third group, not named in this verse. They have faithfulness in their service but never get mentioned by name. That third group can also teach a fourth generation, described in 2 Timothy 2:2 simply as “others.”

In Acts 19:9-10, we read that Paul had daily discussions for two years in the school of Tyrannus. In those two years, all of Asia Minor heard the word of the Lord. We aim for that kind of impact. We train people to multiply: not just to multiply disciples, but also to multiply churches, leaders, and teachings. The focus of this training helps people *discover* what they should do, rather than *telling* them what to do. The discovery approach brings much more internal motivation to people at every level.

**Elements of Leadership Training**

Leadership training takes place in two parts. First, ongoing *field training* as described above. Every month we give three to five days of reproducible training, passed on all the way to the grassroots. Leaders find creative ways to pass on the training to those they lead during a different few days each month. They do training for a couple of hours, maybe after Sunday fellowship or during the weekly fasting and prayer day. In the village context, most people are self-employed in agriculture or trading or as a skilled laborer. Their schedules have flexibility. In semi-urban or urban areas where people work full-time, they either have a good relationship with their employer or they work some evenings or weekends to make up the time. We have a separate training (sometimes on weekends) for people with challenging schedules. We ask them, ‘When are you free?’”

Second, *apprenticeship*. We never work alone; we always have another believer with us. So when a leader does ministry, someone else watches and learns. In India, training often happens through apprenticeship. For example, if you go to a mechanic shop, you will find one expert and some new workers. After a few months or years, all the new ones will have also become experts. They learn by doing things together. In the same way, we always encourage leaders to take along some of those they’re mentoring.

*Empowerment* is a key element of our leadership training. We aim to empower leaders from day one. (Note: empowerment is different than delegation. Delegation means I have authority and I’m sharing it; empowerment means the authority is *yours,* and I’m helping you to do the task.) Some people think empowerment means isolation. Not so. It means we continue to mentor the person but we don’t spoon-feed them. When they need us, they come to us with their questions or challenges.

*Evaluation:* As leaders, we continue to evaluate and build relationships with those we lead. In Luke 10 we read about the disciples returning to Jesus and excitedly sharing their ministry testimony: “Even the demons are subject to us in your name!” Jesus, as a master teacher, evaluated and said, “Don’t rejoice because demons are subject to you; rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” When leaders share their testimonies, I always evaluate: are they on the right track? Or are they too caught up in their success? Our leadership always has that element: not criticism, but helpful evaluation. We can’t get carried away when somebody shares a testimony. Like Jesus, we want to lift people’s focus to a higher level as part of their leadership development.

*God-Reliance:* We help leaders rely on God and always focus on him. We tell them: “Whatever success you get, stay focused on God. He is the hero of every story, not you.” Many ministries die because people focus on themselves. So we help leaders focus on God as part of leadership training.

**Hands-on and Personal**

Much of our leadership training happens as we involve emerging leaders while we engage in the work. Many ministries do a lot of theoretical training, with Bible college and so on, but they don’t give people a chance to practice what they learn. We teach one thing then say, “Go and do it.” So whatever they learn, they immediately apply in their lives. That’s why they learn more. We teach a little, then they do it and learn from their experience as well as from our teaching. That enables them to really work effectively. When they learn from us, that starts the process. When they start implementing what they learned, they learn many more things, because God is teaching them. What they learn from God they learn much better. When they teach others, they pass on what we taught plus what God taught them.

When you travel even 5-10 miles in India, you often find differences in dialect and culture. Given that dynamic, it’s better that the leaders use their own examples rather than repeating exactly what we said. Our teaching doesn’t push information on them; it involves discussion and discovery together. We use a group learning process, so we as trainers also learn. Everybody puts together their experience and what they have learned, and new results come as the Lord directs.

Involving people actively in training makes it easier to set goals for their work. Nobody pushes a goal on them. They themselves decide what goal they believe God wants them to pursue. Then they can more easily accomplish it. They have conviction in their hearts to move toward the goal because the plan has come from God.

In the New Testament we see team leadership, not people working individually. We make a mistake if we focus just on individuals. If a ministry depends on one person it will collapse when that person disappears. This is why the Lord wants us to work as teams. The team building process includes discovery together. Working in teams builds and maintains momentum. We often plan a training for 50 people but end up with 70 people, because people bring friends eager to learn.

**Practical, Loving, and Biblical**

For us, “training” doesn’t mean making people sit all day or all week in a classroom. It means practical training with two essential ingredients: first a couple of hours of classroom training, then time for them to meditate and discuss. When we have a leaders’ training in our office, we focus on just one topic. We share something we have prepared on the topic, then allow those being trained to discuss it in small groups and large groups. This approach has facilitated tremendous growth in our leaders.

We also consider it essential to show love to our leaders and spend quality time with them during the training process. We do this because Jesus did it that way. We have passed that on to our leaders. We try to not let people get lost in leadership, so they stop learning and growing. Sometimes the training involves just listening to the leaders. They get very encouraged because they sense: “He cares about me. He loves my family.”

We also tell our leaders: “Don’t just believe what I say; check in the Bible and recheck to see if it’s biblical. If it’s not biblical, come back and tell me.” We don’t try to add to what we find in the Bible.

**Using Individual Skills**

A key ingredient of our organization’s breakthrough in leadership development is respecting leaders and allowing them to use the skills and talents God has given them, as described in Romans 12. We also allow them to learn by *doing* the work and helping others learn in the same way.

We offer field people the unique opportunity to develop and learn from their own mistakes and experiences. We involve people in our service programs and give them opportunity to develop whatever skills they have. We don’t impose on them something that we’ve decided for them. Leaders come as they are. Everyone has some skill or talent, and we allow them to use that talent to reach people. Because of this they become more confident and relate to people more effectively.

I (Satish) experienced this myself. When I joined the organization and talked with Victor John, he didn’t ask much about my ministry experience, because I had come from a secular field. I didn’t have any ministry experience or Bible education. He just asked, “What do you want to do?”

I didn’t know much about house fellowships. For a long time I had thought, “There are so many people in the traditional church; so much potential there. People have skills that God could use.” So I said, “I’d like to give an opportunity to all those people to work for the Kingdom of God. The society has so many needs, and these people could effectively relate to people and share the good news.”

Victor asked me: “How will you do that?”

I said, “I don’t have any idea.” But that desire stuck with me, from 2008 until now. By God’s grace, he put me in a leadership position, without any theological education or ministry experience. So I started using for God’s glory all the things I had learned in my secular position: administration, management, and writing skills. The organization helped me to think and relate to people in a more relational way while using my skills.

From Victor John and other leaders I learned humility and to respect and honor other leaders. I learned to respect whatever skill they had and encourage them to use their skills and knowledge to acquire more and more biblical knowledge.

I have used the same strategy with many leaders I have mentored. For example, one brother didn’t have any ministry experience or Bible school knowledge when he began, and now within a year he has started mentoring more than 50 CLC leaders.

Whatever skills I’ve sharpened and acquired, I learned mostly from Victor John. We used to sit together for long hours at night discussing things, whenever he visited my city. HHe knew I needed a lot of information and biblical perspective. He knew I had never studied those things, so he gave me insight. Whatever I learned, I tried to pass on to others in their own language.

We use a very simple step-by-step pattern. When Anil came to discuss his desire to work with us, I described our approach this way: “You don’t start with having to obey everything in the Bible all at once. You just start with what God brings to you and obey that. Then you learn to obey more and more things. Eventually you will become able to obey all of God’s commandments.” Anil had already been a pastor and he had experience in ministry, but that simple idea appealed to him. His humility influenced him to leave a good position and come work with our organization under my leadership, although I didn’t have prior experience in ministry.

**Ravi’s Story of Leadership Development**

Before I joined our organization in 2005, I had already received much positive influence from the Bhojpuri movement. I’ve been encouraged by the organization’s influence since early in my spiritual life. Soon after I came to faith I attended a one-month training run by the organization. I first started ministering in 2003, then moved to Varanasi when I joined the organization in 2005.

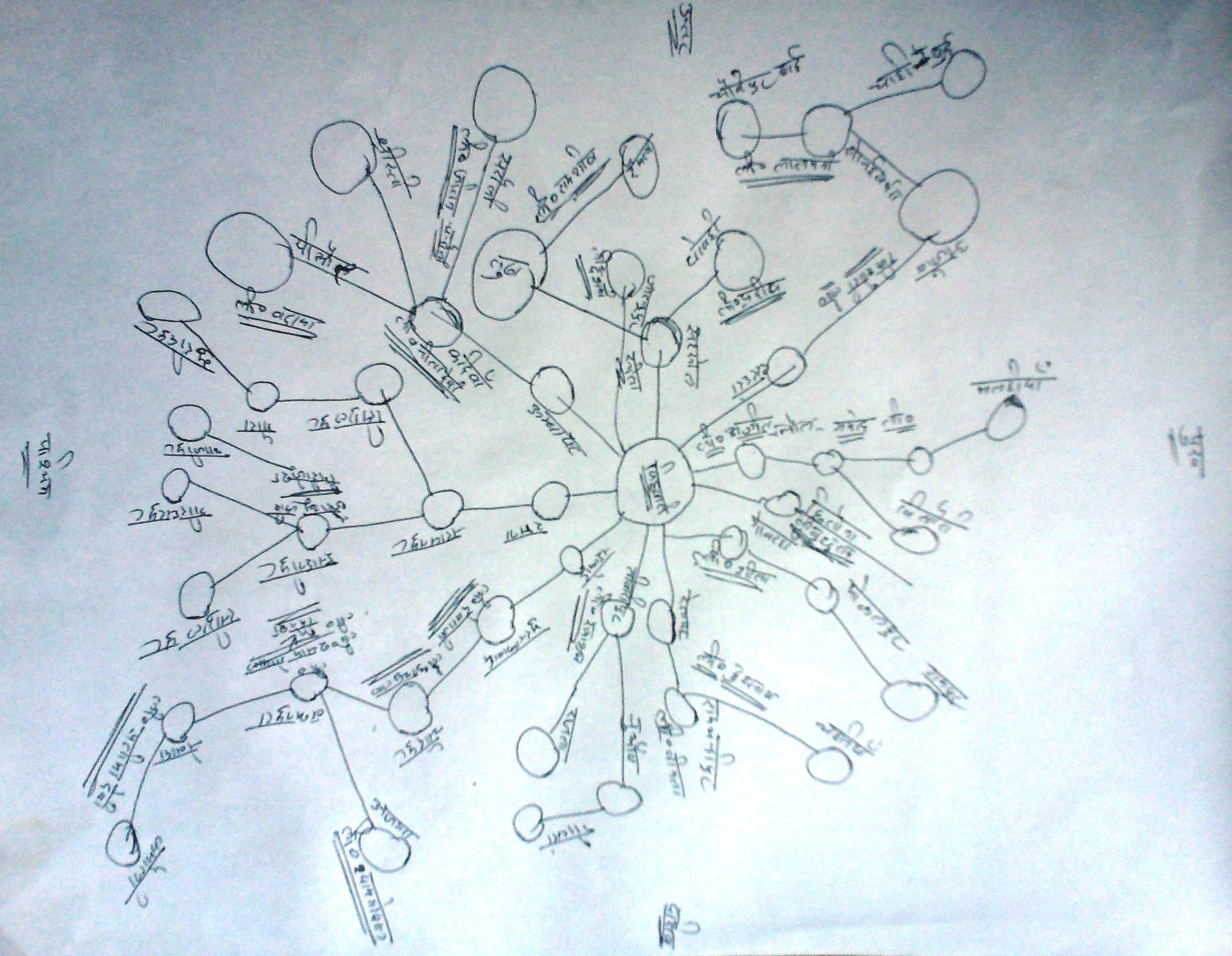
From the beginning up until now I have mentored and prepared about 180 leaders in one district. These leaders moved to many other districts. I still keep in touch with them and encourage them as they start new fellowships and mentor many leaders. At present, they have started fellowships in 580 of the almost 4000 villages in that area. This is just one stream of the movement.

I currently directly mentor 60 leaders. I usually meet with them in person at least once a month, and by phone as well. They can call me any time. Whenever I go somewhere to do a training or organize a fellowship, I call two or three of these leaders to go with me. They get trained and mentored in the process. They’re still learning, but sometimes I invite them to speak in the fellowship on certain topics. We do mentoring mainly in groups. We don’t do much Western-style one-on-one mentoring. As Paul describes it in 2 Timothy 2:2, “Whatever you have learned from me *in front of many witnesses..*.” Paul could easily hold Timothy accountable because as he mentored Timothy, he had other witnesses. One-on-one mentoring has weaker accountability. So we focus on group mentoring.

Paul’s description in 2 Timothy 2:2 also reflects generations of multiplication. As the movement grows and multiplies, we try to keep track of the generations – of leaders and of groups. We track these through the testimonies of those we mentor. After a few generations, though, the multiplication becomes harder to track.

When I go and talk to the leaders I mentor, I get an estimate of how many have come to faith, how many people they lead, and how many have become leaders. They have lots of testimonies they eagerly share.

We asked one leader, Vijay, to draw us a chart of the generations of churches he has planted: those he leads, those they lead, and so on. In about 20 minutes he drew this chart (up to seven generations of new work in the past few years). He then commented, “Sorry, it’s incomplete. I’ll draw you a better one next time you come.” This generational multiplication is in the DNA of the movement, such that everyone in the movement receives mentoring from someone while they also mentor others.



**Leadership Training for Children**

Children play an important role in the movement. I myself was led to faith by a young girl who often came to share with my family. She prayed for my father and he was healed; eventually my whole household accepted Jesus.

We don’t have specialized Sunday school programs in this movement. Instead, children sit with their parents. As a result many children get involved in church planting as they grow. They have accountability within their family. They learn the same things their parents learn and hear the same testimonies their parents hear. Because of this, they tend to become spiritually mature at a younger age.

Manoj[[42]](#footnote-42) (who reached the Nirankari family described in chapter 9) is one of those children. He was about three years old when the movement started. He grew up as a child within the movement and became a church planter. Now as a young man in his mid-twenties, he has already prepared 87 other leaders whose groups span four or five generations.

**Leadership Development Conferences**

Training of leaders happens on an ongoing basis through local centers, and regional trainings and seminars. We also conduct major annual conferences for leaders of the work. Six major conferences currently take place each year, to train leaders and celebrate God’s work among them. Each one ministers to a particular group of leaders: Bhojpuri, Magahi, Awadhi, Bengali, Urdu and Urban Youth.

Each conference has a vision to encourage, empower and inspire the leaders who attend the gathering. Most of these leaders operate quite independently for 51 weeks of the year. By providing them with an opportunity to join in fellowship we equip them for their roles on the front lines of service throughout Northern India.

Each conference has these goals:

*Encouragement*. Coming mostly from small villages, our leaders can participate in a large community of national leaders. They encourage one another through fellowship, prayer, worship, and Bible study.

*Inspiration*. The conferences allow leaders to worship God as part of a larger community and experience their place in a much bigger picture of what God is doing. They also provide the main source of inspiration for multiplication. Hearing others’ visions and plans provides collective motivation for fresh effort in advancing the good news. Leaders leave the conference with renewed energy and motivation to press ahead in serving.

*Empowerment*. Relationships begun and strengthened at these conferences empower our leaders. Exchanging ideas enables them to adapt to a continually changing environment.

*Accountability and verification*. The conferences enable workers to establish accountability relationships and receive equipping tools for service. In our context, most people find it difficult or impossible to provide written reports, so conferences give opportunity for verbal (face to face) accountability in a group context. When accountability happens in a group, group members can’t lie because others working nearby know what is or isn’t happening around them. Leaders leave the conference with individual goals for the next year and a process for accountability in carrying out those goals.

**Developing Local Leaders**

To develop local leaders, we start by looking for three qualities: (1) passionate love for the Lord; (2) concern for the salvation of their friends and family; (3) ability to pass on to others what they are learning.

In the past, most Indian missionaries leading ministries came from Christian populations in South India. But in the last 10-15 years, local people in North India have been learning and getting training. They realized, “I also can become a leader.”

In the past five years, many local leaders have been raised up and can lead the ministry. The dynamic has changed. People here used to say, “Outreach is not our job. That’s a foreign missionary’s job. I’m just a church member.” But nowadays local people take initiative and lead out in ministry. One district used to have only eight leaders; it now has more than 100!

Local people now say to missionaries coming to help from outside the area, “We welcome you, but you have a different role than us. We can go and preach because we know our people, our language and our culture better than you. You come from a distant place, with a different language and culture. So I understand our people better than you. But you have an important role also, to teach us and train and mentor us.”

**Many Kinds of Leaders**

We mentor not only field people but also traditional pastors. The Lord has allowed us to influence them toward simpler, more reproducible church patterns. Traditions have value, but it’s important not to let them create a boundary around the church. For example, in the church I attend when I’m in town, our pastor used to be very traditional. He said no non-members could take Holy Communion. I talked to him and he changed his attitude on this. Now he allows other believers to participate in the worship service and Holy Communion.

The leaders in this movement do a good job of helping both grassroots leaders and mainline church leaders to grow. We share our experience with them and in a couple of years, their church grows. One church in Patna is part of a typical traditional denomination, but has been transformed through the influence of CPM principles. They now have a lot of worship time and opportunity for young people to give testimonies and be part of the service. They have planted 25 worshiping communities around Patna, and they view us as brothers in the Lord.

We believe that leadership should not depend on education or status. Our movement includes some leaders who are not literate at all. I recently heard one of our top leaders interview two completely illiterate Bhojpuri women. He asked them, “How much education do you have?”

They both said, “None at all; I’ve never been to school.”

Then he asked, “How many churches are you leading?”

One said “three” and the other said “seven.”

We also have an 18-year old girl leading a church. Her grandfather is one of the members of the church. God does extraordinary things with ordinary people.

**Networks of Independent Leaders**

Many contexts in India give no opportunity for leaders to develop themselves. The CLC context, though, gives leaders an opportunity to develop more confidence so they can continue working on their own, even if we don’t directly supervise them. They themselves own the work, not us. We help local leaders develop the mentality that they really own the work. That has brought a new pattern and mindset, especially as we have seen new leaders coming up. They understand the value of working on their own and they also develop connections outside the state and overseas.

Many families want to support people working in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However, they serve independently and we feel very comfortable with that. We praise God that so many people can lead these initiatives. We just identify emerging leaders and potential leaders, then equip and empower them. If God allows them to develop ministry on their own we bless them in that. We give training (short term) and mentoring (longer term). We don’t give them finances; we just visit them and share with them, which is much more important.

We don’t want to receive tithes from the house fellowships. We encourage them to support their local leaders, help the poor in their area and meet the needs of people in their community. If a leader has five or seven fellowships, that might cover their financial needs. They might run a shop or small business. The local fellowship can meet their travel needs, so they become self-sufficient. This local financial independence enables the movement to continue multiplying without waiting for outside funds.

**Conclusion**

This movement is built on non-traditional but very biblical patterns of leadership and leadership development. We don’t use special ecclesiastical titles for leaders (Matthew 23:8-11), and we equip and encourage all believers to minister, using the gifts God has given them (1 Peter 4:10-11). We use patterns of group mentoring and hands-on training so simple that even uneducated people can fruitfully multiply disciples, churches and discipler makers. Strengthening local leaders and avoiding dependency has given long-term viability and enabled the movement to thrive without reliance on any centralized authority structure. To God be the glory.

**Chapter 12. Principles that Guide the Movement**

Every church-planting movement begins with prayer and has a unique design. A movement doesn’t depend on our activities. We can do things that will hinder a movement and we can do things that will facilitate a movement. But nothing we do can make a movement happen. Only God can do that and he alone deserves the glory when a movement takes place. He can do mighty things either with us or without us. So we never say, “God moved because I did x, y and z.”

We didn’t plan a strategy and ask God to bless it. God graciously includes us in what he has sovereignly chosen to do for his glory among these peoples. We have identified these principles as the Lord has guided. We don’t present them as a formula or a recipe for a church-planting movement. We share them for prayerful consideration by others seeking God for a church-planting movement.

1. **Passionate Prayer**

Prayer is the heartbeat of the movement. The believers pray passionately; it’s part of their DNA. When the believers gather, everyone is allowed to pray. They don’t just listen to a leader or the more mature believers pray. Sometimes it’s special prayer and fasting with other believers; sometimes it’s continual talking with God during all kinds of everyday activities. Prayer is not complicated and anybody can do it. It’s so simple (and so much has already been written about it) that we don’t need to expound on it here.

**2. Instantaneous Personal Witnessing**

New believers immediately begin witnessing to their friends and families. We don’t wait until people have been believers for a while, then have them sit in a class on evangelism to become “equipped.” The people who sit through evangelism classes have often already lost most of their natural contacts with unbelievers. Then their heads get filled with so much information that their attempts to witness can seem packaged rather than natural.

The most powerful thing each person has, from day one, is their own personal testimony. As the early disciples said in Acts: “We can’t deny what we have seen and experienced.” Rather than waiting, we mobilize believers to share their testimony from day one. This connects people and connects more unbelievers with the good news. In Mark’s Gospel, we read over and over again the word “immediately.” Our God invites *all* believers into immediate action for the glory of his name.

**3. A Culture of Empowerment**

The culture of empowerment impacts numerous aspects of the movement. First, in addition to encouraging new believers to share the good news, we model for them how to start new worshiping communities. And we empower them to start new groups immediately. We watch over and release these new disciples to lead the new groups they start.

It may sound very strange to say that “new disciples start new worshiping communities immediately.” But we believe in entrusting ministry to imperfect people. Jesus taught the same things to all 12 Apostles including Judas, knowing he would betray him. He taught the same things to Peter, knowing Peter would deny him. So irrespective of the results, we teach our disciples what God has assigned us to teach. We don’t wait for the perfect situation and the perfect people. Groups who hold a high standard of qualifications for service always experience relatively slow growth.

Jesus didn’t wait for perfection before entrusting ministry, so why should we stress out when the people we disciple aren’t yet perfect? Jesus handed ministry to his disciples and empowered them, in spite of all their limitations and imperfections.

Second, we empower grassroots leadership at the local level and we assist local leaders in starting new worshiping communities. We don’t establish work dependent on outsiders, which would leave the work vulnerable. We empower local leaders. This brings local ownership, resulting in long-term viability and multiplication.

Third, we empower and equip *all* believers to do ministry in Jesus’ name. This means no clergy/laity distinction. We avoid the mindset of positional leadership and don’t call our staff “Reverend” or “Pastor.” When we connect with new people, especially in a rural area, we tell them: “Don’t call me sir.” Rather we call each other “brother.” If people in the village call you “Sir,” they won’t open up to you. If they call you “brother,” they will be more open to share. It becomes a personal relationship rather than a formal one.

Most leaders in the movement work bivocationally. We don’t pay pastors or hire leaders. Instead of *adding* leaders by paying more money to hire staff, the movement *multiplies* leaders by training willing partners. No one waits for a salary or a title before doing ministry. Everyone ministers because of obedience to Jesus, not because of something given by other people. This allows temptation from other Christian groups who offer people money or titles, but we leave that between the Lord and his children.

Rather than thinking in terms of full-time versus part-time workers, we see everyone as a worker in God’s Kingdom. We don’t oppose paying people in ministry and we don’t attack that pattern. In fact some of us who live as itinerant mission workers rightly get support for doing ministry. We just avoid the traditional Christian assumption that substantial ministry should have a direct connection with payment and a title.

Fourth, we don’t invest resources in building church buildings. From the very beginning we have advocated and facilitated churches functioning anywhere, in any situation. Having a church building can give the impression of permanence and power as well as convenience. But even if a group can get permission and gather the resources, having a church building inevitably shapes the ministry. It orients the ministry inward toward gathering and maintaining rather than spreading and multiplying. We want the church vibrant and reproducing, not stuck in maintenance mode where the leaders and congregation have to maintain an inanimate object.

In a context like ours, having a church building raises political issues and religious issues as well as economic issues. If persecution comes, a church building becomes a very easy target. And when the Lord brings a breakthrough of the good news, a building would limit the growth of the church. Everyone would think they had to fit into the four walls of the existing church building.

In this movement, when a breakthrough comes, the churches can easily start new churches without waiting for a financial campaign to build a bigger building. Avoiding church buildings empowers believers to deploy resources elsewhere for kingdom advance.

**4. Reaching Friends and Relatives**

We focus evangelism on reaching whole families. New disciples tell their family and friends what they are learning and obeying. Mark chapter 5 tells how Jesus delivered a demon-possessed man. As Jesus was leaving the area, the man wanted to go with him but Jesus said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.” This man had no training. He had never been to seminary; he had never even attended a church! What was he going to tell people?

A personal testimony can be more powerful than all kinds of theological statements and apologetics. Speaking from the mind touches the mind, but speaking from the heart touches the heart. When Paul stood on trial (Acts 24-26), he didn’t use apologetics; he used his testimony. So we always encourage people to use their testimony and they get into the habit of sharing with people around them from day one.

**5. The Word is the Foundation**

The good news commonly breaks through not just in words but also in signs, wonders, and power encounters. People discover a living and active God who has the ultimate say. Yet we don’t build people’s faith on miracles but on the abiding truth of God’s Word.

We train people to discover God’s will in his Word and to obey his will as they discover it. This means both individually and as a movement we follow the Bible and the Spirit rather than church tradition. We don’t do what has always been done, which produced little or no results. We let go of traditional patterns when they get in the way of God’s purposes as described in the Bible.

From the beginning I taught people: “Don’t have an ordained pastor baptize anybody. Get over that romantic idea. Let the head of the family baptize. Don’t worry about the old traditional Christian way of doing burial or marriage or a child dedication ceremony. We can do everything biblically in an Indian cultural way.[[43]](#footnote-43) Just keep asking: ‘What does the Bible say about that?’ Find an answer for each issue, then let’s discuss the answer.” Our commitment to simple biblical approaches has led us to avoid producing a denomination; to produce instead an organic, indigenous and dynamic movement.

**6. Intentional Planting and Reproduction**

We practice intentionality in sharing the good news, in making disciples and in planting churches. All three of these need intentionality; they don’t happen automatically. We intentionally produce disciples who produce disciples and plant churches that plant churches. This DNA has resulted in church multiplication beyond 20 generations. It gets passed on not through packaged information but through shared lifestyle.

Everything hinges on intentional discipleship. Lack of clarity about discipleship results in failure. A lot of churches don’t have a clear idea of how to make a disciple. How sad, since Jesus’ last command to us said: “Make disciples of all nations (all groups of people).” McDonalds doesn’t have confusion about how to make a burger. If you ask any worker at McDonalds how to make a burger, they’ll give you a clear, simple answer. But if you ask most Christians how to make a disciple, you’ll likely get either a blank look or a rambling complicated answer.

Discipleship happens best in an apprenticeship relationship. That’s the most effective model for training and learning in all kinds of fields. Doctors, carpenters, teachers and business people all learn through apprenticeship. It’s a lifestyle, not a curriculum. Not a course, but showing people how to do something and doing it together in everyday life.

That kind of discipleship enables effective leadership transitions. We don’t worry about someone “taking over” for a leader because we constantly mentor new leaders in their own context. We multiply ourselves instead of keeping the work focused on ourselves then hoping to pass it on to one other person. Jesus used this approach: he passed his ministry on to many, not to one. We aim for decentralized multiplication, not building up ourselves as a center of power. This intentionality in discipleship and church planting results in effective reproduction.

**7. Obedience and Accountability to the Word**

We train people from the very start in obedience as a lifestyle: obedience to God’s Word, not to a specific human leader’s interpretation of the Word. Obedience is vital, because too many Christians have gotten educated way beyond our level of obedience. So before we start imparting a lot of knowledge we start helping disciples to obey. Instead of telling a new person do’s and don’ts, we help them discover who Jesus is and how to follow him. By learning and growing together in groups, believers have natural accountability to one another, to apply the Word in daily life.

**8. Cultural Relevance and Holistic Service**

As described in previous chapters, we see the New Testament calling believers to manifest God’s Kingdom in ways relevant to each culture it enters. This enables the Kingdom to flourish in every context rather than functioning as an imported foreign religion. Proclaiming a holistic message of good news provides access to meet real needs in a community. It also yields fruit of tangible blessing to all people, not just spiritual blessing for believers. This way, Jesus’ followers don’t become outcasts in their villages, but important members of their community.

**9. Sensitivity toward Other Religions**

We don’t attack or criticize other people’s religious practices or beliefs. Rather than disparaging other faiths, we aim to proclaim and manifest the greatness of our God, and the blessings of life in his Kingdom. This diminishes enmity and unnecessary offense. It allows people to discover their own comparisons and conclusions about Jesus’ excellent way versus the other alternatives available.

**10. Pioneering (Apostolic) Outreach**

We pioneer churches in unreached areas. We value and continually focus on how to bring the good news to additional unreached peoples and areas. This fuels the continual growth and expansion of the movement. We enter pioneer areas with the goal of sustainable ministry. This includes sensitivity to the Lord’s leading in finding any local partners the Lord might already have in that area.

**11. Partnership**

We aim to work together with any local believers or organizations interested in training or partnership. We understand that reaching millions of people in every state is a huge task. We can’t accomplish it alone. So we invite other believers and include them as partners in all our programs. We firmly believe that local ownership is essential for sustainability of the work. So, for example, we design each CLC to strengthen the service of the local partner, not our organization. We try to help local people take responsibility and hold leadership positions, to create local flavor.

We don’t hope or claim to be God’s final answer for spreading the good news. We want others to own the ministry. So we invest in local people, stakeholders who will take ownership, who have passion for reaching their own people and are not just looking for personal gain.

This approach has enabled the movement to survive and thrive. If we owned it, we wouldn’t have been able to carry it. We don’t manage it; that would be impossible. In all our programs and all our work we strengthen local leaders. That frees us to move into new pioneer areas.

**Conclusion**

These are key principles that guide the Bhojpuri movement. They are not a recipe for a church-planting movement but rather principles that have permeated the movement among the Bhojpuri and other nearby groups. They portray the Lord’s leading for our context and might be useful in other contexts as well.

**Chapter 13. Frequently Asked Questions about the Movement**

You may have a number of questions after reading this book. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions that observers have raised as they heard about the Bhojpuri movement.

1. **What does a typical house church meeting look like?**

A house church does not necessarily meet in a house. Usually it does, but it might meet in an open field or courtyard. A house church (worshiping community) is one that meets anywhere other than a designated “church building.” The location doesn’t matter, nor does the time or frequency of the meetings. Typically a house church has 40-100 people, often meeting in someone’s courtyard with a sheet of plastic set up for shade.

Our approach from the beginning has been that we don’t want to invest in church buildings. We don’t have money, it’s not very reproducible, and we don’t know how big any given church will grow.



**A house church gathering**

A house church gathering includes people who have been discipled, some who are being discipled, and some who are interested. Many house fellowships have a few people who have not yet been baptized, and are preparing for baptism.

The gathering usually consists of singing a lot of worship songs in the local language, prayer, Bible reading, and testimonies. Also praying for the sick, talking about struggles and challenges people face in their lives, and then bringing everything to prayer. Then someone preaches or teaches from the Word of God, usually for between one hour and an hour and 20 minutes. This may include interruptions, comments, and questions. The time is interactive; not just a one-way lecture. They have an offering, which sometimes in rural churches consists of giving in kind rather than money. Most groups share the Lord’s Supper together monthly; others do so twice a month or weekly. It varies from area to area. The elders of the church (not just men but also women) pray and serve the Lord’s Supper.

Groups normally accompany singing with simple Indian instruments, so people outside hear familiar sounds. The instruments might include an Indian style drum, a harmonium (hand-pump organ), and little cymbals.

Churches meet on various days of the week, depending on the location and situation. Almost all the churches meet more than once a week, typically two or three times a week.

1. **What’s the leadership structure of the churches?**

Churches normally have multiple elders and multiple levels of leadership, not just one leader. When the church reproduces or when a leader is away, things work better with multi-layer leadership. To respect the culture, women usually deal with pastoral issues for women and men deal with men.

A typical house church of 40-100 people will usually have four to six elders. There will usually be one main leader, a first among equals. This takes place not by appointment, but by recognition of the natural relational patterns. Believers submit to one another in love and respect rather than submitting to one person because he is the boss. In the movement we call each other “brother,” and view the top leaders as elder brothers. That shows affection rather than position.

The church involves different types of people. Not just one type of person can manage the church by themselves. You need different types of people interacting and addressing the needs of different people in discipling. Some church leaders think, “I have to do all this ministry myself, because I’ve been appointed to do this and people expect it of me.” But we try to engage multiple people in ministry and manage relationships among those in the church.

1. **How do the house churches (worshiping communities) handle functions like weddings and funerals? Are there certain people who officiate at such events?**

The national government requires that births, marriages, and deaths be registered. So we encourage couples to have a legal wedding. We also have a ceremony with the fellowship to bless the marriage. Local church leaders normally lead weddings and funerals. We equip and encourage all the house church leaders to do these things as fits their context. The weddings look like any other wedding of that area, but include Christian prayer and a message on what the Bible teaches about marriage. That’s the only difference. So people see: “In spite of becoming a Christian, you don’t have to forsake your culture to get married.” For funerals, some use cremation, as is the common Indian custom, depending on what is available locally. They don’t do all the rituals they used to do; they just have a prayer and do the ceremonies in a local cultural way.

The Bhojpuri songbook contains written guidelines for what to do for events like marriage, childbirth, death, Holy Communion, child dedication, a child’s birthday, an anniversary, baptism, and so on. That way leaders have a pattern they can follow if they’re new at it. We also help equip them through the trainings. Though the songbook is in Bhojpuri (and also some other languages), these guidelines are also written in Hindi, to be accessible for people from all the language groups.

Some groups have a ceremony a certain number of days after a person’s death. This ceremony is done in a Christian way with prayer, not with the previous rituals. We don’t necessarily eliminate the traditional gathering, but instead of mourning, we celebrate. People invite all their relatives to the ceremony and share the good news with them. Instead of praying to the dead person or praying for the peace of their spirit, they thank God for things he has done. So it’s a celebration rather than a gathering to weep for the person.

People attending these ceremonies generally respond positively. It becomes a door opener for unbelievers, since they have never seen anything like it. Occasionally some negative response arises, but generally people love the way it’s conducted. We don’t have a prescribed liturgy for such celebrations. We try to give principles and keep the patterns simple, so the good news lifestyle is easily passed on and practiced by anyone.

Many of the low-caste people don’t have as many ceremonies as high-caste people. And different castes have different ceremonies. So we don’t make any rule about ceremonies. We encourage them to have whatever ceremonies will be relevant and meaningful in their context.

1. **When is a fellowship considered a church?**

In this book we have intentionally used a variety of terms to describe the churches, such as “worshiping community", “fellowship” and “group.” This reflects contextual sensitivity but not ecclesiological fuzziness. We consider it important to have a clear definition of church. Two or three people gathering in a house is not a house church. “Church” is the gathering of believers who meet together regularly to break bread and pray and encourage each other. The key elements are repentance and discipleship, commitment to follow Christ, and baptism. The believers come together to celebrate their new life in Christ and leave the gathering promising to continue to preach the good news.

In our definition of church, we also include that a church has a designated place (so everybody knows where they meet) and a designated leader or leaders. In many gatherings, sometimes as many as half of those who attend are not yet baptized followers; they’re still on the way. But they come and study the Scriptures and participate in prayer, though they’re not yet a member of the church. They’re just visitors or guests in the church, and that’s a normal part of the process toward faith for many people.

The churches in the movement do not belong to any denomination, but they fulfill all the functions of a church. Sometimes a church will attach itself to a denomination, at which time it usually tends to become more traditional. We don’t call that a house church.

1. **How do you count the number of churches in the movement?**

In this context, churches start based on relationship, so we have a general idea of how many churches are starting. However, we don’t especially try to count them, because we would rather focus on outreach than administrative details. We don’t feel we need to cite big numbers to prove something. After people start meeting in a place and start baptizing and fulfilling the functions of a church, we consider it a church. When it starts reproducing, it becomes very difficult to keep track of how many times it has multiplied and how many new churches it has given birth to.

We know the number of fellowships started by leaders we have directly equipped. But these fellowships shift and multiply and sometimes a couple of them merge into a larger church. If we started trying to keep close track of all those numbers, we might lose our main focus.

1. **How can you maintain the work without paying pastors?**

We aim from the beginning to train bivocational leaders (“tentmakers” like Paul and Aquila and Priscilla). We don’t force those already serving as pastors to get another job. But we encourage farmers, teachers, engineers, and laborers in different fields to become church planters and lead churches. So from the beginning there’s no dependence on getting a salary from the ministry. The movement doesn’t depend on salaries and we don’t want to bring in salaries to cause disturbance in the movement. The movement thrives because all of God’s people are empowered to serve the Lord.

1. **How do you form a group?**

When there are at least two or three believers in a place, we encourage them to form a group. They might also invite three or four seekers to join. They then have a fellowship. Initially maybe four or five or seven people will gather once a week. The gathering will begin with prayer and singing, then slowly they will begin to share their testimony and then the Word of God – beginning with Psalms.

For example, I might run a fellowship and two of the members who attend come from three miles away. For a month or two they can come to my group, but then I would encourage them to form a group in their own village. So those two people would gather their family and some friends and they would start a worship group. Forming a group is very relational, following natural patterns of friends and families.

Initially the leader would show the new leaders how to have a worship service, teaching them some songs and how to conduct a prayer service. For the first month or two he or she would mentor and guide them. After they start the worship group, the leader would visit and mentor them once a month as they grow into fulfilling all the functions of a biblical worshiping community.

1. **How does multiplication of churches happen?**

Multiplication happens right from day one. It’s not a matter of a church getting too big so they have to split. Everyone in the church is motivated, everyone is intentional. Multiplication is not dependent on the main pastor. While a leader cares for the 20 to 50 people in one church, someone in the church starts another church connected to that church. Planting a new church can be done by anyone in the church: a member or one of the leaders. In fact we often don’t call people elders or pastors because of the baggage that comes with those titles. Other than leading in the weekly worship service, everyone views the pastors very much as equals in the congregation. So everyone produces disciples: the pastors, elders and members all produce disciples. And out of those disciples the natural leaders of new congregations arise, as illustrated in Vijay’s chart of generations in chapter 11.

1. **Do you have Discovery Groups of seekers – people who are not yet believers doing chronological Bible studies?**

We use Discovery Bible Studies as an approach to inductive Bible study for training believers and training leaders, not as an approach to evangelism.

1. **What questions are normally used in Discovery Bible Studies?**

Our basic pattern uses four simple questions to help people develop a routine of hearing and obeying God:

1) What does this passage say? (How do I put it in my own words?)

2) What is the main principle in this passage?

3) What should I do to obey this passage? (How do I apply it in my life?)

4) Who can I teach what I have just learned?

1. **What is the role of teaching and preaching in the movement?**

As already mentioned, teaching and preaching of the Word is a regular part of the believers’ gatherings. Teaching also takes place every month in the advanced leadership training, which gets passed on through the generations of the movement. Conferences and seminars also include teaching and preaching. But we don’t emphasize preaching as something done by special people. Preaching can be done by a variety of people.

1. **When leaders don’t attend seminary, what prevents heresy from creeping into the movement?**

Scripture is the main authority. The movement employs group learning and group accountability. One person cannot bring in a teaching that is not rooted in Scripture. The rest of the group will not accept it. Believers don’t just follow the ideas of one talented or brilliant individual. They simply take the Scripture and try to apply it in their lives. They emphasize obedience, not knowledge. Heresies come when teaching emphasizes “knowledge,” presenting some new and interesting idea. When discipleship focuses on obedience, the main thing is “let’s do it.”

The group learning process consists of Discovery Bible Studies, prayer, and testimonies, so believers all learn together, deal with problems together and rejoice together. Accountability happens through relationship, like in a family. When someone heads in the wrong direction, others in the family begin to notice symptoms. That’s how it works in the church as well. It’s not like people write a weekly report to make sure everybody is okay; it’s relational. In real conversation, people share what’s on their heart.

Our Curriculum for New Disciples conveys biblical truth in such a way as to prevent two possible setbacks to a CPM:

* Religious Syncretism – where old baggage of religion gets imported into the practice of church
* Christian Nominalism – a generation of Christians without any true experience of Christ.

We also do conferences and seminars, and (as already described) three to five day trainings for leaders every month (which leaders then pass on to those they lead). This brings ongoing connection and relationship. Regular interaction and visits also bring implicit accountability.

1. **How is baptism handled in the movement?**

Our staff do not baptize people. When people start coming to faith in a community, often the person of peace, the first believer, will do the baptism. In the rural context, baptism is done by the local leader who started the fellowship. It’s important that a local person does the baptism, not somebody from a different city.

Normally the leader considers who is closest to the person getting baptized. If they have a close relative who is already a believer (an uncle, father, mother or a friend) we usually encourage that person to baptize the person. That minimizes protest and persecution. If a relative does the baptism, nobody will question it; it’s considered their right. Even if a son baptizes his father, nobody will bother him. It’s a family matter.

When a person gets baptized, it’s important that they give their testimony of how they came to know Christ. Sometimes a whole family will come to faith together, but often it’s an individual. Most people get baptized as soon as they come to know Christ. It’s part of the basic teaching new believers receive. At the same time we like to have the whole family prepare and get baptized together, so that together they can survive any pressure or persecution. The main thing is that we don’t wait for a huge number of people before we baptize. If two people are ready for baptism, we baptize them. We try to encourage them to not wait for a big crowd to get baptized.

Baptisms can be done anywhere. It depends on the situation. If a river is nearby, we use that. Or it can be done in a home, if there’s some kind of tank that can be used. It just depends on the situation. Any believer can baptize people; there are no restrictions. Normally women will only baptize other women, but it’s not a rule. There are cases when a woman might baptize men.

1. **How do you handle evangelizing individuals vs. evangelizing families?**

We share the good news and rejoice in whatever ways God brings people to himself. Sometimes a whole family will come to faith together, but often it’s an individual who comes to faith first then reaches the rest of their family. When a person comes to faith because of a healing, often that person accepts Christ first, then the whole family accepts Christ.

1. **How do the people in the churches understand the person of Christ?**

They have made a choice, instead of following 330 million gods and goddesses to follow only One. They’ve gone through suffering just for that One Name, the Name above every other name. When ministry is relational rather than attractional, Christ-centered rather than personality-centered, Christ becomes the focus from day one. People are drawn toward Christ, God manifest as a man. Not the miracles, not the people, not Christianity, not the benefits. People discover over time who Christ is and God shows them his power, so they come to know him as the living God. The whole point of disciple-making is following Jesus.

1. **What is the role of prayer in each aspect of the movement? What does prayer look like; in other words, when a church planter prays daily for however long, can you describe how he/she is interacting with God?**

Prayer plays a very important part in the movement. It’s part of the movement’s DNA, the essence of the movement. Without prayer, nothing can move. Whatever we do, we start with prayer. We train believers in such a way that they can pray for themselves and also pray for others. We teach them: “The things I’m praying for you, you can go and pray in the same way for others.” We also have group prayer, prayer walks, fasting and prayer, all-night prayer, and praying for the nation (especially around election times). If persecution is happening somewhere, we pray for that place. We involve everyone in the body of Christ in prayer. We teach them that prayer is not just for pastors and leaders.

Prayer connects everyone with Almighty God. We even involve unbelievers. Everyone has some needs. So instead of trying to meet every need ourselves, the leaders encourage unbelievers: “Connect yourself to the Living God. God answers the prayer offered in faith.” So they pray to God and in most cases, God answers their prayer and that begins the journey of faith for them. After that comes mentoring and reading the Scripture together, inviting them into fellowship. So prayer is the beginning.

Sometimes the fellowship will join in prayer for the needs of an unbeliever. That helps unbelievers realize that it’s not a matter of chanting a mantra, but personal communication with the Living God. Prayer may be silent, it may be in a group, or it may be one person praying for another person.

In our culture, if we ask someone, “Can I pray for you?” they almost always answer, “Oh yes, please pray for me.” So prayer becomes a good connecting tool – like a way of access. If a person is open for prayer, they may also be open for something more.

The majority of religious people in India focus their personal prayers on just three things. They pray for protection from demons (appeasing the gods so they won’t harm them), prosperity (for wealth to increase), and victory over their enemies. When redemption comes into their lives, it brings a total transformation. They no longer need to pray for prosperity or appease the gods or ask for victory over an enemy. We ask God to help us love our enemies and grow closer to him. And we don’t focus on increasing our wealth. We pray for God’s glory, not for selfish benefit.

New believers learn about corporate prayer by praying with God’s people. They discover that prayer is conversation with God rather than a matter of clapping their hands or other bodily motions. Corporate prayer revolutionizes them. Part of discipleship and mentoring is modeling, including modeling prayer.

Most of the leaders in the movements spend three to five hours a day in prayer. This has been surveyed and recorded. That’s part of the culture of the movement. The first motivator is their vision for reaching out. They pray for guidance as they go to new places. They pray for survival and pray about the challenges from non-Christians and those who persecute them. They pray for wisdom in their interaction with seekers, people coming with questions. And when someone invites them to go somewhere to pray, cast out demons or heal someone, they spend time praying in advance that God would use them.

1. **Is prayer walking common in the movement?**

People do prayer walking most often when going to a new area or village to start a new work. Whenever we go to a pioneer place or an unreached place we always start with prayer. Sometimes we go two by two and sometimes in a whole group. Before the Bhojpuri movement started and as it got underway, we did a lot of prayer walking. This included prayer related to high places and special places of spiritual power.

Praying while walking is a new experience for many people in this context, so we train people in it through experience. And sometimes occasions will just arise spontaneously as people are walking together and discussing things. One of them may say, “How about if we pray about this?”

For things like prayer walking, a lot depends on the patterns and preferences of individual leaders. We don’t organize or monitor or supervise it. But the movement definitely has a culture of prayer and substantial time spent in prayer.

1. **If most of the leaders are bivocational and they spend three to five hours a day in prayer, how do they have time for ministry and for their family?**

Eight hours sleeping and eight hours for a job still leaves eight more hours left in a day. That includes prayer, eating, ministry, family, and everything else. God didn’t create us to not have time for him or to not have time for one another. I can’t just tell God, “I only have 15 minutes for you.” And I can’t tell my wife or my children, “Tell me everything you need to say in 15 minutes.” Here in India use of time is based more on relationship. So from a Western perspective, one might say a lot of time is wasted here. But for us, it’s the way to get things accomplished. And in the village context many of the bivocational workers are self-employed in agriculture or trading or as a skilled laborer. They may wake up at 4:30 in the morning and pray for two hours before beginning their day’s work.

Some people are busy taking care of small children or working in the kitchen, so while they do their kitchen work they pray. I don’t spend two hours doing nothing else but praying. We pray along with whatever we’re doing. When I’m going on a visit, I’ll pray for the visit and the meetings while I’m traveling there.

1. **Is fasting commonly done in the movement?**

The practice of fasting depends on the various leaders and their relationship with God. Most groups have a regular weekly day of prayer and fasting. Sometimes on Sunday, or Wednesday evening, or some other day they have agreed on. Often they’ll pray through the whole night. Or if they’re going to pray for someone who’s very sick, sometimes they’ll ask the believers: “Let’s fast and pray for the Lord to heal this person.” And sometimes they’ll pair fasting with a prayer walk.

Typically when believers gather for prayer and fasting they’ll start with worship, then pray over different needs they have. They pray for their neighbors and for the area, that God will show them places to go and open the door there. Or maybe they’ve already gone to an area and made one or two contacts and they want to go and follow up. So they would have the group pray for that. They also pray for the covering of Jesus’ blood (Revelation 12:11), so that whenever they have a power encounter they will be able to face that, because power encounters happen quite often. It’s not easy casting out demons and all, and that’s a new experience for the new believers.

1. **Have you developed any training to equip new believers to engage with God in prayer?**

We have a booklet on discipleship which includes prayer. When we teach the Word of God we teach everything. We teach about prayer from Scripture and through example and active involvement. These are all very reproducible.

1. **How do you disciple someone?**

We pray throughout the discipleship process. We first connect with the person to build a relationship. Through the relationship, they may become interested in knowing Christ in some way, through bits of the good news or through our testimony or lifestyle.

The next phase comes when someone makes a commitment to Christ. They experience the power of God, learn to pray, and experience God’s power in their life. In that discipling process they also share with their family and friends, so that while they are making commitments they are also preparing others to do the same. Then they start coming to fellowship and become part of the church. Sometimes they also get inspired to start a new fellowship.

We involve people in prayer and Bible study, and in fellowshipping with believers continuously as part of the discipling process. We also share with them our testimonies of how to grow, how to pray, and how their faith can be sustained. Then we share about how to handle tough situations when they come.

Our "Curriculum for New Disciples" gives new believers a basic knowledge of the Bible (concerning God, Man, Sin, Salvation and the Word of God) and how to apply these truths for spiritual growth and obedience to the Word of God. It also equips them to reach out to the lost and start the process of discipleship with others. This course aims to preserve the purity of the good news while applying it in varied cultural settings. We designed it for teaching in an interactive way where the participants/disciples discover these truths from the Scripture, preferably in groups, to ensure accountability. We focus not so much on acquiring knowledge as on encouraging each disciple to obey the Word of God in practical everyday life. The natural outcome is a church-planting movement, when disciples make disciples of others, and this process continues consistently.

1. **What does the mentoring process typically look like?**

Mentoring doesn’t depend on any set curriculum. It comes together spontaneously. In a mentoring relationship, leaders keep in regular contact with those they mentor. They help them gain a biblical perspective on issues they’re facing, understand how to share the good news, and learn how to start and run a church. They also prepare them for whatever may come in the future, and generally share whatever’s on their heart. It’s a day-to-day process, doing things together: working together and watching ministry in action. It doesn’t happen every day; they spend time together whenever they have opportunity. Sometimes they just pray together or address any doubts or questions the mentee has. At other times they share biblical references to address issues being faced, advise about pastoral care or suggest books to address issues. It’s a long-term relationship.

If a new leader (mentee) has a problem in the church, their mentor might personally visit the church or the family, giving some guidelines and coming alongside the local leaders. The most important thing is spending time with the leader, so they sense their mentor is available in times of need. In the same way each leader aims to be available to their community and the people they lead.

As leaders become more confident, mentoring requires less time. We give new leaders freedom to move ahead. If they’re doing well, we don’t need to be teaching them all the time or getting in their way. But we remain available if they have a question or a problem they need to talk about. The mentoring doesn’t happen on a schedule: “It has been X amount of time, so it’s time for us to talk again.” That’s a more Western approach. The most important part of mentoring is to free the leaders in ministry: empowering, not controlling. This helps multiplication.

Mentoring is not always same-gender (men mentoring men and women mentoring women). It’s sometimes mixed, but we take care that mixed conversations don’t happen alone. We always have other people around, especially since we don’t do mentoring just one-on-one. A group provides accountability, so we always work in a team. We never go places alone, so mentoring doesn’t become personality centered.

1. **What role do women play in the movement?**

We view women and treat women as equal partners in the good news and in the ministry. This is counter cultural and intentional on our part. Our stand from the very beginning has been that men and women are equal. Just as God calls men, he calls women as well. If men can make disciples, women can make disciples. So we have many women who are leaders and church planters in the movement. They have discipled people and won whole households. We have no problem with appointing women as leaders in the church. The head of our organization is a woman, a wonderful servant leader.

1. **If spiritual warfare is part of your experience, how do you describe the spiritual battle?**

The spiritual battle is a continual part of discipleship. Once you’re on the Lord’s side, you have to fight against the powers and principalities of darkness. Spiritual warfare may come through persecution, family issues, children getting sick, somebody working against you, or people making false accusations. All these kinds of attacks can come from various directions as part of the spiritual battle we face. But when we continue to pray and stand strong in the battle, the victory belongs to us because Christ has already won! The believers know this fact: we have to fight and persevere. If we give up we lose. Victory is assured as long as we remain in the battlefield.

When people accept the Lord it’s not easy to go forward. There will be temptations, persecution, and opposition. Many things will happen, but we have to always depend on God. This life is a fight every day, but every victory helps us have faith for the next fight. David remembered how God had given him victory over the lion and the bear, and that increased his faith to face Goliath. God builds on past victories.

Most of the time the battle happens in our mind. The mind is connected to the soul, connected to emotions, and it can distract us. So we have to continuously watch our mind and take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). The devil brings in all kinds of thoughts and we start struggling with those. But if I tell my heart and my mind: “Always remember what God has done,” then I stop struggling and start winning. The Psalmist said, “I have hidden your word in my heart, so that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). When Jesus answered Satan (Luke 4), he used the Word of God and he showed us: “This is how you fight the battle. Don’t try to use your human logic or the devil will entangle it more. Use the Word of God.” So prayer and the Word of God helps us fight the battle.

Spiritual warfare is not always from the outside. Sometimes it’s within us – within our organization or our family or our own mind. So it’s a different kind of experience every day. On the macro level as well, the way we stand against spiritual forces opposing the movement is to apply these truths and obey the Word of God.

1. **Have there been typical strategies that Satan has used to try to prevent progress in the movement?**

Yes. One of Satan’s favorite strategies is to discourage God’s people so they lose heart and give up. Persecution is often part of Satan’s first strategy to bring discouragement, as we already mentioned in chapter 6. Another of his strategies is to counterfeit: to come up with something parallel but off base. Many of the counterfeits don’t last very long. But before they disappear, they can do serious damage. A third strategy of Satan is to create distraction, which can come through comparison: “He’s succeeding; I’m not. He got a motorcycle, but I didn’t. He’s building his house; I’m not.”

Satan also tries to disrupt through conspicuous sin, especially by leaders. Right at the beginning of the movement, one of the church leaders was caught committing adultery. Some thought we should shut down the church. But we tried to apply a response like the Apostle Paul took with the church at Corinth: the goal of church discipline being restoration not punishment. Whatever the sin, God’s strategy is to redeem while Satan’s strategy is to condemn and destroy.

1. **Are signs and wonders generally common in the movement? Are they connected to prayer and fasting?**

In our context, signs and wonders always follow wherever the gospel is preached. Miracles happen quite commonly in the movement, but we don’t focus on those. We focus on obeying God and doing what he commands, to show his glory on earth. We do pray and fast, asking God to do mighty works and show himself as the Living God. But we don’t have a formula, as if X amount of prayer and fasting brings Y resultant increase in the likelihood of a miracle. We don’t do special things to twist God’s arm so he’ll act. We draw near to him because he’s our loving Father and he does great things because he’s a mighty Savior.

1. **How have you handled criticism from outside Christians who don’t believe this movement is happening?**

We just continue doing what God has given us to do. When David’s own brothers criticized him, that didn’t stop him from fighting Goliath. He obeyed God and went after what God had told him to do. He didn’t focus on what other people said, but on what God said. We do that too. We see the same with Nehemiah when he was building the wall. He just kept on doing the work.

1. **How do you maintain the movement’s momentum multi-generationally?**

From the beginning, local leaders are involved, and they own the process. They get what they need for ministry in their own community. Each area has a mini-movement, so when you put them all together it becomes a big movement. They each pass on the DNA (reflected in the principles in chapter 12) to those close to them so the same DNA passes on through the generations. Everyone acts on their own internal motivation, with their own network of connections.

From the first day, when we share the good news with people, we tell them: “Whatever blessing we receive, we have to share with others.” In the same way, we tell leaders: “Whatever we learn, we have to share with others.” So when people take initiative and start a new church, they pass on the same blessings they have received.

1. **What things increase the likelihood of multiplication?**

Simple biblical patterns multiply much more effectively than brilliant human ideas. Multiplication happens naturally when everyone takes ownership, everyone feels empowered and everyone obeys God’s commands.

1. **Does rapid multiplication lead to shallow believers?**

When people actively study God’s Word and consistently obey it, why would they be shallow? Shallowness comes from either ignorance of God’s Word or a person knowing more truth than they obey. Discovery Bible Studies prevent both of these. As believers remain in Christ, they bear fruit. Everyone has an opportunity to grow and to multiply. The Bhojpuri movement has continued to multiply for more than two decades. Some people wonder: “With such rapid growth, how do you keep it from being shallow and at the same time keep it moving forward?”

The answer is simple. We deal with issues biblically and we allow leadership to mature as quickly as possible. Everyone has a vision to reach the lost within their own circle of influence and groups don’t depend on ordained or paid leaders.

The church in the book of Acts didn’t worry that rapid multiplication might lead to shallow believers. They focused intensely on obeying Jesus’s command to proclaim the good news to as many people as possible and bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ. We want to do that too, and encourage other believers in it as well.

1. **Isn’t this kind of CPM something that can work in India but not in Western countries?**

When God’s people obey his Word, it will work anywhere. This movement started in a rural area and many people said, “It won’t work in an urban area.” But we can’t limit where God can and can’t work. God can work anywhere when people are willing to obey. When we say, “God can’t work” in a certain place, we have a problem with our belief about God. Better to ask, “What do I need to do to increase my faith?” It’s trusting that God can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

The Arameans thought Israel’s God was only a god of the hills and could only work in certain locations. But God showed his greatness by defeating them on the plains. He said, “Because the Arameans think the Lord is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the Lord” (1 Kings 20:28). Our job is to accept the challenge to believe God and obey God.

1. **How do you avoid accusations of proselyting?**

If someone accuses us of converting people to Christianity, we answer that we are not here to convert people to any religion. We’re here to transform people’s lives. We quote from the Bible that Jesus came into the world, not to convert people to a religion but to give eternal life to all who believe, in the whole world. We explain that what we do is to share the good news of Jesus Christ, which includes loving each other and helping the poor and oppressed. If someone becomes so influenced by our actions and behavior or by our message that they want to follow Jesus, we don’t convert that person. That would be their personal decision.

In the past, some people converted to Christianity because they hoped to get some financial or social gain. So visible *external* change was most important, as evidence they had converted, so they would get the benefit. But that didn’t encourage spiritual transformation or real spiritual life among Christians. We aren’t interested in the externals, and this movement doesn’t offer people any financial or social gain. We try to bless everybody, and those who open their hearts can experience a personal relationship with God through Christ, in obedience to his Word and in fellowship with his people.

1. **Why is “conversion” such a big issue in India?**

While the vast majority of Indians are Hindu, official census data shows a steady decrease in the Hindu percentage of the population: 84.1 percent in [1951](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951_Census_of_India), 81.5 percent in [1991](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Census_of_India), 80.4 percent in [2001](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_Census_of_India) and 79.8 percent in [2011](http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-has-79-8-percent-hindus-14-2-percent-muslims-2011-census-data-on-religion-2407708.html). This percentage decline has continued despite the rapid growth of India's population. The percentage of Christians has officially remained at 2.3 percent throughout this 60-year period while the percentage of Muslims has increased (largely through higher birth rates). No official data is available concerning the number who may have converted from one religion to another, yet anecdotal evidence (from both Christian and Hindu sources) suggests large numbers of “conversions.”

Article 25 of India’s constitution guarantees “Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.” However some states have passed anti-conversion laws (euphemistically called “Freedom of Religion” laws) and the current national government favors passing an anti-conversion bill.

Hindu nationalist organizations claim that Christian missionaries forcefully convert Hindus to Christianity. So the stated purpose of the anti-conversion laws is to prohibit religious conversions “by force, fraud, and inducement or allurement.” Most Christians, however, view these laws as intended to obstruct any type of religious change and maintain Hindu cultural dominance.  Hindu nationalists have often harassed Christian workers, imprisoning them with false accusations or attacking prayer meetings and claiming they caught Christians intending to convert Hindus.

In several states, groundless prosecutions have been launched under the Freedom of Religion Acts against members of the minority Christian community. “In its 2011 report, the USCIRF [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom] noted that: ‘The harassment and violence against religious minorities appears to be more pronounced in states that have adopted “Freedom of Religion” Acts or are considering such laws.’ The report further stated that: ‘These laws have led to few arrests and reportedly no convictions.’ According to the US State Department, between June 2009 and December 2010, approximately 27 arrests were made in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, but resulted in no convictions.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

This kind of “anti-conversion” pressure constitutes a challenge for our work, although as just described we do not “convert” anyone.

1. **How do you respond to accusations that Christianity is a foreign religion?**

We actually did research and asked many people: “Why do people say Christianity is a foreign religion?”

The main answer was, “Because when people accept Christ, their eating style becomes very different. They start using a spoon, and wearing a white shirt and a tie. They start saying ‘Mom’ and ‘Dad’ instead of using respectful terms, and they sound like foreigners.”

So we identified the problem: people weren’t just changing their faith, but their whole lifestyle and culture. That’s why people called it a foreign religion, because the believers adopted a foreign culture.

In a village, the moment you say, “I’m a Christian,” everyone immediately thinks: “Oh, he goes to a big cathedral where people drink wine and eat cow meat and pork.” So we need to change that perception of Christianity. We need to present the Christian message wisely. In rural areas Christianity needs to be Indian style.

In towns or cities, people generally don’t mind Christianity much even if it is Western style. Maybe some of them want to become Christian, which means they adopt the Christian culture. In rural areas, that won’t appeal to many people. So we need to know the context and who we’re talking to. Depending on the audience, we give an answer that’s clear and makes sense.

1. **What do believers in the movement call themselves? What’s their public religious identity?**

From the beginning of the work, we never suffered from an identity crisis. So we didn’t have to create a denomination or put our name on churches. That confuses some traditional-thinking people. They say: “You’re not a bishop; how can you say you have thousands of churches?” We don’t want our name on it. It’s working; it’s God’s work and it has inspired others. The movement is not centralized; it’s centrifugal, with momentum flowing outward.

Many people in the movement don’t use the word “Christian,” because it’s considered a foreign religion. So we refer to the disciples as “Believers.” Everyone understands that term, but it doesn’t bring a negative reaction. We just avoid using the religious terms that cause problems.

In some contexts we say we are making Jesu Bhakta – Hindi for "disciples of Jesus Christ"; they don’t have to call themselves Christians. Many people in the movement would say, “We are followers of Christ, we are not ‘Christian’.” They understand that being Jesus’s disciple doesn’t mean changing your name and eating certain foods or wearing certain clothes. The change happens in their heart and relationship with God and prayer life. We don’t tell people we have “converted” to become Christians and we don’t change our name (which people would interpret as a sign that we had “converted”).

Our goal is to point people to Jesus and what he teaches so they can follow him. So our way of life is culturally appropriate for reaching that goal. We honor the local culture and customs. People don’t have to change their food and language or their way of living, so long as it is not in violation of Scripture. For example, when I got married, I followed my own cultural patterns, not the “Christian culture.” My wife wore a red sari (which is normal for Hindus; different from the white dress normal for Christians). So our continuing of neutral cultural patterns shows people we haven’t “converted to a foreign religion.”

1. **What’s the believers’ sense of connection to the larger (global and historic) body of Christ? Since they aren’t part of a denomination and many of them don’t call themselves Christian, what’s their sense of “Who are we?”**

From the start, the movement has been connected to the global church, with edifying and mutually supportive relationships. In some villages, many of the believers are the first person in their family to accept Christ, so they don’t have any idea of the concept of a “denomination.” And since the Bible doesn’t mention denominations, they don’t feel anything missing. The big conferences, like the annual Bhojpuri conference, help them feel: “We are not alone. We have a crowd of people and we have a big family in Christ.” We invite leaders from around the state and elsewhere to participate in the conferences, so people feel a sense of connection with the larger body of Christ.

Leaders who have more education and global awareness understand that they and all believers belong to the global and historic body of Christ.

1. **What lessons did you (Victor) personally learn during the early years, when you had the vision but there was no sign of a movement?**

I had some very depressing years in the beginning of this work. I felt very lonely at times because I lost all my friends and not much was happening in the ministry. Time and again I would subconsciously be reminded that the Bhojpuri area was the “graveyard of missions.” But I would refuse to accept that. The battle went on, day in and day out. Many people thought what I was doing was crazy.

I found it hard to explain to people how to categorize this effort. If I said, “I’m a pioneer church planter,” people would ask, “Why aren’t you based in some remote location with your family and suffering for Christ?” Or, “Why don't you have a church that you pastor?”

My friends distanced themselves from me because they thought I was on the wrong track. I didn’t have many people around me to fall back on as a ring of protection. I became very vulnerable. People could say, “I don’t think Victor is doing the right kind of ministry” and everybody would believe it.

I asked God about this and God said, “I’m your friend.”

I asked myself, “Do I really know him?” And I found out that I didn’t!

God said, “This is your chance to know me as a friend. Not just as God; not just as Creator, but to discover me as your friend.”

That liberated me. I suddenly found myself very content and happy and free. I could be in God’s presence at any moment. Now, no matter what I’m doing I can just be in his presence and be in his glory, and have that touch of holiness. I’d say my friends gave me that as a gift. Because if they hadn’t left me I might still not be experiencing this.

If I hadn’t met God in that way I don’t think this movement would have started. A movement needs to be built on a strong inner relationship with God. It’s not a philosophy that you teach. It’s not “the four points to successful church planting.” At some point you have to meet the Creator and have a one to one meeting with him and develop an intimate relationship. That’s when a process of self-denial and self-evaluation begins. That’s where the future becomes the present and a believer can move at another level by fulfilling the purpose of God.

It’s not about my personal holiness or my sanctification or my knowledge. It’s simple obedience as a lifestyle, not as a rule or with fear that God will punish me. That meeting and relationship with God brought an understanding of who he is and who I am.

You’ll never hear me saying, “I did this or that which caused the movement.” I’m very conscious of what Christ has done. I understand that I can never do some good deed that makes God obliged to move and work. We have to realize and acknowledge that it’s God who has *done it all*. I try to be very careful not to say, “I did it.”

If somebody asks, “What one or two things do you want to tell people?” I would say, “You have to ‘come home’ and develop an inner friendship with God, where God can talk to you as a friend.”

I used to walk the *Ghats* (steps leading down to the Ganges River) with the Hindus and lift my hands in prayer. I embarrassed myself, but not much happened. It’s not because of something I do that God moves. Some people have this idea that if I do something special then God will move. They say things like, “I fasted 40 days, then God moved” or “I prayed on my knees then God broke through,” as if God was conditioned by a human act. No human should ever think, “I did something that made this act of God happen.”

When I hear that I tremble. I think: “Do you have any idea who our God is? He’s a consuming fire. He can snuff out my life in no time.” I must never say: “I did this so God would move.” Some people will say things that make you wonder: “Was God there before you came?” It’s not that I did something, therefore God moved. It’s God’s movement; we just follow what he’s doing and play our God-given role.

1. **What is your vision for the future?**

Our vision is to continue to obey the Great Commission, to present Christ to various language communities and have a global impact. The Great Commission is a global vision so we share in that vision to impact every people. The progress we have seen (described in the “Beyond the Bhojpuri” chapter) encourages us to believe for what God will do in the future.

1. **What role (if any) do foreigners play in the movement?**

While the movement is indigenous and led by Indians, we greatly appreciate the contributions of friends from other countries, especially teaching and resources. Our organization has partnered with Westerners throughout our history. Foreigners have played a number of useful roles over the years, which we have already mentioned. These days we could use short-term volunteers as trainers in fields like medicine, business, education, and English teaching to improve the skills of local people.

We also have many needs for documenting stories of God’s work here. We don’t have time to document the stories and none of us are good at writing in English. We need people who can help us with that. We need connectors and people who can come teach us and provide pastoral care for our main leaders. But we don’t need foreigners going out to the field and trying to share the good news individually.

Some opportunities do arise for foreigners to share the good news when they get involved in community-access approaches. For example, if a person teaches a class on business, they would directly interact with people of another faith, which gives an opportunity for sharing.

A professor recently came from Texas to teach university students. During his 10 days of teaching, he led someone to Christ. When foreigners teach at that level, whether it’s teaching English or some other skill-development program, they can interact directly with their students. When foreigners bring some expertise, they can give training to trainers. They can also give training to business people and consult with them. But we don’t recommend foreigners go directly to the communities to share with people.

1. **How can Christians in other parts of the world play a positive role in this movement?**

First by praying for the movement:

* Pray for the people playing a vital role on the front lines of the movement, who share the good news with unbelievers and face day-to-day difficulties and problems.
* Pray that when God’s Word is shared it will land on fertile soil and grow; that the Spirit will touch people and draw them to Christ.
* Pray for the needs of the bivocational workers.
* Pray that God will overcome barriers and that even resistant groups and individuals will become open to the good news.

Also, as mentioned above, Christians from other parts of the world can also get involved by assisting with various holistic projects. All kinds of people can play a role, contributing their skill to the movement.

1. **How can I contact you if I want to support the work or come and get involved directly?**

You can contact us via <www.apii.org/contact>.

**Appendix**

**Chronology of the Bhojpuri Breakthrough**

Organiza-tion registered as a Charitable Society.

First survey of Bhojpuri districts.

First

Bhojpuri

conferencein Varanasi.

Training center established in Patna. First Bihar Leaders Conference held in Patna.

Bhojpuri New Testament released. First Bhojpuri song book launched. The movement began to grow exponentially.

Opened Awadhi Leaders training center. Launched ministry among Muslims. Sixth Bhojpuri Conference held. IMB did survey to assess Bhojpuri CPM growth.

Second Bhojpuri conference.

Began HIV/AIDs awareness programs. Sent missionaries to Suriname to train church planters.

Launched the Bhojpuri Dramatized Audio New Testament. Released audio tape of Bhojpuri worship songs.

Started mobile health clinic in U.P and Bihar. Launched Advanced Leadership Training Program. Began Bible Training for Pastors Course to equip leaders locally at the Bachelor of Theology level.

Started Adult and Child Education program in U.P. and Bihar.

Began *Sahyog-A-Child* (Railroad Kids) project in U.P. and Bihar. Began work among the physically challenged. Began the Mother and Child Health program and Family Life Education.

Launched rapid response to December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

Leaders interviewed by Beyond, for survey of CPM among the Bhojpuri and beginning this book.

Began self-help groups in rural U.P. and Bihar; *Sahyog-A-Child* expanded to Kolkata. Did CPM training in Indonesia.

Sent survey team to Delhi. Produced worship song books for Magahi and Awadhi languages.

Opened the first Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in U.P. and Bihar. Opened a center in Delhi. Released the book *Rural Participation on Environment Conservation*. Did CPM training in Bangladesh.

Began ministry in Delhi. Opened CLCs in West Bengal and Delhi. Distributed food to flood victims in Bihar and U.P.. Began publishing

bi-annual magazine *Sahyog*. Published a *Child Policy Rights* book.

Opened *Sahyog-A-Child* children’s homes in Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Patna, and Kolkata. Held Mega Bhojpuri Conference for first time in Delhi.

Laid foundation stone for *Chehri Gramin* School building.

Began work in Haryana. Did CPM training in 3 cities in USA. Did conference and CPM training in Japan.

Published discipleship booklet: *New Disciples.* Published booklet *Leadership: A Course Material for Leaders.* Prayer team’s fact-finding meeting in Jaipur, for starting work in Rajasthan.

Started Sports Ministry in U.P., Bihar and Delhi. Published Magahi New Testament. Partnered and trained in Karnataka. Did CPM training in three countries of North Africa.

Launched the Magahi Dramatized Audio Bible. Began ministry in Rajasthan. Launched the Child Development Center in partnership with Compassion International.

2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016

Note to Megan: Don't include what follows in the book:

71,265 words = about 240 pages

1. Editor:’s note: I (Dave) met Sashi’s father. I invited him to tell me more, and later verified his story with his mentor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matthew 12:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In obedience-based discipleship, obeying God (*applying* the teaching of Christ) functions as a central characteristic of life as his disciple. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As described in published reports such as, e.g. “[Ayodhya dispute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayodhya_dispute),” accessed 5/29/2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, for example “[THE PATTERN OF ABUSE: RURAL VIOLENCE IN BIHAR AND THE STATE’S RESPONSE](https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/india/India994-06.htm),” and “[Class (And Caste) War Brewing In Bihar, India’s Poorest, Most Dangerous State](http://www.ibtimes.com/class-caste-war-brewing-bihar-indias-poorest-most-dangerous-state-1515840).” To mention just two especially noteworthy atrocities: in 1992, the MCC (low-caste fighters) brutally killed 35 members of the Brahmin caste at Bara village in Bihar. The MCC's armed group brought the 35 men of Bara to the bank of a nearby canal, tied their hands and slit their throats. Revenge came in 1997 when a militia of upper caste landlords, called Ranvir Sena, slaughtered 58 Dalits in Lakshmanpur Bathe village in a well-planned and coordinated attack. About 100 armed Ranvir Sena activists entered Lakshmanpur Bathe at around 11 pm. They broke into huts and shot people in their sleep. The village was virtually decimated in the attack; the youngest victim was less than a year old. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See descriptions from these sources: [**http://navsarjan.org/navsarjan/dalits/whoaredalits**](http://navsarjan.org/navsarjan/dalits/whoaredalits)**;** <http://creative.sulekha.com/manusmriti-epic-of-caste-system-and-casteism_416485_blog>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/india17605.htm>. Accessed 12/14/2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “The Scheduled Castes…and Scheduled Tribes…are various officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged indigenous people in India. The terms are recognized in the Constitution of India….In modern literature, the Scheduled Castes are sometimes referred to as…Dalits.” Wikipedia, accessed 3/13/2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, abbreviated RSS, is a right-wing Hindu nationalist, paramilitary organization. Its members are not generally considered friendly toward the good news. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For description of this ritual, see for example “[Hindu Funeral Traditions](https://www.everplans.com/articles/hindu-funeral-traditions)” or “[Srimatham - Introduction to death & dying](http://www.srimatham.com/death-samskara.html).” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In India a block is a cluster of 5–10 villages, depending on population. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The *bindi* is a symbol of the "third eye" an eye that sees beyond the material world. This insightful symbol is very compatible with the Christian worldview that there is a spiritual reality that may be quite different than what the material world presents to us. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See “Five Dalits Done to Death for ‘Killing’ a Cow” (<http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/01112002/0111200292.htm>) and “Haryana's Brutal Cattle Vigilantes…Appear to be Above the Law” (<http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/haryanas-brutal-cattle-vigilantes-notorious-for-youtube-videos-appear-to-be-above-the-law-748444>). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hundreds of cases of recent caste-related atrocities (many in Haryana) have been recorded and posted at <http://www.annihilatecaste.in/atrocity-all-case-studies>, and a Google search using three words “Haryana,” “caste” and “atrocity” brings well over 100,000 hits (as of 12/14/2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The dowry system in India refers to the durable goods, cash, and real or movable property that the bride's family gives to the bridegroom, his parents, or his relatives as a condition of the marriage.” “The trend in present India, with its booming economy, is now encouraging ever-higher bride prices among all socioeconomic strata. But the rising bride price has brought with it an increase in violence against women.

    Dowry violence is usually perpetrated by the husband or the in-laws in a bid to extract a higher dowry from the bride's family. The dowry price paid at the time of marriage may be significant, but the greed of husbands and in-laws can grow after marriage. This frequently translates into physical, mental or sexual violence against the bride….

    Although seeking a dowry has been outlawed in India since 1961, the ban has been a challenge to enforce. An amendment to the law in 1986 mandated that any death or violence within the first seven years of marriage would be tried as related to dowry.” Sources: Wikipedia and “The Dowry System in India: Is the Trend Changing?” <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/asia-india-dowry-marriage-violence-against-women-bride-culture-husband-physical-mental-sexual-suicide>. Accessed 12/15/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A social unit known as a *mahapanchayat.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In Indian culture, a garland of shoes is considered the lowest of insults, very shameful. It’s the opposite of a garland of flowers, used to honor someone. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. According to Wikipedia, *“Ghar Wapsi* (Hindi, meaning "Home Coming") is a series of religious conversion activities…to facilitate conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism.” The article “India: ‘Ghar Wapsi’ [a Return Home] and the Not-so-veiled Threat of the Sangh” reports: “I have had occasion to document Ghar Wapsi events in various villages of Orissa,…where the process has involved shaving off the head of men and women, their purification through a mixture of cow dung and cow urine, the chanting of mantras around the fire and, wherever possible, the burning of “alien” books such as the Bible….My own observations after field studies are of Ghar Wapsi as a movement that uses armed force and violence, certainly the threat of violence, towards a conversion of neo-Christians to Hinduism.” (<http://www.sacw.net/article4747.html>, accessed 12/14/2016 ) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. We highly recommend the 2016 movie “Lion,” which powerfully portrays a case similar to this one. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. We don’t have a license to work with girls, which involves many more issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Some of the most common forms of child labor include working in a house or hotel as a domestic servant: cleaning, mopping and carrying water. Not everywhere has direct access to running water so water sometimes has to be carried a long distance. Other work includes cleaning toilets in hospitals and some of the worst kinds of jobs. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The general public often doesn't feel safe trying to help a lost child because the police would ask questions and if any problem arose, they might get accused of child trafficking. An NGO could help an unaccompanied child, but the general public would be taking a big risk to try to help. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Help Line is a government program to help railway children. Our ministry’s time at the railway stations is limited (five to six hours at a time, three days a week), whereas the Help Line is staffed 24/7. They often refer cases to us when people call, if a child is lost or in trouble. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. A doctor comes once a month to the children’s home to give all the children a general checkup, to make sure they’re healthy and don’t have any diseases. We also have a special room at the children’s home where new children stay for five or six days until they can be tested to make sure they don’t have any contagious diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis or Hepatitis B. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For a poor illiterate child in a remote village, the railway seems to represent hope -- a different place, a different future that, although unknown, must surely be better. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 outlines where and how children can work and where they cannot. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In 1992, India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Various lists give a different ranking, depending on what is included. Some lists have Delhi as [#2](http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0762524.html), [#3](http://www.worldatlas.com/citypops.htm), [#4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_proper_by_population) or [#5](http://www.themost10.com/populated-cities-on-earth/). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_in_India_by_population>. Accessed 1/13/2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The narrative voice now returns to Victor, Prakash, and other leaders together. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. WhatsApp is a freeware messaging and voice-over-internet service. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This represents significant population growth since the early 1990’s when our ministry among the Bhojpuri began. “According to an article published in Times of India, a total of 150 million people in India speak Bhojpuri. An estimated 70 million people in Uttar Pradesh and 80 million people in Bihar speak Bhojpuri as their first or second language. There are 6 million Bhojpuri speakers living outside of Bihar and Purvanchal.” <https://mevidur.wordpress.com/2010/12/30/bhojpuri-language-1-origin-history/>, accessed 4/12/2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. According to Ethnologue, “The number of individual languages listed for India is 462. Of these, 448 are living and 14 are extinct.” [www.ethnologue.com/country/IN](http://www.ethnologue.com/country/IN). Accessed 12/15/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. According to Ethnologue, there are over 3 million Awadhi speakers in the world. The vast majority of these are in Northern India. <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/awa>. Accessed 12/15/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. An article published December 19, 2013 gives this description: “Bihar is one of the poorest, most corrupt and backward parts of India…. Widespread poverty, an undereducated populace, underpaid police, extensive criminal gangs, vigilante justice, lynching and corrupt politicians all conspire to make rural Bihar a dangerous place…. Over the centuries…a poisonous criminality and violence seeped into Bihar that is so deep that no one flinches when a local judge or politician is accused of committing murder or rape or other serious infractions of the law…. Murders and kidnappings are commonplace; infrastructure is crumbling or nonexistent, and public services are dismal….A report from the World Bank said that almost 40 percent of Bihar’s 90 million people live below the poverty line.” “Class (And Caste) War Brewing In Bihar, India’s Poorest, Most Dangerous State” by Palash Ghosh, <http://www.ibtimes.com/class-caste-war-brewing-bihar-indias-poorest-most-dangerous-state-1515840> accessed 12/17/2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See, for example, “Private caste armies in Bihar”: <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/Private_armies.htm>, accessed 12/19/2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Sahyog* means “help” in Hindi. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The remaining narrative comes from Victor and other leaders of the organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. In India a block is a rural district sub-division consisting of several villages or village clusters. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Not to be confused with the T4T (Training for Trainers) CPM model. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Referring to generations of multiplying disciples and churches, not generations of physical birth. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The narrative here returns to Victor and other multiple voices. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See the discussion of how these things are handled, in question #3 of Chapter 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Note x in “[The Spread of Anti-conversion Laws from India](http://evangelicalfocus.com/blogs/1734/The_Spread_of_Anticonversion_Laws_from_India#_edn10)” <http://evangelicalfocus.com/blogs/1734/The_Spread_of_Anticonversion_Laws_from_India#_edn10>, accessed 12/15/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)