The Battle Belongs to the LORD in India

Shackled from centuries of idol worship, the light of the Gospel is glowing in one of the world’s most populous nations.

Pastor Guna greets the village “wise man” while the “tiger dance” is performed. Guna is native director of the ministries that are an outreach from CC Boise, Idaho.
A dozen years ago, Pastor Bob Caldwell, CC Boise, Idaho, partnered with native Indian pastor Guna to share Jesus Christ in this Hindu land. They have faithfully sought God’s leading as 22 Calvary Chapels and four orphanages have been established.


Indian men crowded around the bus, eager to meet the honored guests. It was the first time a group of Americans had journeyed to this isolated village. A rainbow of colors greeted the new arrivals as the local men’s traditional white robes contrasted with the beautiful multi-dyed gowns of the women. The worship band began playing two long horns and handheld drums. The words ‘Calvary Chapel Puram’ adorned the entrance to the church, providing a lone, visual comfort to the visitors.

A fierce-looking man, his face and body painted bright orange and green, ran toward the group. Decorations covered his dark, bare skin as he seemingly threatened the crowd with a long stick. They began backing away as the man, flanked by others, began speaking and showing the group around.

For centuries, women of India have threshed grain by hand.

Confronted by persecution, Indian Christians are facing each attack with love—by fasting and prayer—knowing the battle belongs to the Lord.

Guna, raised in an orphanage, has a special love for little children.
An elephant roams the streets of Bombay amidst crowds of people and an occasional cow. People pay to be “blessed” by the elephant. The Hindus consider animals holy.

Luke Caldwell (center), son of Bob Caldwell, and other pastors pray for a new fellowship.

Cathy Caldwell, wife of Bob Caldwell, prays for a young girl whose mother had died.

away, uncertain of his intentions. They had been told that 225 of Puram’s 250 residents had accepted Christ as their Savior. “Could this man be part of the small percentage that still held to the country’s majority Hindu beliefs?” they wondered.

They soon understood that the costumed man was performing a ceremonial “tiger dance” as part of a joyous welcome the church had prepared for the visiting Calvary Chapel pastors.

“These brothers and sisters want to honor us because we were the messengers that brought them the Gospel of Jesus Christ that transformed their lives,” said Bob Caldwell, pastor of CC Boise, ID. “While they realize that we are only envoys used by God, the Indians want to show us their gratitude for being faithful to share the Good News.”

Garlands of flowers were placed around the neck of each visitor. The musicians and the dancer led the entourage on a joyous trek through the village of thatched-roofed huts. The “wise man,” his long white hair and beard shadowing his dark face, met the crowd as it returned to the church. Pastor Gunu, the visitors’ host, gave the “wise man” a ceremonial Indian greeting, his hands cupped in a prayer-like fashion. The man smiled and returned the salute. He had also become a Christian.

The group passed by the town center, stripped bare of its Hindu idols. After returning to the church, the Americans shared a word of encouragement with the congregation. The Indians had been fasting and praying for funds to repair their roof that had been blown off in a storm. The monsoons—torrential rains that annually deluge the country—were only weeks away.

George Small, a pastor visiting from Horizon Christian Fellowship in Fitchburg, MA, had a sum of money to be used where he sensed God’s leading. The financial total was the exact amount needed to make the roof repairs—God’s perfect provision.

Long Swords to Swords of the Spirit

Before the village underwent their dramatic conversion, the local men were well known as assassins. Puram was called the “Village of the Long Swords” because the men were excellent swordsmen, dealing in the deadly trade of murder-for-hire.

Their transformation did not go unnoticed. The government recognized that the most problematic people had become model villagers. They rewarded them with the construction of a water tower. In a desert environment, water is a priceless commodity.
Bob and Cathy Caldwell dedicate a baby to God, the latest addition at the orphanage.

Graduates from the Bible College, all native Indians, are sent to different slum areas to minister that are often controlled by gangs or Hindu militants. The young men go door-to-door sharing Christ and praying for the sick. They invite parents to send their youngsters to the children's centers.

After school, the children from the slums are assisted with their homework by the pastor and young Christian women. Most adults in the slums are illiterate and unable to help. They share the love of Jesus by reading and acting out Bible stories. Traditional Indian poetry and dance are taught, with the fruit of their lessons being displayed several times a year in community performances.

“Every parent in the world, regardless of religious background or economic status, loves to see his or her children excel,” said Pastor Bob. “This provides an opportunity to minister to all the slum people who come out to watch. Over 5,000 children have been reached through this ministry.

After a period of time, their parents desire to learn about Jesus. Resistance eventually gives way as locals witness Christ’s miraculous impact. Soon a modest house church begins. The pastor, recognized as a leader, lives alongside the people in the harsh conditions of the slums.

As the church grows, young men from the congregation who exhibit a heart to minister are selected to attend the CC Bible College. Women instruct the girls in this gender-segregated society.

“We had no plan, no idea of what we were doing when we started,” mused Bob. “However, people immediately sensed Guna’s servant’s heart. The Lord has used him dramatically here, beyond our imagination. We are both in awe of how the Gospel is altering this place.”

How it Began

Pastor Bob began ministering in India a dozen years ago with L. Gunasekaran, known simply as Guna. Twenty-two Calvary Chapels, 13 house fellowships, and 42 centers for children have been impacted all over India through this partnership. Four orphanages have taken in hundreds of abandoned children, giving them new life—physically and spiritually.

Guna grew up in an orphanage, sponsored by a Christian family from Germany, who shared the love of Jesus with him. After schooling, he accepted a job overseeing the finances of local orphanages. Many years later, he journeyed to America to find his sister who had been adopted as a small child.
America. Bob had felt the Lord call him powerful, he didn’t feel God leading him to be a part of it. Bob returned to America, uncertain about his involvement in India. Guna cautiously approached Bob, ashamed that he had done nothing himself to help the plight of his own countrymen.

Initially skeptical, Bob agreed to meet Guna for a day of prayer and fasting. Bob explained, “Many Indian pastors journey to America, show pictures of impoverished Indians, and return home with enough resources to live well above the economic level of their congregations. At first I thought Guna might fit into this category.”

Through the day of prayer and fasting, Bob felt God speak to his heart that this was the Lord that He was going to use to bring many in India to his Son, Jesus. With Bob’s help, Calvary Chapel Trust was soon established in Bangalore, India.

Guna struggled with the decision to resign from his job to pastor the new church. But as the battle for his heart continued, he and his wife, Victoria, and their three children surrendered to the Lord’s will. They realized the battle for the souls of India belonged to the Lord, and they were called to be part of it—and on the front lines.

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

Hinduism holds to two core doctrines. First, the belief of karma states that every thought and deed results in certain consequences. Second, reincarnation following death allows for rebirth into another body—human or otherwise. The nature of this “rebirth” is determined by one’s past actions.

Non-injury to living things is closely related to the belief of reincarnation, the main reason why some Hindus are vegetarians.

Also associated with reincarnation is the caste system. Four basic castes or social classes make up the system. Brahmans, or priests, dominate over the other castes. Those in the lowest castes or strata suffer unspeakable injuries. It’s thought that their suffering is because of deeds in a previous life, so they are allowed to suffer in hopes of a better rebirth.

Many Indians are no longer tolerating this cruel system and are more open to Christianity than ever before.

Girls from the orphanage perform a traditional dance. God provided a former palace for the orphanage. The children consider themselves princesses and princes because they have Christ as their king.

PRINCESSES AND PRINCES: CALVARY CHAPEL ORPHANAGES

Guna fasted and prayed for direction for the ministry. God answered his prayers, and people started coming to the Lord. Miracles happened in the new believers’ lives, and the church began to grow. People threw away their idols, and 40 new Christians were baptized. Guna and his wife felt led by the Lord to take abandoned children into their home, but the staggering number of neglected children soon overwhelmed them. Their first orphanage was opened in Bangalore.

In 1996, militant Hindus entered the church’s orphanage and demanded that idols be displayed. After they were refused, the radicals severely beat the director of the orphanage in front of the children and then forced Guna to march around the neighborhood. They shouted that Guna was an agent of America and not to be trusted.

The entire church body fasted and prayed. Every effort to close the orphanage ended in futility. The Hindus sought government intervention. High-ranking officials began an inquiry. When the government officials arrived at the compound, they found well-kept, nourished, happy children doing schoolwork in a clean family environment.

A beautiful baby girl, her face radiant with joy, was rescued by Guna and placed in the orphanage. Millions of Indians are homeless, living in the open.

Left to die in a Hindu temple as an infant, this little girl now radiates with the joy of Jesus as she was rescued by Guna and placed in the orphanage.

“The life of this smiling baby is in your hands,” Guna said, sensing God’s timing. “She is a happy child here because she receives so much love and attention from our people. As a baby, she was abandoned by her mother. Think about what her life would be like if this home was not here for her,” Guna continued to plead.

The little girl that moved the officials’ hearts that day is now in elementary school and still lives at the home. She is a brilliant student and a pupil of the Bible, able to quote Scripture in English as well as her native tongue. After the government inquiry, opposition in that community ended.

Four orphanages are now in operation. The children rise each morning at 5 a.m. for Bible study, prayer, and personal devotions. They begin and end their day with prayer.

Boys from the CC Home of Hope orphanage pray before leaving for school.

Children at the orphanages begin and end their day with prayer.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James 1:27

L. Gunasekaran
Bob thanks a Bible College student for his testimony during a class. The curriculum is based on Pastor Chuck’s teachings—the Genesis through Revelation series. Students expect persecution as they share the Gospel, village by village.

Pastors and their wives are encouraged after a mammoth outreach outside of Bangalore. The facility is called the “prayer garden.”

Women wait in anticipation of prayer for God’s healing and intervention.

David, above, had polio as a child. His parents planned to poison him when CC’s Home of Hope orphanage intervened and asked to take care of him. Now a grown man, he is going to college and loves the Lord. He crawled under the tent to receive prayer.

Pastor Bob Caldwell, his hands cupped in prayer-like fashion, thanked the students. “We will only support pastors if they are willing to endure persecution, humiliation, and beatings as they spread the Gospel, village by village.” Bob spoke to the young men sitting cross-legged on the floor. The air in the small room was still and stifling.

Bob scanned the older men who had become leaders and teachers in the Indian ministries. Each one had suffered much for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ—their testimonies glorifying God and neglecting the injustices they had suffered. Glistening, not only with perspiration from the intense Indian heat, the older men’s demeanor radiated a peace beyond the understanding of most Westerners.

“We identify promising, young believers in the churches to attend the Bible College,” said Bob. “During the first year, they have a comprehensive study of the entire Bible. The second year is very intense,” he continued. “The students learn how to teach Bible studies, how to deal with practical problems of the ministry as well as persecution, and how to disciple new believers. Weekly visits to areas untouched by the Gospel show a young man’s true potential.”

“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” —John 9:4

CC Bible College, India

Amidst the Lion’s Den

“My desire is to be a martyr for Jesus Christ,” he stated. The slight, young man, a second-year student at the Calvary Chapel Bible College in India, had been raised in a Hindu family. An encounter with a Christian transformed his life. After receiving the Gospel, his desire was to equip himself to share his faith effectively with the millions of non-believers on the Indian subcontinent.

The Bible instructors had watched him closely and noticed a quiet boldness whenever he approached Hindus and Muslims. The students share their faith in unreached villages weekly as part of their second year of study.

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Vision

From Idaho to India

Pastor Bob Caldwell began Chapel Missions India as an outgrowth of the dozen years CC Boise has invested in the work there. Assistance is welcomed from other Calvary Chapels to train, equip, teach, and disciple these young Christians. The foundation is already in place, and all financial support goes directly to the work in India.

“Indians are responding to the sacrifice of the cross,” said Bob. “I am humbled by their surrender to prayer and fasting. They are willing to pay the price to follow Jesus.”

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The threat of a possible attack by radical Hindus prompted pastors to the prayer huts, where they fasted and prayed for the three-day CC Youth Camp.

Pastor Guna introduces Luke Caldwell at the CC Youth Camp. His teaching would go through two different translations.

Teenage girls listen intently to the Bible teachings. Six hundred youth were expected; over 1,200 came—committing their lives to Jesus Christ.

Guys want to stay in their comfort zone and aren’t willing to suffer for the Gospel, then they are of little use here.”

“In India, you will never spread the Gospel unless you are willing to plant churches. You can do social work, food work, and orphanage work—and even dig water wells. Much money comes from the U.S. to assist. Unless you are willing to plant churches, however,” Bob emphasized, “those well-meaning endeavors will not help change the spiritual constitution of the nation and save its people for eternity.” Bob paused to let this sink in with the visiting American pastors as well as with the Indians.

“This is why we moved the Bible College north into the harshest areas of persecution,” continued Bob. “Around Koppal, we could determine if the young men would be willing to pay the price. They are certain to endure hardship in this area of North Karnataka. Bob smiled, “Going to the college simply to learn is just not an option.”

Of the dozen unreached areas visited on a typical weekend, students usually endure persecution in four villages.

Each graduate is given a yearlong internship as an assistant pastor in a village or slum church. No one is called a pastor until he has begun a children’s center and a church in an area not reached by the Gospel. Twenty-five new believers have to be baptized, and their idols discarded, before they are considered a church and their leader a pastor.

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