

*An Incredible  
Journey by Faith*

**Elisha Chowtapalli**

*An Incredible Journey by Faith*

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This book is offered to brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ to bless, encourage, inspire and challenge us all to exercise our faith in God.

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*This book is dedicated to my dear family; my Grandmother Annamma who cared for me, my Father Abraham and my Mother Santhosamma who looked after me their best and have been a great support to me in running the ministry, my elder sister Nirmala Kumari and my brother-in-law Vasanth Kumar whose help is so vital in running the day to day works of LIGHT Home, my brother Ravi, my younger sister Ruth, and my kind and beautiful wife Sindhu for allowing me to dream more and to spend more time on LIGHT Home.*

*My family has been a continuous, great encouragement and wonderful support to me. They have been with me in my joy and sorrow. Without their help I couldn't have come this far.*

*I am proudly dedicating this book to my supportive family.*

## ***Acknowledgements***

First I acknowledge my sincere Thanks to my Father in Heaven for saving me and giving me this great privilege to write this book. Without Him I couldn't able to do this. He is only one who is worthy to receive my first thanks.

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Grateful Thanks to my friends Prasanna, Sobhanadri, Raju and Prasad for their support in the ministry.

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*Helping the orphans and needy of India*



## ***Endorsements by friends of LIGHT Home***



Elisha's work in India is astounding and inspirational. His passion for God and the poor, especially children and old people has led him to many ventures. Each vision he has followed up by hard work and determination to give people a better life to be lived. Elisha's

faith in God has led to the building of an Orphanage for 50 children; a Garden of Eden to feed and support children and old people; tailoring classes for women to start their own business and a Bible College. He also organizes crusades and conferences for pastors, women and youth. Over and above this Elisha arranges food, clothing and Bibles for those in need in surrounding areas. It is amazing what he has achieved in just four years with the help of family and friends, and all have benefitted greatly. We wait in awesome wonder for the next vision. Elisha we are very proud of you.

***Leighton, Nanette, Christel and Wade White***  
**Perth, Australia**



Mine was the oldest face amongst this sea of national and international students all gathered to live and work together for three months to learn about serving God through festival outreach. If I felt like a fish out of water, gasping to adjust to the cultural shock of being a student and getting to know this mixture of people that I was eating with, sharing

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accommodation with, and learning all the rules, rules, rules that the hierarchy insisted on – how were these international young people coping?

One young Indian man touched my heart. We learnt that he was from a very poor Indian village and belonged to the poorest of poor caste system, the Dalits. Here he was, coping with all this, as well as trying to understand the language, eating foreign food (pumpkin... how could we eat that?) and learning Australian cultural everyday norms, such as flushing the toilet paper down the loo. Elisha simply watched and learnt, while at the same time listening to God seeing a vision for his own people in desperate need back in his hometown. No amount of Western comfort and “celebrity status” amongst us could deter him from his goal, “to start an orphanage in my house on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2007”. “Orphanage in your house?” I’d say, “What do you own?” “I am oldest son – my father’s house is mine, two rooms – we will live in one and the orphan in the other,” Elisha would reply with a determined look in his eyes.

And he did. From these humble beginnings he has established the orphanage and then many programs, to help his people to live a better life. However more importantly he shows them how much God loves them. For the Dalit caste people who are told they have no worth in life to discover how precious they are to God, become one of his children and inherit eternal life, it is life changing.

I had the privilege of attending Elisha’s wedding and visiting the Light Home, seeing first hand some of his programs in action. I cannot describe the joy it brought to see all this first hand, to talk to those who benefit and see hope and dignity restored. I am sure you will enjoy reading about Elisha’s journey and how God uses those who are willing to step out, no matter how little they have, to help the widows and orphaned. Don’t be surprised if God challenges you too.

***Lyn Haack***  
**Manilla (NSW), Australia**

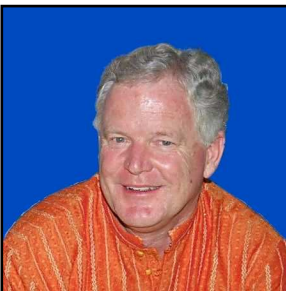




I first came to know Elisha in 2006 when Sam (my husband) & I billeted him while he did a course with Fusion [Certificate III in Youth & Community Work (Christian)] in Australia. His great desire was to help his people in India come to know the one true God and to help reduce their poverty by starting a Home for children through which they would know God's love and get an education. We promised to support Elisha with this dream and over the past three years have witnessed the incredible work God has done. By opening their home to needy children Elisha's parents and family provided him with the initial support his dream needed. I pray God will bless them abundantly for their self-giving love, faith and trust in Him.

I feel that the Light Home Ministry is doing a great work answering Christ's command to care for the poor, as well as share the Gospel. Through humble servants seeking to fulfil God's plan may the Light Home and associated work continue to prosper and give glory to God.

***Julianne and Sam Hoffard***  
**Gippsland, Australia**



In July 2008 I had the privilege to be involved with Elisha and a team from Australia in some outreach meetings and some Pastor's training meetings. I was left with many impressions about our experience in India. The most pressing for me, was the size of the harvest about to come, and the labourers needed to bring in the harvest and disciple the nation. With that in mind, after our time in India I spoke to Elisha about my burden. He too shared a similar burden. It was with that in mind we together in July 2009 commenced the Light Bible School. With 35 students including pastors and leaders we ran an

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intensive four week long training school. Elisha was one of the few people I have met in India that has the organizational skills, the financial integrity, the profile, and the standing in the Christian community that would allow me to partner with him in this project. I am committed to working with Elisha to help provide an annual Bible School that will minister to as many pastors and leaders as we can, in our vision to win India to the Lord.

***Peter Dunstan (B.Comm, MHSc.)***  
**Tamworth( NSW), Australia**



It's incredible that God has taken a young Dalit man from working in a quarry earning \$1US per day to demonstrating how the Good News reconciles all things to Christ. Elisha's heart for his nation mirrors God's heart in his ministries to the poor, spreading the good news, and feeding the orphans and the widows. I heartily recommend Elisha and his story to you.

***Justin Pagoto***  
**Sydney, Australia**

## *Foreword*



Meeting and getting to know Elisha has been and continues to be one of the highlights of our lives. First let me tell you how our paths finally crossed.

It was 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 2005, as I was laying in my hospital bed, my mind grappled for answers. Why? Why God did this happen? God where was your guardian Angel who was supposed to be protecting my daughter? I had taken her for a joy ride on my motorbike along the road. At that time, without warning a truck ran over us. Anna my precious daughter was dead. My wife Lynda and I did not even get to say goodbye to our precious daughter Anna.

In the midst of all the questions that raced through my head I had a strong sense of the small still voice saying that this was the beginning of a new chapter and that Jesus the Christ would be glorified. Anna was now with him. In a strange way I felt a peace and the presence of God's Spirit was very real.

It was in 1981 at aged 16 years old that Jesus had taken hold of my life. From the early years I had dreamed of being an evangelist and from time to time had the opportunity to share my faith and see some souls come to Christ. For the next 25 years I tried to be faithful to God and was committed to being a good husband and father to my two daughters, Miriam and Anna. Also for 12 years I had worked hard to build a business and the Lord had brought much blessing upon it. At

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around age 38 I had begun to ask questions and wonder what purpose God had for our business. We owned our home, we had a healthy savings account, and we had our superannuation, but I was deeply weighed down with life and was desperate to be free from it all. I hoped and prayed that God had a higher plan.

It was while I was in hospital that Lynda gave me Anna's diary. As I read about Anna's dream to have a music band called WakeUp, God began to speak. And I listened as a new chapter began to unfold. God showed me that I would fulfil that dream. I began to organize the first WakeUp for Tamworth, my home town. On 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2006, we had our first WakeUp meeting. I preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and many souls were saved. Anna's dream was fulfilled and my dream to be an evangelist had just begun. Our business was now profitable enough to finance the "WakeUp".

Meanwhile as I got busy saving the world, my wife Lynda went into a very dark place for many months. For a time she gave up the desire to live and could not eat food; I began to fear that she would die from starvation and a broken heart. Praise to Jesus the day came when she began to recover. She was then invited to go to India with a group of ladies who were helping women in poor places to build small businesses. Lynda's time in India changed her life. It was in India as she spend time with Indian women and their children that God began to heal her broken heart.

After arriving home Lynda wanted to take me to India. I praised Jesus that she had again found a reason to live. Twelve months later the three of us, Miriam our eldest daughter included, boarded a plane bound for India.

As we were making plans for this journey I made my first contact with Elisha at a Fusion meeting in Sydney. I was inspired by him and his dream to start a Children's Home. Over the next two years I continued to hear news about Elisha through Fusion newsletters. Elisha was only 26 and had been a Christian for only four years. I was amazed that such a young person could have such a noble dream. I was inspired by Elisha's faith and even more so as in time I watched the dream begin to unfold.

## *Elisha Chowtapalli*

The thing that impressed me most about Elisha is his ability to dream a dream and build on that dream. Meeting his family and the Light Home Children has been one of the greatest high points of our lives. Now as I write this I am sitting with Elisha travelling across India conducting WakeUp meetings and church leaders' conferences. Many Hindus are coming to be baptized and are receiving Jesus Christ the one true God. Many Pastors and Church leaders are being challenged and inspired by the Word of God.

I thank you Jesus for bringing Elisha into my life and making this all possible.

***Paul Disher***  
**Tamworth, Australia**



**A vision for Income-generating Projects**

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**A vision for LIGHT Home orphanage**



## ***Preface***

My Dear Friend, I take this opportunity to thank you for choosing to read my book. I am sure that you have read many books so far. Every book or life story you read has offered something to you. Now you are about to read another book that has something for you. Though I am part of this story, it's not really about me. However it is about the One who created me, who called me, who guiding me, who gave me the vision, who entrusted me a work and who is using me for His glory in India. So it is all about my God who transformed my life.

In my life, I never thought that I would write a book. I didn't think that there would be something to write as a book about my life. But God has led me to write my life story to encourage each and every believer to trust God more. In this book, you are going to read my life from childhood till today. Especially the last four years have been something different in my life that I never imagined or dreamed of. All these four years are filled with God's miracles, miracles and miracles. You may wonder how these miracles happened in my life. In this book I am going to share how I am seeing the miracles by trusting God. I am also going to share with you how God raised me from a remote village in India to show His love to needy children in India. Through this book I want to bless you, encourage you, inspire you and challenge you to trust God even more.

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Do you agree with me that your story, my story and our story is part of the biggest story! That is God's story. So now you are going to read His (God's) story. Here I would like to request you not to listen to me, but listen to God and what He is going to speak to you through this book. I am sure your time will not be vain for choosing to read this.

It is my sincere prayer and hope that God will speak to you through this book to be able to see the need and to take action together to show His love to the orphan, poor and needy children of India.

So without further delay I let you to get into the book.

Enjoy your reading,

*Brother Elisha Chowtapalli*



# Chapter 1

## My Childhood

**I** had a great desire to write this book, but I didn't know where or how to start. I started writing it in March 2008 while staying with the Disher family at Kootingal, Australia. I prayed to God to give me some thoughts on where to start. Then God guided me to write the book from the beginning. Again, after finishing the book I was getting ready to print this book and I asked myself where I should start my story. After much prayer, thought and discussion with friends I decided to start at the very beginning of my life.

My name is Elisha Chowtapalli. I was born in a very poor Dalit Christian family. I was born and brought up in a small village called Gollanapalli which is in Andhra Pradesh state, South India. I don't know my exact date of birth. My parents didn't record my birthday as they are illiterate. When they enrolled me in school, they gave a date that came into their minds, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1979.

Our parents have four children: two sons and two daughters. I am the eldest in the family. My father was a daily wage quarry labourer whose daily wage was one U.S dollar a day. Sometimes he used to get a little bit more than that but mostly he got less. My mother also used to work along with my father in the quarries to earn some money to feed the family. They used to work from 8 O'clock in the morning to 6 in the evening or later. Sometimes my father used to

work at night time if he couldn't earn enough in the day time. He didn't earn much. My grandmother also used to live with us but she worked for her own food. I could remember the challenges my father faced to feed the big family. I remember that sometimes we didn't have enough food to satisfy our empty stomachs.

Sometimes we went through very tough times. In those times, we just bought one kilogram of rice but there was no curry to mix with it. So we mixed rice, water and salt together and ate it with a piece of onion. I still remember those days when we had this type of meal in our family. It is the least food that we can have. My grandmother was so concerned about our family that she used to save some money to mix some pickles for us so that we could have the pickles when we didn't have money for curry. If we had chicken once a week, it was a great blessing. Our family was not the only family with these living conditions. There are millions of families in India just like ours. Our way of life is typical of poor Indian families.

Here I should describe the house which we lived in. The roof was made of palm leaves and the walls made of mud. Our single room house was four meters long and four meters wide. Every year we had to replace the roof. I remember one very bad year when we couldn't afford to replace it. The following year was very difficult. One side of the roof was totally damaged, so when the rainy season started, all the rain poured into our home on one side. We all had to move everything we had to the other corner. When water flooded our entire home, we had to collect the water in vessels and pour it outside so that we could have some place to stand. It was a very bad year in my life.

Cyclones and storms are common in India in the rainy season. So if we had a big cyclone or storm we used to go to another house to protect ourselves because our house was not strong enough. That year made a big impact on my life. Because of that very bad

## *My Childhood*

experience I didn't want rains any more. Whenever the rainy season started my heart was so troubled because our house was not strong enough to bear the rainy season.

We only had a few cooking vessels that we used daily. Each time we had to clean them straight after cooking as we didn't have spare ones. We all used to sleep on a mat on the floor. Only my grandmother had a bed made on four wooden posts. I used to collect wood from the trees and from the hills to cook our meals. My mother faced a lot of problems cooking when the wood got wet in the rainy season. We didn't have electricity in our home so we used a kerosene lamp to give light. I used to study under a street light pole at night where I could get some light to study. So I studied under a street light for examinations. This happened when I was studying at primary school.

I used to collect the firewood in summer, when we had school holidays. One day I went to bring the firewood from over two kilometres away. My friends and I tied the wood into piles and put them on our heads. Sometimes it turned into a five kilometre trip. On one particular day we were coming down the hill with firewood on our head. While we were coming down, I saw a snake. I had a great fear of snakes so as soon as I saw the snake I tried to run, forgetting that the firewood was on my head. With the heavy load on me it was hard to move fast, so I threw the firewood away. In less than a minute I got down the hill!

At that time my friends didn't know what was going on. Once I regained my breath, I could tell them what happened. They all laughed at me because I was so terrified of the snake, even though it wasn't trying to get me. They had a great laugh watching me sprint down the hill; however it was not funny to me. I knew I had to return for my wood but I was terrified that the snake would be waiting for me. My friends said that they would come with me and

be my bodyguards. Thankfully, I collected my wood without meeting the snake. This was one situation that shows how I feared everything, but soon God was going to remove those fears from me.

I will never forget one time in my life. It was Christmas and I was twelve years old. Traditionally children would get a new set of clothing for the year. This Christmas my parents couldn't afford to buy any new clothes for me. This would mean another year of wearing my worn out old clothes surrounded by other children excitedly showing off their new outfits. I still remember how I cried all day long. It was a sad experience for me.

All these experiences were common in my childhood. My childhood was not a bed of roses. It was full of problems and suffering, and these conditions made a great impact in my life. Even though my parents were so poor, they did their best to give their children every opportunity. My father was very keen to educate his firstborn son. If I could be educated there was some hope of breaking this vicious cycle of poverty.

## Chapter 2

# Dalits – Untouchables of India

**D**alits are commonly called Untouchables. The word Dalit literally means broken or crushed.

In the previous chapter I said that I was born into a Dalit Christian family. Here I would like to give you a picture of who Dalits are and what their life is like in India. Many people don't realise that this system existed and is still going on in India. Even though it has been officially outlawed it is still happening.

When I started to write this book, I struggled to write about Dalits because we are low caste people in Indian society. I was struggling with being exposed as a Dalit. In India we are not proud of being a Dalit. A Dalit is a downtrodden, unworthy and unacceptable person. Many of my friends have encouraged me to write about the Dalits so that people can have some idea of our people's experience of life in India. I hope my decision to include this is helpful to you in gaining a better understanding of the society I find myself in.

One of the more confusing mysteries of India is her caste system. The caste system has existed for more than 3,000 years. Dalits are Untouchables in Indian society and deemed as being less than human. Caste discrimination also extends to Nepal, Sri Lanka and other countries where Hinduism is present.

The reason the Dalits are kept in virtual slavery in India, Nepal and other countries where Hinduism is present, is that they live at the bottom of the Hindu caste system. This system of enforced inequality was established by the Aryans, a tall, fair-skinned people who invaded the Indian subcontinent 3,000 years ago. After settling here, they sought to prevent intermarriage between themselves and the original, darker-skinned inhabitants. They wanted to control the masses so they brainwashed the people to believe that their fate is determined by the gods to be Untouchables or low caste.

According to Hinduism, Lord Brahma (Creator) created the whole world, and mankind came from his body parts which are the four major castes. Upper caste **Brahmins** (teachers and priests) came from the forehead of the god Brahma; second, **Kshatriya** (kings and warriors) came from shoulders of that god; third, **Vysyas** (business community) came from the belly of the god; and finally, the fourth caste **Sudras** (labours) came from feet of the god Brahma. If you see this structure, Dalits are nowhere from any part of that god Brahma. Dalits were not part of his creation, which makes them aliens to the niceties of life and deserving to feed off the garbage. These are the sort of backward and illiterate ideas that still occupy the people's minds in most parts of this country and the change is far from coming into existence. India has followed the caste system for over 3,000 years and the sad part of all this is that it's still very much part of the present society. If a Dalit dies no one in the community cares about them but they do care if one of their cows dies. Such is the situation in India where a Dalit fights everyday for his portion of a meal and for survival to keep living to see a day when he could be a free person.

I belong to the Dalit caste and we are 300 million Dalits in the 1.2 billion people in India living under extreme poverty ever since we

were subjected to the brutal and insane caste system. The Hindu religion has been a religion in the dark to the West and the rest of the world for a long time. Its caste system came to light during the colonial rule of the British.

Dalits are forced to live in separate settlements. They are not allowed to draw water from the village wells, they are prohibited from worshipping in Hindu temples, and often their children are denied education or made to sit in the back of the classroom. In some villages there is a two drinking glass system which means one glass is for Dalit caste people and another glass used for the rest of the castes. Dalits have to drink only with their glass which was meant for them and have to clean it and put it into its original place. This practice is still going on in some villages. Dalits are subjected to rape, harassment, violence and murder. Even if a Dalit's shadow falls on an upper caste person, that person is polluted according to caste rules. Caste rules hold that Dalits pollute higher caste people with their presence. If higher caste Hindus touch an untouchable or even come within a Dalit's shadow, they must undergo a rigorous series of cleansing rituals.

When I was studying my school education, my father put me in a tuition centre that was run by a high caste Brahmin teacher. He was a good man but his father was very much against Dalits. His father warned me not to touch him at any cost. I still remember that he used to drop things in to my hands without touching me so that he could be pure and holy. That made a great impact on my life. Sometimes I faced discrimination from high caste friends because I am a Dalit.

A Dalit is not considered a part of human society, but instead is considered something less than human. The Dalits generally perform the most menial and degrading jobs that include unclogging

sewers, disposing of dead bodies, cleaning latrines or working on the roadside repairing shoes. Even simple Dalit assertions of their lawful rights and privileges have set off hate crimes against them by members of the upper castes. These have included rape, harassment, violence and murder.

In the early 1900s, a man emerged who was passionately opposed to the caste system. B.R. Ambedkar was born a Dalit and lived during the time of India's father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Known as "India's one true Untouchable hero," Dr. Ambedkar fought to give the Dalits the same rights as other Indians, beginning a momentous movement for their freedom. He wrote:

**“Untouchability shuts all doors of opportunities for betterment in life for Untouchables. It does not offer an Untouchable any opportunity to move freely in society; it compels him to live in dungeons and seclusion; it prevents him from educating himself and following a profession of his choice.”**

**“Ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality.”**

Although the Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms for all Indians, the Dalit are systematically abused. Dalits are poor, deprived and socially backward. Their most basic needs of food, shelter, and safety are not fulfilled. They also cannot access decent education and employment. The average literacy rate among Dalits is approximately 37%. Among some Dalit communities it is as low as 10%. The systematic denial of their basic human rights results in a lack of education, food, healthcare, and economic opportunity, thereby keeping Dalits in perpetual bondage to the upper castes.



## **Types of Untouchability Practices and Discrimination**

In the name of Untouchability, Dalits face nearly 140 forms of work and caste-based discrimination at the hands of the dominant castes. Here are a few:

1. Prohibited from eating with other caste members.
2. Prohibited from marrying with other caste members.
3. Separate glasses for Dalit in village tea stalls.
4. Discriminatory seating arrangements and separate utensils in restaurants.
5. Segregation in seating and food arrangements in village functions and festivals.
6. Prohibited from entering into village temples.
7. Prohibited from wearing sandals or holding umbrellas in front of dominant caste members.
8. Devadasi system – the ritualized temple prostitution of Dalit women.
9. Prohibited from entering dominant caste homes.
10. Prohibited from riding a bicycle inside the village.
11. Prohibited from using the common village path.
12. Separate burial grounds.
13. No access to the village's common or public properties and resources (wells, ponds, temples).
14. Segregation (separate seating area) of Dalit children in schools.
15. Prohibited from contesting in elections and exercising their right to vote.

16. Forced to vote or not to vote for certain candidates during the elections.
17. Prohibited from hoisting the national flag during Independence or Republic days.
18. Sub-standard wages.
19. Bonded labour.
20. Social boycotts by dominant castes for refusing to perform their “duties”.

As the slogans of ‘India poised’ and ‘India shining’ are being shouted from every roof top in the country, here is one reality which needs to be looked at:

1. Every hour, two Dalits are assaulted, every day two Dalits murdered and two Dalit houses burned, according to the Human Rights Education Movement of India, yet only 1% of those who commit crimes against Dalits are ever convicted.
2. In some places there is 90% illiteracy among these Dalits. They are not educated well and not treated well in the Indian society.
3. According to government statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals.
4. 80% of Dalits live in rural areas and 86% of Dalit households are landless.
5. 60% of Dalits are dependent on casual labour.
6. Only 37% of Dalits are literates.
7. Three Dalit women are raped every day.
8. A crime is committed against a Dalit every 18 minutes.

Independent India has witnessed considerable violence and hate crimes motivated by caste. Recently, in 2006, four members of a

Dalit family were brutally killed by the members of the dominant caste in Kherlanji, Maharashtra.

In newspapers we often we see headlines like this: *Dalits tortured by cops for three days, Dalit boy beaten to death for plucking flowers, Dalits killed in lock-up, Dalit people houses burnt, Dalits burnt alive in caste clash, Dalit woman gang raped, paraded naked, Dalits killed by high caste people* – and many more. These are only a few examples.

I faced many embarrassing moments in my life being an Untouchable. When I was 12 years old I was stopped by the Hindu temple priest from entering a Hindu temple in my own village because I am Dalit. I was mocked by fellow students in school. I felt very sad that I was born in the Dalit caste. You may ask me the question, can I come out of my Dalit caste in my lifetime? The answer is NO. It is possible to change from one religion to another but I cannot change or escape from the caste I was born into. I have to live and die in that caste only. I could be rich but I can't change my caste. I was born in the Dalit caste and I have to live and die in this.

These are just some of the facts and truths about Indian Dalits. Dalit life hasn't changed much after 63 years of independence. In some villages the situation is worse. In some villages things have changed a little. But the truth is Dalits are not still treated equally. Even the very few wealthy Dalits also face discrimination from wealthy people of other castes.

Many times I was ashamed of telling people my caste. Many times I asked myself why I was born into this caste. Why do I have to live as a Dalit man? For many years I didn't know the answer, but I am seeing the answer through Christ who gave me a deep love for my people.

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God has a different future in mind for these forgotten and oppressed people. He loves and values them. This is the hope of the Dalits. The good news is that in India 80% of the Christians are Dalits. That is why many Hindus say Jesus Christ is the Dalit (Untouchable) people's God or the poor people's God because we are poorest of the poor in Indian society. They defend themselves by saying these words. But we are so grateful to God who loves us irrespective of our caste. When we were untouchables in Indian society, Jesus touched us with his love. We Dalits are finding hope in Him who cares for us and loves us as we are. In God's love there is no discrimination. His love is pure and perfect. That's our hope and future.



**A Dalit making sandals – traditional work**

## Chapter 3

### Education and Job

Since my childhood I had a strong desire to be educated. I am the first educated person from my family. My parents and their parents are illiterate. My father had a strong commitment to give me an education. He enrolled me in a government-aided mission school in my village. Our church mission runs this school with the help of the government. My school was very near to my house, less than hundred metres. Our school building was our church building. Monday to Saturday, we had classes and on Sunday it was used for church services. Weddings were also conducted in the church building so on wedding days, we had holidays as there was no room to run school.

Like most schools in India we didn't have toilets. If we had to go to the toilet, it was on the side of the road. All the boys used to stand in a line and urinate. It was good fun in those days. I liked my school a lot even though we were made to sit on the floor and study.

I didn't have enough books in my schooling days. As I said before, my father was a quarry worker and didn't have enough money to look after the family and also buy books for me. He used to give me two rupees and sometimes five rupees for the books. I used to buy books with the money that I had at that time and bought the rest of the books when we had some more money. I bought my

schooling necessities in an instalment system. So in this way my studies went on.

After I reached sixth year, I came to know a little bit of the world and I wanted to do some work to earn money so that I could buy my school necessities. I told this to my family and to my grandmother as she was the leader for nearly 50 labourers in our village. She used to lead women labourers. Landlords and land owners came to our house for women workers. My grandmother used to send the labourers according to their needs and according to availability. So I told my grandmother to take me as one of the workers. She was worried that I was too small for the work because land owners are not interested in giving jobs to small kids who can't work as adults. However she added me to her women workers list. On Sundays and holidays I used to go to work with the women into the fields. We had to work from 10am to 5.30pm. We used to have a 45 minute break for lunch. My daily wage was 15 Rupees which is less than 30 cents (U.S). That was big money for me at that age. With that money I was able to get some more books for my studies and I helped my family as well. I was so happy for the money I was earning in those days.

When I entered eighth year, I started working as a milk boy, collecting milk for a small businessman in my village. I had to get up at 5am in the morning and collect milk from the different cow owners. I had to be very careful that no cow or water buffalo owner mixed water in the milk and cheated my boss. When a cow owner milks the cow, my eyes had to be fixed on the man. If not, they could mix water into the milk and cheat us. Even though I was careful, sometimes some people managed to add water. My milk boss was so clever and could easily tell whether it was pure milk or watered down milk. He used to dip his finger into the milk and say there was water mixed in the milk. In the beginning I was amazed at his intelligence. I asked him how he was examining this and he said that if it was pure milk, when we put our finger into the milk it sticks and it doesn't drop quickly. That was the theory he followed which

was good. So later on I also did that to test whether it was good milk or not. I worked as a milk boy from 5 am to 9 am and I used to collect nearly 25 litres of milk from different houses. After finishing my job, I went to my home, had breakfast and then to school which started at 10 am.

My high school was one and a half kilometres from my house. I had to walk three kilometres round trip to attend my school. This was all done barefoot as it would be much later before I would own my first pair of slippers/thongs. All my morning hours were spent collecting milk, getting ready for school and walking to the school. Sometimes there were delays in collecting milk and I got there late. In school, I had to stand outside the class as punishment. Sometimes teachers used to beat us for coming late. Do you know how much I earned for collecting milk? You may wonder but it's true. I used to get 60 Rupees (\$1.30 US) per month. That money was good money and with that money I could buy half of the notebooks that I needed for my schooling. I did that job for two years and enjoyed it.

When I was 14 years old I became a quarry labourer. My village is surrounded by hills. From the hills people get gravel and rocks. It is our village's main income source. Mostly our Dalit people use to work in mines as a way of living. My father and mother also used to be quarry workers. So at the age of 14, I became a quarry worker in my own village.

We used to fill big trucks and tractors with gravel and big rocks. We used shovels and spears to finish the work. But it was completely manual work. Around 10 to 15 people used to go in one truck to fill the gravel or rocks. Sometimes we had less people and sometimes we had more people. We used to get 150 Rupees (\$3US or 200 Rupees (\$4US) for doing that work. We all had to share the money among us equally. We used to work for around one and half or two hours to do the work. So imagine sharing \$4 or \$5 among 10 to 15 people! Sometimes we used to get less. We got money depending on how many trucks we filled. If we filled more we could

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get more. If not we could get less. There were times when people got nothing in one day. Every day was a struggle and a challenge. We were constantly looking at each truck to see if it came for gravel or not. If it came for gravel or rock then we were happy. Among all these workers there was a lot of competition as well. This was what life was like for us in the quarries.

I enjoyed the first two days of my work in quarries. But very soon I came to know that it was a very hard job. But I had to keep doing it so that I could get some money. Most of the time my wage was less than one US dollar, but for that money I worked from morning to evening. Sometimes I worked at night time. My job was to carry gravel and rocks on my head. By the end of the day my head would feel very sore after doing heavy work. In the rainy season the work was very hard because the ground became slippery and the gravel also became heavier than usual. However, I bore all those pains for a little money which made a big impact on my life.

Accidents were also common in quarry life because the hills were slippery and steep. So while we were filling the trucks we would often fall down. But we had to get up again and work because there was no choice. If we didn't work then we had no money. So for money we needed to work even when we had pains or minor accidents. Sometimes there were major accidents. Mostly night times are more dangerous. The reason for that is that truck drivers are sleepy after long hours of continuous work.

One night around 2 O'clock we were in the mines. We filled one truck and sent it. We knew that another truck would come soon. The mines were two kilometres away from the village so we all (about 12 people) wanted to wait in the mines. We had around half an hour before another truck was to come so we all had a quick nap. When the truck came I was still sleeping on the ground. While I was sleeping the truck driver was reversing the truck just behind me into the right position for us to fill it. Suddenly one of my friends working that night saw me sleeping and the truck coming towards



me. He shouted “STOP!” So the driver stopped the truck. Then my friend rushed to me and woke me up. Then I got up trying to comprehend what was going on. My friend told me I had been very close to being killed but thanks to him I was saved.

I also used to collect buffalo and cow dung during the school holidays. Collecting cow dung was the lowest possible work. I had to carry it on my head. But I did that because I needed some money.

When I was studying Year 6 I lived in a government-run welfare hostel (like an orphanage) that is meant for Scheduled Castes (Dalits). My parents joined me in that hostel where I could get some schooling necessities like books and food. But government welfare hostels are known for the bad conditions. They didn't even cook food properly. We had lots of worms (some insects or small creatures) in the food. Every day we had to eat them with rice. It was very cheap food that we couldn't eat. I was in that hostel for two years and then left the hostel as I couldn't eat such food. In those days many parents wanted to send their kids where they could get some food and education supplies. I, myself studied in an orphanage and experienced orphanage life. But I never had a desire or dream to start an orphanage.

I successfully finished Year 10 and started Year 11. We call this Intermediate. After year 10, we had the choice to select which subjects we wanted to do. I could not understand the logic in science so I opted for Arts which was my favourite and I took H.E.C (History, Economics and Civics/Politics). Intermediate is a two year course. I passed the first year without failing in any subject but in the second year I failed in English. The Intermediate board of education conducted a special exam for the students who failed only one subject to give them another chance to go to university. I applied for the re-exam and passed.

I then began a B.A (Bachelor of Arts) University degree. I studied my degree for three years and passed with first class

honours. I enjoyed studying and it was a good time in my life. While I was studying in college, I had a part-time job as a photographer and earned some money for my studies. In my college days, I had a second hand bicycle that my grandmother bought me to make the 20 kilometre round journey.

After finishing college, most of my friends were applying for postgraduate studies. Due to financial problems I was not in a position to do further study so I wanted to do some short term technical study which could give me a job. So I did an eight month computer training program. After finishing the course I got a part time job as a computer teacher in a private women's college. I held that job for two years. I was the youngest teacher in the college. I worked as a part-time teacher in the mornings and in the afternoons I attended computer courses so that I could increase my skills. I really enjoyed my first job as a teacher with a salary of \$25 per month. I bought my first shoes just six months before I got the job. Since then I have been wearing shoes.

Here I should confess one bad thing I did to my father. My father used to drink alcohol. I think he got addicted to it due to the financial problems at home. On Sundays he used to drink a lot because on that day we normally cook non-vegetarian (chicken or beef). Having a meat dish was a cause for celebration. After drinking alcohol, he was not in control and used to do anything he wanted. He used to scream at my mother and often beat her. I grew up seeing all these troubles. On one Sunday, he took a lot of alcohol and didn't know what he was doing. He started quarrelling with my mother and began beating her. I was 23 years at that time. I got very angry as I had been seeing him in that condition for a long time. I grabbed a strong stick and I beat him up badly. He was almost unconscious. I left my father and went to my elder sister's village about 30 kilometres away. I left with a decision not to come back to my house ever again. My sister was married by that time and living with her husband. I was at my sister's house for three days.

My sister and her husband came to visit my father while I was with them. After spending one day with my family they came back. They said that I shouldn't have attacked my father but I was not sorry. I felt that I was right. On that day I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I still don't know what happened to me that night. Suddenly I started thinking about my father and how he cared for me since my childhood and how much he suffered to give me education. He always cared for me and strived to give the best to me. So when all these things came to my mind, I couldn't sleep and I wanted to see my father. This happened around 11 p.m and I started to walk back home to see my father. I was so sorry for what I had done. At that hour there was no proper transportation. I started running on the road. After a few kilometres, there was a man who gave me a lift on his motor bike and he dropped me near a town called Gannavaram. From there I got into a truck and came to my village. From the busstand again I started running and reached my home at 2.30am. I went straight away to my father and fell down at his feet and wept. I cried for half an hour and begged my father for forgiveness. He forgave me and accepted me – my burden of guilt was lifted. I promised myself I would never repeat this type of behaviour no matter how difficult the situation became. I was once a prodigal son but my father now accepts me as his son more than before and I thank God for restoring the relationship.

During the course of my education I went through a lot of problems, difficulties, pain and embarrassing moments, however I learnt something from each and every situation that I faced.

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**Helping the aged and needy**



## **Chapter 4**

# **My Conversion, Theological Studies and Persecution**

**A**s I said I was born and raised in a Christian family but I was not at all a Christian. In my early childhood days, I used to go to church with my mother. In the beginning I was good at going to church and reading Scriptures but later on I didn't believe in God and moreover became very angry with God. As I was getting more of worldly knowledge in school and in college I became an atheist who said there is no God. I was attracted to Communism and became a Communist. In my college days I was actively involved in Communist Party activities. As an active communist, I have participated in many protests and activities. In my village along with my friends, I have conducted lot of communist youth activities.

I strongly believed that there is no God. I used to argue with pastors, evangelists, believers, Christian friends and mostly with my mother as she is a very committed Christian.

I had two strong reasons to hate Christianity and not to believe in Christ. The first one was that in school, my teachers taught us

Darwin's Theory of Evolution which says that humans came from monkeys. But the Bible says that God created humans out of dust. For me this was a stupid idea to believe. Science is more powerful than God, I reasoned.

My second reason was due to our family problems and situation. The Bible says that God blesses His children and He gives them everything they need. Pastors preach about God's blessing in the churches but I couldn't see any blessing in our family. Even in other Christian families and in pastors' families I saw no evidence of blessings. I know many pastors who starve for the sake of God's work. I know pastors who spend weeks without food serving the Lord in India. Christians and pastors are known for their poverty in India. I still remember as a child when my mother went to our neighbours' houses to ask for rice. My questions to my mother were "Where is your God when we are starving?" and "Where is your God when I need my school books and clothes?" She told me to stop questioning as we are not worthy to question God. I thought God was rubbish so I didn't believe her. I didn't think I would ever become a Christian. I hated Christianity and I hated Christ. I never imagined myself as a preacher or an evangelist who would preach God's word. Then in one day my life changed completely.

On December 25, 2002 Christmas Day, one of my friends asked me to attend church. I was not interested in attending church but I didn't want to upset my friend by saying no. When I entered the church, my pastor was preaching about the love of Christ – what made God send his Son to this sinful earth: why Christ had to come to this world and why he had to die on the cross of Calvary? These were the two things he talked about.

The message was something that I had never heard before. In his message, the pastor said that there are some people in this church

who don't believe in Christ as their personal saviour. I thought the pastor was talking about me because I was that person. Again he quoted one verse from the book of Ezekiel 2:1, "Son of man, stand up on your feet, I will speak to you." He spoke in a commanding way which touched my heart. I thought someone other than the pastor was speaking to me. I felt something happening to me. After the message, I went to our pastor and told him how I felt and expressed my doubts. He clarified my thoughts regarding Christ. My main concern was poverty. Why did God allow poverty?

My pastor clarified that poverty doesn't come from God. It comes from Satan. Satan uses it as a tool to bring destruction on people's lives. In the Old Testament God is so concerned about looking after the poor and even when Jesus was on planet earth, he cared for the poor and hungry. So poverty doesn't come from God at all. This is the clarification that my pastor gave me. We had nearly one hour chat.

My doubts were cleared up and at that time I came to know how much God loves me and how much He cares for me. I was greatly touched by God's love and I was so sorry. I then decided to have Christ in my life and to follow Him. We celebrate Christmas as Jesus coming to this earth as a baby, and on that same day Jesus came into my life. Since then my life never has been the same again.

Once upon a time I wanted to change my name from Elisha. By hearing my name Elisha, which is a Bible name, people easily recognised me as a Christian. But I didn't want to be called a Christian. I hated Christianity so I wanted to change my name. I enquired about it and did some research on that. But to my disappointment, I came to know that it is a long process and it involves money too. So with great disappointment I gave up the

idea. Many times it costs too much to change things and we fail. In God's creation, for everything there is a purpose. Now I am so happy that my God didn't allow me to change my name. Now I am so proud of having the name ELISHA.

I am very happy that Christ came into my life. This was the greatest miracle that has ever happened in my life. Since then God has changed my life completely. At that time, I didn't know God had a special plan and purpose for my life. I didn't know that God was going to put a special work on my shoulders to carry. My life was changed from atheist to committed believer; from mocker to preacher. Once I thought it was foolish to be persecuted for Christ but after I became a Christian I was also persecuted. Before I came to know Christ I had the desire to get a good job and earn money to give my family a better life. Once Christ came into my life, he turned it upside down.

I started going to church every Sunday and participated in all our house prayers and church activities. I quickly became an active member in the church. While I was participating in church activities, God spoke to me to go to Bible school to learn more of God's word. So I left my job as a computer teacher and decided to go to Bible College.

I started searching for a good Bible College in India but with limited finances I needed to find a scholarship. After a few months' search, I got admission in a college at Ooty which is about 800 kilometres from my village. It took some courage to go. In June 2004 I said good bye to my parents and friends. I started from home with great anxiety and interest to learn the word of God. After 24 hours of journey I reached the college but by the time I got there, my entire mind had changed. My family and friends started coming to my mind. I felt homesick and couldn't stay. I was only at the



college for three hours and started to return home. I went to the college with great speed and with good intention of learning God's word but with that same speed I started coming back home!

Now you can see that I was an utter failure in following God's plan on my life to learn God's Word. At that time I didn't tell anybody that I was coming home. After reaching Vijayawada, the nearest city to home I made a phone call to my father and said that I had returned from the college and I was coming home. I was expecting some encouraging words from my father. To my surprise, my father said that I couldn't come home unless I enrolled in a Bible College. This was the command that I received from my father, instead of comfort. At that time you can imagine how my feelings were. I felt tremendous despair but I made a very strong commitment to go to a Bible College and learn God's Word.

So again the search for a Bible College began. Before I could go to a Bible College I needed somewhere to live because my father told me not to come home unless I enrolled in a bible college. At that time my sister and brother-in-law came to mind so I went to their house and stayed with them for two days. While I was at my sister's house, I went to my pastor and told him my situation. He encouraged me and used his influence to get admission for me to a college. Within two days I was accepted by a Bible College in Eluru, a town which is about 35 kilometres from my village. I was happy to be accepted by the college and enrolled straight away.

The theological education was very different to my previous secular studies. I had a great interest to know God's Word which made me curious to dig into the Scriptures. Our college was an English-medium College but my entire previous education was in my native language Telugu. I learned English as a third language in my school education and it was always a mystery for me to

understand. Once I failed an English exam.

Now in Bible College I developed a huge interest in English and I wanted to speak in English like the others. So I made a commitment to learn five words every day so that I could improve my English vocabulary. In our college we had students from Northeast India. They didn't speak our language. In India we have 18 languages that the government of India officially recognized. Every state has its own language. But many north Indian states speak Hindi so Hindi became our national language. Apart from those languages we have other 1,600 languages and dialects.

So here I was in the college with an interest to learn word of God in English language. I tried my best to speak in English in the college. I knew my grammar was wrong but I kept speaking. And then I got a plan to improve my English. That plan was that my north Indian friend and I should have sermon practices every afternoon on top of the college building so that no one could see us. Every day at 5 o'clock we used to go on to the top of the college. I used to preach in English and he used to translate into his own language. And then he used to preach in English and I used to translate into my language Telugu. There was no one on the top except us two. We used to pretend that there were thousands of people eagerly listening to our sermons. We really imagined that. Every day we used to do this and by doing that we improved our English skills.

Our college gave me a scholarship so I didn't have to pay but I had to look after my personal needs. This was a big challenge for me because I knew my family couldn't support me fully. I had to use things very carefully. I made one small cake of soap last for one full month by cutting the soap in the middle and using each piece for two weeks. I remember there were times when I didn't have money

to buy soaps, shampoos and so on. My grandmother and mother used to work on the agricultural fields and save some money to send me every month. They used to send 200 Rupees (\$4US) per month, sometimes less. With this money I had to survive. In those times, I started to learn how to trust God for every need.

Those were my first lessons in trusting God. I prayed to God for some regular financial support because without financial help I couldn't survive in the Bible College. To my surprise God answered my prayer in February 2005. At that time I was communicating with a family in the USA. We became good friends. They knew that I was in Bible School and studying the word of God. At that time God talked to them and through them He sent \$100 for my studies. I used some of it for my studies. However I felt God prompted me to buy books, pens and slates for the school children in my home village. God never left me and he kept looking after me day by day.

Our college had an evangelism department. Every Friday afternoon we went to different places to preach the word of God. Our evangelism leader used to collect money from students (small donations) and others to do evangelism. Each time we split into four or five different groups. Some groups went to pray for sick people in hospitals, praying for families in houses, visiting Christians to encourage them and distributing gospel tracts to evangelize people. For the first six months, our senior student led the department however in the beginning of 2005 our college recognized me as a good leader and appointed me as Evangelism leader.

Traditionally only seniors become evangelism leaders but as a junior I became an evangelism leader in a very short time. That was the first Christian leadership role I played in my life. Being a leader, I learnt many things: how to organize and allocate jobs and how to

lead teams. God taught me many things which were going to be very useful in the years to come. Through our evangelism teams, we have seen a great impact on peoples' lives; many came to know Christ, many were encouraged and many were healed. These were the first miracles that I saw which made a great impression on me. I learnt that if we put our complete trust in Him He is trustworthy at all times.

I successfully finished one year of the Bible course at Eluru and came home in the first week of April to spend a few days with my family. After that I went to participate in a summer camp which was conducted by a youth organization in India. Our youth camp ran for 45 days and as a part of camp we had to go to New Delhi, the capital city of India, for an outreach program. I was one of three leaders and our team consisted of 13 teenagers. Our mission was to go to different places in Delhi and distribute gospel tracts. We were in Delhi for nearly 25 days. I was leading the gospel tract distribution and everyone was very happily doing evangelism.

On Wednesday morning, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005, as part of our outreach we went to a suburb called Poothkalaan, New Delhi to distribute gospel tracts. On that day I went into a Hindu political party office to give them a gospel tract. This party believes India is for Hindus, not for Christians or for any other religion. They hold Hinduism high in their party agenda and had a reputation for persecuting Christians. When I entered the office, I offered them a gospel tract. As soon as they saw the tract, they became enraged and grabbed me and beat me up around my face. They then took around 250 tracts out of my hand and left me.

People in the area looked on and did nothing. When this was going on, my team members who were all teenagers were astonished and frightened. They almost ran away because of fear but I told

them not to fear. I encouraged them to continue the evangelism and finish what we had started. I didn't get upset over the beating rather I was happy to be beaten for my God. Once I was an atheist who didn't believe God and mocked at Christianity and Christian people but now the same person was beaten up for Christ whom he denied. I remembered the story of Paul when he was Saul. Once he was a great Christian hater and persecutor but later on he was persecuted for spreading the same gospel he once hated. I am not great like the Apostle Paul but God is doing the same restoration work in my life. I am so grateful to God for changing and leading me in the way that brings glory to Him alone.

Living in India as a Christian and spreading the word of God is not simple. You have to be ready to face mocking, starvation and sometimes you have to be prepared to give your life. In India I have seen and heard many people killed because of their faith. Many churches and Christian homes have been destroyed. Thousands of children became orphans and many families fled to forests to save their life because of persecution and yet they are ready to face any problem to share their faith and gospel. Likewise we need to spread the gospel at any time and at any cost. Our people are ready to face any circumstances and persecution for the sake of gospel.

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**Elisha' mother cooking**



**Elisha's father gets water**

## Chapter 5

### Foreign Land - Australia

After I finished my theological education, I was again active in our church. In August 2005, two people from Fusion Australia came to India to look at ways to start Fusion in India. On their mission trip they met many pastors including mine. The team gave out brochures about the 90 Days of Mission which was a Community Development Education course (Christian) in Australia. Fusion was running this course in 2006 during the Commonwealth Games in Australia. My pastor brought the brochure and gave it to his son and me and advised us to apply for the course.

I was worried about the finances to cover my course cost and flight tickets but I wanted to write first and see what would happen. So I wrote to them sharing my testimony and my interest in being a part of the course. I also told them about my financial situation, asking them to pray for my application and for the resources that I would need. A few weeks later I got a letter from Fusion explaining that they would pay for my course and flight tickets. This was the biggest answer to prayer to that time. I never thought that I would go to Australia to study.

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In January 2006 I was accepted by Fusion to do the Community Development Education course. As I trusted, God gave me the visa to go to Australia. On 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2006, I started my journey from home. In India it is the custom for the eldest son to look after the family but I was going to a foreign country and leaving my family in God's hands for their provision. I started my journey by trusting God for my family needs and for my needs in Australia as well. With a heavy heart I started my journey. My family gave me \$120 AUD for my expenses. It was a very large amount for our family as my entire family could live for one month with that money. It was a big sacrifice for them, but by Australian standards it was very little and it had to last me six months.

In my childhood I had a dream of travelling in an aeroplane. Ten kilometres from my village we have a domestic airport and aeroplanes often fly over my village. Since my childhood I have watched the flights and dreamed of flying. I was fascinated by the plane and travelling by air. I wanted to fly at least once in my lifetime. I never thought I would fly so soon.

I boarded my first plane in Hyderabad to fly to Mumbai. I was so excited to be on the plane and enjoyed my first flight to Mumbai. From Mumbai I caught an international flight to Melbourne. While I was flying to Melbourne, I sat next to an elderly Aussie woman who was returning to Australia. During the flight we discussed many things and I learnt that God had placed me next to a Christian lady. When she got off in Sydney she gave me \$200 and said that she was led by the Spirit of God to give me the money. I was shocked, excited and emotional as it was such an unexpected miracle from God. At that time I said to God, "You were with me when I was in India and again you have proved that you are with me in Australia. Thank you for not leaving me." I eventually reached my final destination - Poatina, Tasmania.



I had a good time in Australia during my study with Fusion. I learnt so many new things from the Bible, about western society and I had some funny experiences too. I still remember my first day at Fusion. We went to have breakfast and the food was set out in a buffet style. All the breakfast items were completely new to me bread, butter, jam, cereals, and fruit. There were knives, forks and spoons. It was a big puzzle for me how to use them. I hadn't used such utensils before as we eat with our hands. We have idli, dosa, or vada for breakfast but these cereals and bread and jam were different and I didn't know how to eat them. Then, I decided to step back for a while to watch how others served themselves. After watching others for few minutes I became brave enough to serve myself. On that first day I think I tasted a little bit of everything. Lunch and dinner were also different from my normal food in India. For the first time in my life I had sandwiches, burgers and different kinds of food. It was a great comfort to all the International students that rice was always on the menu. For a week, it was difficult to adjust to the food but later on I fell in love with the food. My favourite dish is Lasagne. Very yummy!

Again language was also difficult for me for the first week. English was not my first or second language, it was my third language. In school, my first language was Telugu (my mother tongue), my second language was Hindi (the national language) and English was my third language. I learnt enough English when I did Bible College in India but I was not fluent. When I came to Australia, I found the Aussie accent was completely different. For a week into my study, I faced some problems in understanding the words but in time I did well with my English. Once the English language was a difficult subject for me but I wrote my first book in English. How cool is that! What a great blessing God has given me! This is far beyond anything I had ever imagined.

Another memorable experience was my first swim. It was the first time I had seen a swimming pool other than in the movies. Our course started in summer so in the afternoons most of the students went to the swimming pool to keep themselves cool. One afternoon a friend invited me to the pool. I was keen to try swimming, so without any hesitation I went to the pool. The only trouble was I didn't have any idea how to swim. In India swimming is not common. In western countries, children learn how to swim at a very young age but this is not common in India. So for the first half an hour I tried to swim where I could touch the bottom of the pool.

At that time, my friends were diving from the diving board into the pool. After being there for half an hour, my spirit rose up and I wanted to dive from the diving board. My friends warned me not to dive but I really wanted to try. So I went up on to the diving board and jumped into the pool. It was thrilling. As soon as I jumped into the pool, I went in deep and couldn't come up. For a few seconds, I was in the water trying my best to come up but nothing happened. My friends, who warned me and watched my diving, realized that I was having difficulty. So, two of my friends jumped into water to bring me up. Literally, one friend grabbed my hair and lifted while another one went to the bottom and lifted me up. It felt like a few minutes but finally I was able to see the world after my terrible and thrilling diving experience! I know it is fun to read about but I tell you that experience was not fun for me. Later on, my friend Christel White gave me some swimming lessons.

Apart from swimming lessons, I learned many things from my course. I learnt how to reach people through community events. Our main course taught about reaching the community through festivals. So we did these festivals with Christian values. I enjoyed doing them and it was great to participate in many community events. I enjoyed learning about Nehemiah's leadership qualities

and his entire life story. Every week we were given classes on Nehemiah. I was challenged by his dedication to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. His story inspired me and continues to encourage me to this day.

Later on I got the opportunity to lead some of the festivals. Most of my outreach was in Gippsland, Victoria. I had wonderful time there. I met some wonderful people and was blessed by my billets, Sam and Julianne Hoffard who treated me as their own son.

While I was enjoying my time in Australia, I didn't forget my family back in India. I was always thinking about how they were and how they were living. Whenever I talked to my family they told me they were having problems as usual so I worried a lot. For the first three months of our course in Australia, Fusion supported international students with \$30AUD per week for our personal use. I saved that money and sent it once a month to my family. Sometimes some of my friends were also moved by the Spirit of God and gave me some money without me telling them a single word. These were great miracles.

On 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2006, one of my friends invited me to share my testimony at Longford Baptist Church, Tasmania. I was so happy for the opportunity to share. I got 15 minutes to share my testimony and my dream for the orphanage. At that time I didn't have a single dollar in my pocket. I didn't tell anyone in the church about my financial situation. I just shared my testimony and my vision. After the church service finished, one middle aged woman came up to me and shook my hand. She said my testimony touched her heart. She also said that God wanted her to give me some money so she left a \$50 note in my hand. I didn't expect money at that time. I praised God for His miraculous provisions. This woman may not have known my situation but my God knew it and He used her to meet my

needs.

I stayed in Launceston for two and half months. There was a Christian book store called Koorong where I saw a beautiful Bible. Whenever I went to the store I used to look at one particular English Bible that I loved so much. I prayed to own it. One day my trainer John Latten brought an envelope to me from someone at Longford Baptist Church. I opened it and was excited to find \$250 dollars in it. With this provision I bought my dream Bible. You cannot imagine my excitement and joy on that day. I wrote on the front page of that Bible: ***Gift from God to his beloved son Elisha Chowtapalli on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2006 in a miraculous way.***

Here I should tell you of one old couple who loved me and cared for me very much. Their names were Cliff and Dora and they were in their eighties. They lived in Poatina village where my training was and lived near to my house. Every day at chapel we used to see each other and talk to each other. They were a very prayerful couple and I loved them very much. Every week they had prayer time in their house. Once they invited me to come along to pray for the work that is going on around the world. I enjoyed their warm welcome and loved their homely atmosphere. In my heart I was looking to them as my grandfather and grandmother. At least once every two weeks they invited me for dinner. We used to discuss a lot of things over dinner and I was encouraged immensely. At the end of every dinner they used to put \$50 dollars in my hand. That money was very helpful to meet my needs as well as my family's needs back in India.

Over all I had a wonderful time in Australia. It was a time of experiencing new things, a time of learning and growing in leadership. It was a time of receiving God's teachings and experiencing his blessings but most of all it was a time of building

friendships, some of which would have a dynamic impact on me and my vision. Mostly God inspired me to step forward without looking to anyone or anything. God challenged me in a way that was going to change my life. I knew in my heart and was confident that God had challenged me to fulfil this vision.

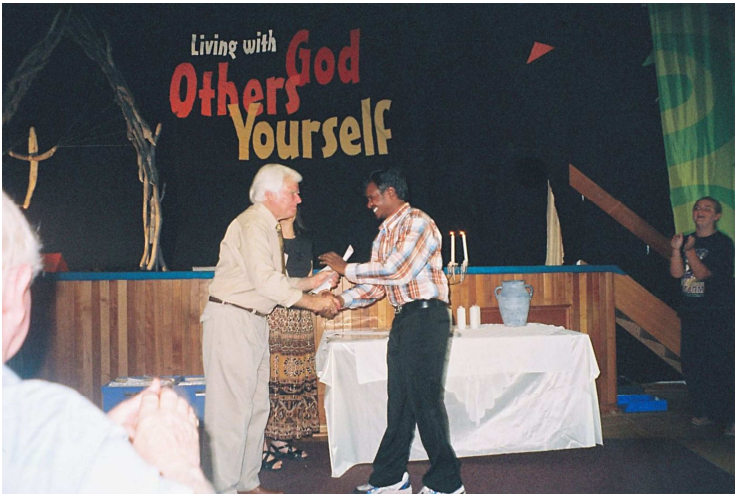


**A vision for orphan children**

*An Incredible Journey by Faith*



**Friends in Australia**



**Receiving Certificate**

## Chapter 6

### My Dream for an Orphanage

Before accepting Christ as my Saviour I didn't have any idea or vision to start an orphanage. I did have a desire to help needy children with their schooling needs but it was not a primary goal. My primary goal was to get a good job and to have a nice comfortable life and look after my family. But after accepting Christ as my Saviour, I prayed one particular prayer, "God, what do you want me to do for You?" I prayed this prayer for a few weeks. After much prayer and waiting on God, He clearly told me, *"I have chosen you to look after the orphan, poor, neglected and needy Dalit children in India, I put you in the place where millions of children are going through difficult times, I chose you to care for these beautiful children in my name and to show my LOVE to them."*

When I heard this answer, I was frightened because my family was not in a position to help needy kids as our family itself was in need. Although frightened, I didn't stop dreaming of starting an orphanage. I started praying for God to help me and continued praying for nearly four years. I didn't know what to do, how to start, who will sponsor us or who will come on board. I saw only God and my dream. Friends used to ask me what I wanted to do in the future.

I used to say that God has given me a vision to start an orphanage and I would. I was just confident in telling them but I didn't know how to begin or run it.

While I was studying with Fusion Australia, my billet, Julianne Hoffard, shared my vision with her prayer group. They then invited me to come and share my testimony and vision with them. I went and shared my testimony and vision for orphanage. To my surprise, God touched the people who were there and they gave me a donation of \$280.00 AUD. They encouraged me to trust that God will provide everything for my dream. That was the first donation I received for the orphanage and I was thrilled for the support. Seeing God delivering this miracle was a great thrill for me. Wow!

On 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2006, early that Sunday morning I had a very wonderful moment of God speaking to me. On that day God clearly told me to use the name LIGHT for the orphanage. It was a really strange experience hearing God speak so directly. I'd never had such an experience before and was excited that God spoke to me. So I decided to start an orphanage with the name LIGHT Home.

While I was in Australia in those six months, God really challenged me and mostly questioned me. What are you waiting for? Do not look at people. Give what you have. Sacrifice something of yours. This was what God clearly told me. I was so much challenged by this word. Many times we wait for something or someone to come and help us in to begin a work of God. This is where God questioned me and challenged me. Then I decided to start LIGHT Home in my own house. I wanted to give my house for God's work which I did.

On 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2006, I came back to India. I still remember the day. I went to Australia with the dream to start an orphanage and after being there for six months I was returning with the same dream



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and challenge from the God. At that time, I didn't have any sponsor or promised support. I only had the \$280 that was given by the prayer group. When I was flying home I prayed for God to give me strength and power to step out with FAITH and to do great things for Him. It was an emotional time, learning to trust God for the finances I would need. I asked God to use me for his glory in India and not to let his servant be ashamed of what he was going to do for God. ***“Use me and give me victory in what I am going to start. Lord be with me and carry me in your arms. Lord, there is no one with me for finances but I am going to start an orphanage as you told me. I trust that You are with me and will provide everything I need to run the orphanage.”*** This was my prayer on my return journey.

This faith step was going to change the lives of children and people around me. I never thought at the time how my step of faith was going to make a great impact in the future. I never imagined that so much would happen in a very short time. In my opinion, faith is not what we talk about but more about what we do. It is very easy to talk and preach on faith. What is really needed is to trust God completely for everything and to allow God to provide everything we need. Still for many of us it is a frightening thing to step out with faith. I was also once frightened of things. Most times we are not completely trusting God in our life. But here I want to show you how trustworthy our God is, if we completely trust Him in our lives.

There are some Bible heroes who inspired and challenged me. They were Abraham (the father of faith), Noah, David and many more faith heroes. In the Bible, there is a great connection between Abraham and faith. We cannot divide the two. With Abraham, what mostly challenged me was that Abraham trusted God when there was no sign to trust God. Abraham showed his faith in action.

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*James 2:17-20, "In the same way, faith itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But some will say, "You have faith, I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Even the demons believe that- and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless."*

Abraham's journey started with putting his faith in action. God first talked to Abraham in *Genesis 12:1*, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." And in verse 4 we see Abraham respond to God's calling, "So Abraham left, as the Lord had told him." As we know, it is a big scary thing to do. God had said to Abraham to leave everything he had: country, people and household. God is asking Abraham to come with him where he is going to take him. As we see in the Bible, Abraham trusted God and did as God said. Here we see a blind following of God's calling. Abraham trusted God completely and went ahead just by His word. He made a great sacrifice by leaving his country, people and household.

Another Bible hero who inspired me was Noah. When God told Noah to build an ark to escape from the great flood which was going to come, he trusted God's word and started building the ark. It was also a big thing to trust God for the flood which was going to come. The Bible says that it took 100 years to build the ark. Just imagine, spending 100 years building an ark just by believing God's word. I am sure many people of Noah's time would have mocked and criticised him for what he was doing. Even though Noah faced much ridicule, however he never doubted God. We see Noah trusting God and building the ark.

So I remembered these men of God and took their lives as an inspiration to me. So with that inspiration I went ahead to start an

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orphanage. So after coming back to India in July 2006, I talked to my parents about starting the orphanage in our own home as I didn't have any land or building to start in. They were happy about my decision and even encouraged me with their promise to help me in everything that they could do to see my dream become reality. I was so glad for their moral, physical and prayer support.

So we turned our house into an orphanage. With the money that was given, we built a wall in the veranda of our house and made a room. The room size was 3x4 metres. So that one room in my house was the original orphanage. We spent all two hundred and eighty dollars on building one room and I was left with nothing in hand.

Then I asked God about a date to start the orphanage. He gave me the date of August 1<sup>st</sup> 2006. So on that day I started LIGHT Orphanage in my own house with one neglected boy. My grandmother inaugurated it. At the inauguration there were a few of my friends and family. The beginning of LIGHT orphanage was a very special day in my life that I will never forget.

At that time I felt I was all alone in a physical way and I found it difficult to stop crying. I didn't want anyone to see my tears as those around me were placing their trust in me and I didn't want to discourage them. With tears, I prayed a prayer in my heart. That prayer was very short but I experienced a very deep feeling that I was really talking to God and putting my burden on Him.

I said these words to God, ***“God I am starting this orphanage with You directing me. God, look after this orphanage and me. I am looking to You for every provision. Lord, let Your name be glorified through this LIGHT Home. Let Your name be glorified my God.”***

I prayed this prayer with tears. At that time, I had a strong sense

that God was looking at me and seeing what was going on. On that evening, I had a different feeling - excitement, joy and delight to see four years of prayers answered. I was so expectant about what was going to happen, looking into the future for God's hand on the orphanage. At the same time I had fear in my heart about how to run it as I didn't have any experience in running an orphanage or ministry. But I trusted God to give me knowledge and wisdom in it.

I started LIGHT Home when I was 25. Normally 25 is the age for enjoying time with friends and having fun. I was very young and I was going to look after kids while I still needed to be looked after by my parents. While I was still under my parents' care, I was going to be a father to needy kids. While I was depending on my parents for my needs, I was going to meet the needs of others. It was a strange experience for me but I was so confident about God's calling that I wasn't discouraged. I knew that was what God called me to do.

I didn't like the name Orphanage so later on I changed the name to LIGHT Home as Home is a place where everyone can feel comfortable and have security. This is why we love to call it LIGHT Home – A Home for Hope and Promised Life.

Since I started LIGHT Home, my God has been doing great things that I never imagined possible. God is always looking for people who will take a first step of faith like Abraham. Once the first steps are taken for Jesus, the rest is going to be history. So since our first step God has been doing many miracles. In the coming chapters you will read about those miracles. You will be thrilled at how God expanded our ministry within a very short period of time.

## Chapter 7

### LIGHT Home

After starting LIGHT Home on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2006, I needed to spend more time with God to give me strength to run the race with boldness and for great miracles to happen in order to meet the needs of our children. We started LIGHT Home with one boy and on the 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, we added two more children. We had three children but still no support. I started praying for finances to come in. On 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, I received \$330 from my friend in Gippsland. She and her prayer group collected the money again for LIGHT Home. On the same day I was told that \$450 was deposited in our bank from our friends Andrea and Ron Camier. God was so faithful to us in meeting those needs as we prayed.

In the beginning, we didn't have cooking dishes, fans, or mats for the children to sleep on. We had just one empty room. We had no gas stove for cooking. My mother used to cook with sawdust and with firewood. It used to produce a lot of smoke but she never complained and didn't give up. She looked after the children with great joy. She used to do everything that they needed. Sometimes the children used to wet their mats and my mother used to clean them. She did a wonderful and remarkable job and she has been a great blessing for the LIGHT Home.

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I wasn't worried about not having all the facilities that we needed at that time. I was confident that God would supply those things soon. So I went on my knees and prayed. God heard the prayer and provided. On 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, I received a \$550 cheque from my friend Lyn Haack, in Manilla NSW. At that time we were cooking outside with sawdust but due to the wet season cooking was very difficult. This money was gratefully used towards building a kitchen and gas stove.

In the beginning, we didn't have running water or taps for the Home. At that time my father took up the responsibility of bringing water from village tap and well. He used to bring water with one pot on his head. It was very painful and hard work but my father did it with great joy as it was part of God's work. My father also used to bring vegetables and groceries for the Home. He is like a labourer, working hard to get everything done. He has been a great blessing for the ministry. He is such an encouragement to me by standing behind me in everything. I prayed for running water and eventually it became a reality.

I believe that every child has both physical and spiritual needs. By providing food, shelter, clothing, education and medical supplies, we meet the physical needs of the child. Physical needs are temporary but spiritual needs are so important and last forever. Our aim is to provide a Hope and Promised Life to each and every child. So, that's what our work is all about - meeting the physical and spiritual needs of our children.

With no regular finances for the children it was really hard to keep the Home running. At that time God reminded me of FAITH (Food Always In The Home) Garden. During my study in Australia, I did some community work. Faith garden was one of them. The whole idea was to grow our own veggies and if we have more, then

we can give them to others. I had a good time working with my friend Sarah Peel at that time and we talked a lot about having a Faith Garden at the Light Home. So here I was in India, implementing that same idea.

Growing our own veggies would save money and it also helps us to become self-reliant. In order to start we had to have some land, thankfully we were able to use a vacant block next door. We took the land and we cleared all the bushes and planted veggies. We planted Indian plants and seeds called Amaranth, Beans, Brinjal (egg plant), Green chillies, Angular gourds, ribbed gourds, Bitter gourds, Bottle gourds and some flowers. Every evening when the children came from school, we all used to do the gardening. With my father in charge the kids had a great time looking after the vegetables.

We had 15 children in the Home in four months. They came from different backgrounds. Some were orphans, some from poor backgrounds and some were neglected by their parents. Our house is a three room house and each room is 3x4 metres in size. By that time one room was the actual LIGHT Home. As more children joined us we had to do something to accommodate them. My father and I talked about using one of our rooms for the children. So we happily gave one more room for the kids. Now 15 kids were living in two rooms and our family of 10 people living in another room. So in these very three small rooms, 25 people were living; 15 kids and 10 of our family members. We had only one toilet and one bathroom for all of us. We had lots of challenges in the early days of LIGHT Home with our limited facilities.

Our three rooms were too small and we were having so much trouble with limited space, with only one toilet and one bathroom. At that time we desperately needed another room for the children so we started praying for extra rooms. At that time, our faith garden

land came up for sale. The owner wanted to sell his land as he needed money. We thought it would be good if we could buy this land but we didn't have any money. At that time we were already going through many challenges to feed the children but I still wanted to buy this land as it would be a great land for expansion which is adjacent to my house.

I didn't have money but I did know one thing – the power of prayer! So I started praying and God talked to Sam and Julianne Hoffard in Gippsland, Australia to provide the finance. They came forward and supplied the money to buy this land. Not only that, but God also talked to them to build two rooms and toilets for the children. My prayer was only for one room. But God blessed us with finance for two rooms. At that time my friends, Leighton and Nanette White from Perth, Australia came to visit us in November 2006. They spent one day with us. They saw our LIGHT Home and all the challenges we had at that time. They asked me about my plans and dreams for the Home. I shared what we were planning and they came forward to provide finance to build a kitchen and an office. It was a surprise and so good to see how God was giving us more than I expected. Our initial idea was to build only one room but now we were able to build two living rooms, a kitchen, office and also even three toilets and three bathrooms. Without delay we bought our faith garden land. It is 73x62 feet or 22x19 metres.

On Christmas Day 2006 we laid the foundation stone for our new building. My mason friends worked for three and a half months building the new LIGHT Home. While construction was going on, we needed more water but we only had the village water tap which was not giving enough water. So we thought it would be good if we could have a bore well on the Light Home premises. God also helped us to dig our own bore well. This bore well provision was a very quick answer to our prayers. By the middle of March we were



able to finish construction and the bore. On 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2007, we dedicated the new building for the Glory of God in the midst of my family, friends, and relatives and LIGHT Home children.

At the time of dedication, my heart was so happy because when I remembered God's faithfulness and goodness towards LIGHT Home, my heart was moved with tears of joy. I started all this just by trusting God and my God never left me since its inception. Moreover God blessed me with more than we had prayed for. I knew that God would provide the land and building for the LIGHT Home but I didn't think that God would give them so soon. In just five months since LIGHT Home began we bought the land and in eight months time we finished the new building. We all were so grateful and thankful to God for His wonderful provisions.

In June and July 2007 we took 10 more children. So altogether we had 25 kids in our LIGHT Home. As a result we needed more finances to cover the cost of providing food and necessities. In those days I was praying for something to happen regarding finances. Miraculously on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, I received \$800 AU towards our work. My eyes were wet as I saw God was taking care of each and every need.

At this time, locals were hearing more about LIGHT Home and our work became more popular in our neighbouring villages. People were getting to know what we were doing, providing needy children with a good life in the LIGHT Home. As we were getting popular, more children were brought to us. We wanted to take more children but were limited by funds. It left me with a heavy heart to turn away these desperate children. Sometimes my friends advised me to say no to taking more children because they knew we were already having great trouble coping. At those times I relented and took in more children than we could feed. I had to pray and ask God to

guide me with each child.

We have children who have come from different backgrounds and lives. Here I want to share with you about three children who are under our care in LIGHT Home.

**Prasanthi:** *Her father was a quarry worker. He used to work day and night in the quarries. Prasanthi and her sister Supraja and their mother had lived on the daily wage that was 35 Rupees [less than one U.S dollar]. Sometimes they didn't get that much. When their father got money they had food, otherwise there was no food. One morning their father along with 17 co-workers went to the mines to load the gravel. They loaded the gravel and on their way to the village there was a narrow road, with a pit to the side. Unfortunately the truck driver didn't notice it and as a result the fully loaded truck slipped in to the pit and turned upside down with all the gravel falling on the workers. At that time another truck came and rescued them. No one died in the accident but they found that Prasanthi's father was badly injured. He was admitted into hospital and needed treatment for a long time. When he came home he couldn't do the work as before. Since then he faced many health problems and four months before our Light Home started he died with illness. After their father's death, their mother took on the responsibility of feeding the children. She worked in the agricultural fields and earned a small wage. Not long after she found that she was affected with HIV AIDS. She was so worried about her daughters' lives and future. She brought children to us we took them in with the love of Christ to give them Hope.*

**Manasa:** *Her story touched my heart. She lost her father in 2006 and then her mother in 2007. In the six months after her parents' deaths, she was with her grandmother who is over 70. No other relatives were interested in looking after her and the grandmother*

*was struggling to cope. The grandmother came to know about our work. She brought Manasa to me and pleaded with me to take this small child. When I looked at Manasa she was so innocent and cute when she came to me with torn clothes. I was deeply touched by her situation. We cannot give her parents back but we can give her what we have in the name of CHRIST JESUS and we can offer his love for her. In the LIGHT Home, she is getting food, shelter, education, medical check-ups and hearing the gospel.*

***Subhashini:*** *She is the eldest daughter of three in her family. Her father works on trucks as a cleaner. He works day and night and doesn't get enough money to feed the family. They fellowship at our church. They brought Subhashini to us and explained how they were finding it difficult to feed the children three times a day. The previous night I had a dream that one child was brought to me and I was explaining to them that I cannot take in any more children, as we were unable to feed them regularly with our limited finances. In my dream I finally took the girl into our care and trusted God for provisions. That same dream happened in reality the next day. So, as God told me in the dream I took Subhashini into our care.*

90% of the kids in our LIGHT Home are Dalit kids. Some rich people appoint Dalit and lower caste children as child labourers in their families for just 1,000 Rupees or little bit more (equivalent to \$22 US or \$30 AU) per month. This is a lot of money for a child. These children's parents are not able to give them food. So if their children live in rich families even as domestic help, they get food to eat and they can get money to send back to the parents. For this reason many children end up in rich families as child labourer, especially girls. Physical abuse is very common among these children and many girls are sexually abused by wealthy teenagers and their fathers.

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The Bible says to ***“teach the child in the way that he should walk so when he gets older he doesn’t come out of that way.”*** When children join our Home they start learning about Jesus, and are taught how to pray and how to ask for their daily bread and their future. The children develop a very strong relationship with their Creator. Once they get up in the morning, they have personal prayers, before every meal they pray for God’s provision, before going and after coming from school they have prayers and before they go to bed they have devotions for half an hour. Their life is completely knitted to Jesus.

We encourage the children to share the gospel with their families and relatives when they go home for summer and public holidays. When the children visit their families, they sing songs, memorise verses, pray before every meal and tell Bible stories. By seeing their children changed since joining the LIGHT Home, their parents also start to think about God. So slowly they get to a place where they want Jesus in their lives. All this is possible because our children go home and share the gospel with their parents and relatives. Our LIGHT Home children are little missionaries.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Second Visit to Australia and God's Miraculous Provisions**

**B**y the end of 2007 we had 50 children waiting for admission. We already had 25 children and were not in a position to take any more. I was struggling to say NO to the kids who were brought to us. Finances are always a great challenge for us but I take it as a great opportunity to exercise my faith. By this time we had regular sponsors for 7 children and the rest of them were supported by one time gifts by generous friends. At that time I was thinking about visiting my Aussie friends again whom I had met in 2006. I wanted to visit Australia to share with fellow brothers and sisters what God was doing through LIGHT Home. My vision was not just to raise finances but to also encourage and inspire them by sharing what God was doing through LIGHT Home. By the grace of God I got an invitation and a visa to visit Australia. I landed in Australia in March 2008 and stayed there for three months.

My first visit was to Tamworth and Manilla, NSW. I spent most of my time there with my good friends, the Dishers and Lyn

Haack. In those two months, I visited some churches in and around Tamworth, shared at prayer groups, with school kids, youth groups, with families and individuals too. I shared my testimony and what we were doing at LIGHT Home. I was so glad that I could inspire people to do something for God. Many said that my life was an inspiration and a challenge to them. I was not proud of those words but I praised God for His great work in and through me.

I had a great time with my friends, going to different places. For the first time in my life I played golf. We don't play much golf in India and I think we only have two or three golf courses within my state of Andhra Pradesh. Another highlight was being baptized by my dear beloved brother Paul Disher on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2008. At that time his daughter Miriam was also preparing to be baptized by him. Two days before her baptism, I was guided by the Holy Spirit to be baptized too. Brother Paul said he was willing to baptize me so I got baptized in the MacDonal River at Bendemeer, NSW.

Life is not all about happy moments. We do have sad moments and trials in life. I am no exception. While I was in Australia in 2008 I had a terrible experience. Ten days after I reached Australia, I received a red alert email from some people whom I loved and respected. In their email, they said that Elisha came from India to raise lots of money and that they suspected my financial integrity. They tried to put some doubt in the hearts my friends and sponsors. They sent this letter out to all my friends without first talking to me or asking my explanation for what they had in mind. They didn't ask me any questions but came to their own conclusions. I was so depressed and my heart was grieved with great pain. There was nothing to be doubted but they tried to stir up suspicion. I am not mentioning their

names here but their treatment of me was a bitter experience. I was not able to recover from that depression for a few days but all my friends knew my integrity and encouraged me not to worry about it. It was a painful experience which I will never forget. I trusted those people and treated as my friends but my trust was betrayed and I was depressed. Eventually God, who is in control of all things, was able to help me to come out of that bitter experience. God helped me to forgive those people who treated me badly.

Apart from that experience I had a wonderful time. I saw God's hand on my entire trip. One Sunday I had the privilege of sharing my testimony at the Salvation Army church at Tamworth. I enjoyed sharing my testimony and what God was doing in India with LIGHT Home and with other ministries. At the end of the sharing, I gave a call to sponsor any child at LIGHT Home. After the service, a 12 year old girl, named Sally, came up to me with her friend and said that she would like to support one girl in our Light Home. I was shocked that such a young girl had a wonderful heart of compassion. That was my first and last experience of a 12 year old girl wanting to sponsor a child. She didn't stop there but also raised some money with her friend Miriam, by selling homemade biscuits at a local festival. By the end of the day they had raised \$251 AU. It was remarkable that these two young girls did so much for the LIGHT Home children. Their caring hearts and commitment were most appreciated.

Another week I went to an AOG church in Armidale, NSW. There I also got to share my testimony. After sharing, one old lady came up to me and shook my hand and left a \$10 note in my hands. She said that she could only help with this small amount as she was on a pension. Some people say if they had a lot of money they would give to the church or charities. God wants us

to give our tithe and help the poor with the resources we have. Often we tend to think that a large sum of money will come from one man. But my experience is that God's financial blessings come in small packages. There were times when we received large sums of money. Through one friend God provided \$20,000.

I spoke on a local Christian radio station called Radio Rhema in Tamworth. It was a first for me. I was so thankful to God for making this opportunity. I never thought that I would speak on radio.

On 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2008, I was invited to speak at a Manilla men's dinner. This opportunity was given through my friend Lyn Haack and her church family. Once a month Christian men in that area come as a group and encourage one another in the Lord. Every month they have a guest speaker who comes and shares the Word of God. I was privileged to speak with them. Around 30 men attended. I enjoyed sharing and answering questions. People said that they were inspired and challenged by God's wonderful work in India. They were moved by the Spirit of God and donated \$718 towards the ministry.

Some friends raised money by selling Easter eggs, some friends gave as they were led by the Spirit. God used many people to help our LIGHT Home ministries. It was a great time of God's blessings.

After spending time in Tamworth I went to the Latrobe Valley, Victoria. There I was able to see my other friends and again I got to share at the Prayer group who were the first to give me money towards my dream for the orphanage. After having a great time in Latrobe Valley, I moved to Perth, Western Australia to spend time with my friends the White family. I enjoyed my first visit to Perth and the fellowship I had with



them.

There were times when I felt like I was going to one church after the other for money, in other words begging. At times I felt so embarrassed to go to churches to share as I wanted to share about God's provisions more than requests. However God spoke to me that it was not about me but it was about the One who called me and was doing the work here in India. After a long struggle, God convicted me that I am actually sharing about God and His kingdom. He told me to do my best and He would do the rest. So wherever I went, I went to share my testimony and what God is doing in India, on His behalf, without expecting something in return. That really gave me some comfort and peace of mind. I still do the same which always makes me happy.

I was in Australia for three months and wherever I went my friends looked after me well with accommodation, hospitality and arranging appointments for me in different churches, groups and with individuals. They looked after me with great love. I am privileged to have these friends in my life.

Here I should mention one friend who has been a great prayer and financial supporter to us since the LIGHT Home inception. She is from Gippsland, Victoria. She has been working in a laundry three days a week just to support LIGHT Home. Her commitment and sacrifice made me more aware of my responsibility in handling finances.

After returning from Australia in May 2008, we had to extend LIGHT Home to take more children. So for this reason, we bought a 390 square foot block of land which is next to Light Home. On this new land we constructed one big room. We have also constructed three extra toilets and three bathrooms for the

children. So altogether we have six toilets and six bathrooms. We have also constructed a wall for preventing goats and buffalos coming inside the Home. So, by the end of October 2008 we were able to finish everything that was needed for the children. We took 23 more and the total number of children was 50 by the end of December 2009. But still there was around 100 children were on the waiting list, waiting for the admission into LIGHT Home.

Our present LIGHT Home accommodation facilities were not enough to take more children in. So we were thinking about how to take care of the children who were on the waiting list. There are many local children in our village of Gollanapalli who need food, education supplies and care. There is a big alcohol problem in the village. Most of our Dalit people work in quarries and agricultural fields and would get three or four dollars a day. But they spend that money on the alcohol in the evening and come home with nothing in hand, forgetting about wife and children food and needs. Children are the main victims of this alcoholism in the village. So children are having a very bad life at homes and going through lot of challenges.

It broke our heart when we heard those stories of the children. So we wanted to do something for these local children. After prayer and thinking, we came to decision to start a Day Care Centre for the local village children. It means that children don't stay at the LIGHT Home but they come morning and evening for meals and tuition, and then go home to sleep with their parents. In June 2010 we started a Day Care Centre for 25 children in the village. We are very happy to see these 25 extra children who are having meals, tuition and they also participate in devotions which brings them to a deep relationship with Jesus. By the end of December 2010 we had 75 children in our

care; 50 LIGHT Home children and 25 children in the Day Care Centre. Around 150 children are on the waiting list.

Now we have 50 children in LIGHT Home. But we have three challenges here.

The first challenge is that our present LIGHT Home facilities are not enough for the growing needs of our children. These same LIGHT Home facilities were enough for our children when they were young. But now they are growing and their physical needs also changing. We can accommodate 25 children in one room when they are less than 12 years old. But now we have girls who are teenagers. Now their physical needs have changed. So to cater to their growing needs we need to give them more spacious rooms.

The second challenge is that our present LIGHT Home is very small. There is not much space for children to have games and to walk around.

The third challenge is that we have a serious waste water drainage problem. There is no drainage canal for the waste water. So we have these three problems now. We need to find the solution for these challenges.

Again we started praying and giving lot of thinking to them. After prayers, suggestions and thinking, we have come to the decision to move LIGHT Home to the new place where we will build whole new LIGHT Home building for the growing needs of the children and also which will allow us to take more children in the future. We will have more space for the children to have games and walk around, and also where we will have a proper drainage system. Then we started praying for suitable land.

God answered our prayers and showed us suitable land in our

village. It is 1.06 acres of land. The land price was so high that we could not reach it. But for God, nothing is impossible. So by trusting God we ventured for this new land. By the grace of God, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2011, we bought the land on our LIGHT Society name. Now we have to pray again for the building construction. By the end of 5<sup>th</sup> May we had \$ 12,000 AUD in our hand towards the building. But we have a long way to go for this building construction. We aim to build the new building by the end of November 2011. So to see this happen, we know only one thing that is Prayer. So now we are praying to see this happen.

My friends, Paul and Lynda Disher, have allowed me to use their daughter Anna's memorial bank account in Australia to receive funds for LIGHT Home. Sponsors in Australia put money in that account. It has always surprised us to see how God has used many people to put money in that account without us being aware. When we check the account there is always some money waiting for us. Our God is so faithful to us.

God has been providing for our LIGHT Home without fail. Sometimes we get money on a daily basis and sometimes we get money that could meet our needs for one month. Our God has been providing everything since the inception of LIGHT Home. We depend on God for all our provisions. Our children have never gone to sleep missing a single meal in our entire LIGHT Home history. Sometimes He has used one person and at other times he has used many to meet our needs. However He meets our needs, God provides according to His riches in Glory. Our God is trustworthy all the time. When we depend on our God for our needs, He is reliable and worthy to meet our needs. We just need to put our faith in God.

After I came back from Australia in 2008 I was engaged to my

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pastor's daughter Vijaya Sindhura. In India we have arranged marriages which mean marriages are arranged by parents. Right after I came from Australia my marriage was arranged by both families. I had known Vijaya Sindhura since my childhood as she was brought up in my own village. But we both didn't know that we would be united forever in holy matrimony. So I knew her very well. When I came to know that Sindhu was going to be my wife, I felt peace in my heart that she was the right partner for me. So I agreed to this and we were united in marriage on February 14<sup>th</sup> 2009. Soon God blessed us with a beautiful daughter named Christina.



*An Incredible Journey by Faith*



**LIGHT Home children**



## **Chapter 9**

### **WakeUp Ministry, Bible School, Tailoring Training, Feeding the Poor and Garden of Eden Income-Generating Project**

#### **WakeUp Ministry**

**I** do believe that with every friendship God has a great hidden plan. Sometimes we don't know or understand how God brings people together for His glory and for His kingdom's sake. I have personally experienced a great revealed plan since I met Brother Paul Disher and his family. It was a sudden surprise to me to get to know this good family in God, and we became very close friends in a very short time.

At the end of November 2007, I received an email from an unknown woman called Lynda Disher, telling me that she, with her husband and daughter, were planning to visit India on their holiday. She asked whether it was possible for them to come and visit LIGHT Home during their India trip. I replied that they would be most welcome.

A few weeks later, I received another email, this time from Paul Disher (Lynda's husband) introducing himself and telling me about the sudden death of their daughter, Anna, in 2005. Briefly, he told me that Anna had been killed in a road accident when they both went for a motorbike ride. On their return, they were waiting to turn into their driveway when a truck, not seeing them from behind, ran over them both. Their daughter Anna was killed and Paul was badly injured. After many weeks Paul recovered physically. While he was in the hospital, Lynda found Anna's diary in her room. In the diary, Anna had written about her dream to have a music band. She wanted to call that band WakeUp and to go to poor places and play music to bring joy to them. She wanted to play gospel songs to bring thousands of young people to Christ.

This was her dream, to have a WakeUp band and to preach the gospel. Lynda read this diary entry to Paul in hospital. Sometime later, God spoke to Paul through a song that he was to bring Anna's dream to reality. So, by God's grace they had their first WakeUp youth event in Tamworth, Australia, in September 2006. Hundreds of young people came to Christ through that. Paul shared this in his letter, and asked me whether it was possible for us to have one WakeUp event on their trip to India. I starting praying, laying my hands on this letter, for God's leading to have WakeUp in India. After three days praying, I got an answer from God that He wanted to have WakeUp in India.

I informed Paul of God's answer and my willingness to organise the same in India. Plans began on February 11, 2008, for that first Wake Up, called *WakeUp Youth Meeting*. At that time, we only had four weeks to make the arrangements. We expected 600 youth and adults to attend, but to our surprise, more than 1700 people attended. We shared the gospel and more than 200 people came to Christ. We also fed them and it was a big success.



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After this successful first WakeUp in India, God gave me a dream to have another WakeUp in India with five thousand people coming each day for two days. In my dream, I saw that we were giving them spiritual food in the gospel message, and physical food to satisfy their bodies. I didn't know when this dream might come true, but within four months God made this dream a reality.

We selected the dates of June 23 and 24, 2008. When we fixed the dates, I was in Australia. I arrived back in India just one month before the meetings. We named this event, *WakeUp Mega Gospel Meetings*. In one month time we were able to make arrangements for the meetings. I was very busy, but God helped us in everything that we did. The day for our first Mega WakeUp Meeting arrived. There were storm clouds in the sky and rain in the surrounding villages. Due to the rain, only around three thousand people attended the meetings. We fed them all. I was a little bit disappointed with the number that came. We presented the gospel courageously. We prayed for more to come on the second day. Our God didn't fail to answer the prayer of His children. On the second day around 7000 people came. We had a great time of praising God and experiencing God's presence there. We enjoyed dancing and singing in our Telugu language.

After a wonderful time of worship, our brother Paul stood up to preach the gospel. At that time it started drizzling. Everyone started worrying about the rain. I was personally terrified. At that time I was led by the Spirit of God to stand and to pray to God to stop the rain. Many joined me with prayers to stop the rain. God answered our prayers and stopped the rain miraculously. That was the sign to many people that our God is great and our God answers prayer. There were many people there who saw this miracle and came to know Christ when we gave them an invitation at the end of the meeting. We are so grateful to God for what He did on that day.

Through the WakeUp Ministry, we have conducted many outreach meetings. Hundreds of people came to know Christ and many got baptised and joined local worship centres. As well as this gospel crusade, we conducted youth conferences, women's conferences, and pastors' and leaders' conferences. 2,000 attended the pastors' and leaders' conference each day for four days. It was a great time of learning and encouragement from the Word of God.

### **Light Bible School**

Our God is an awesome God. We should praise and exalt Him and proclaim His Gospel to each and everyone. Jesus trained His disciples and sent them to the nations to make the disciples (Mark 16:15). This is the Great Commission which is given by our Lord Saviour, Jesus Christ to His disciples. The same Great Commission has been given to each and every one of His followers. It is not only for His disciples. God has given the same great task to everybody to fulfil His will. So, we led the One Month Bible School at Light Home. Our main goal and burden of our Bible School is to raise, equip, encourage, inspire and challenge young people for the Great Task of serving God.

I never thought that I would run a Bible School. But God does the things that we can never imagine or think of. The Bible School was like that to me. In September 2008 God put a burden in my heart to train and equip young people for the Lord's work. The harvest is plentiful in India but the labourers are few. So, we need to prepare more workers for the harvest. India is a place where hundreds of millions of people are in the dark. They need to come into the Light. They need Jesus in their lives. Many are worshipping trees, man-made idols, rivers and other gods and goddesses.

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In India there are 30 million gods and goddesses that people worship. They also worship and sacrifice animals to them. India needs the gospel and India needs Jesus. So we need to send people. Before we send, we need to train them to preach the gospel in an effective way so that they can reach the people. We designed a one month course with Peter Dunstan, a friend from Australia. He has written notes for the Bible School.

I have a burden to train young people in India and Peter Dunstan has the burden to teach and run a Bible School to equip the young people for the Lord's work. God has united us together for this special work. From July 20, 2009 through to August 16, 2009 we ran a four week intensive school. The first week was on theology. In the second week, we introduced preaching practice in the afternoons. We wanted to give good material and knowledge of the word of God as well as preaching practice. Every afternoon five students had the opportunity to preach for 20 minutes each to build confidence. In the second and third weeks we began praying for the sick and casting out demons. The students visited villages in the fourth week, to share the gospel, pray for the sick and cast out demons.

On August 16, 2009, we had a graduation service and students were awarded a *Certificate in Ministry*. We commissioned them to go to their native villages and churches to share the gospel and to be used by God mightily. Our students are planting churches and reaching their communities, some are preaching the gospel as evangelists; some are active in children's ministry, women's and youth ministry. We are very glad for what happened in the Bible School and what is happening now as a result of this school. We are committed to run this short term Bible School every year. In 2010 we had our second bible school which went very successfully.

## **Tailoring Training Program**

Initially my dream was only for Light Home, not for any other things. But later on God started talking to me about my community. I started praying about God's leading in this area. At that time, God gave me a vision to run a tailoring training program (sewing machine training) for the Dalit women in rural villages. India is made up of many villages where most of the people live. In the villages, 90% of the people live by their agricultural work which is mainly seasonal. They do farm work only five months in a year, leaving much free time. Mostly women who work on the agricultural fields are unable to find work for the rest of the year. Men get any jobs available, but it is not permanent work. Some of these men do not look after their families. They work, earn money and use that money for alcohol and their own enjoyment. They neglect their family's needs. For this reason, I thought of giving some training to the women which would enable them to obtain some regular income.

Before I started the LIGHT Home I conducted a Self-Employment training program for women in my village. It was happened in August 2005. We gave them training in making soaps, face powder, phenol, acids, cold cream, flower vase making and more. This training of one month duration was good and useful for the women to earn some money. A couple of years after this, God again gave me a vision to help our community to bring them out of poverty. As God gave me the vision we wanted to make poverty history in the lives of poor families. So I started praying about the right training that would change families. At that time God guided me to run Tailoring Training.

Tailoring training is the appropriate program for village women to help them to come out of the poverty. If one woman is benefited



**Tailor Training Program**



in the family then the entire family will benefit. The woman is the main pillar of the family, so we targeted women in the villages. I was looking for the people whom I should train in the village. God showed me the need of our Dalit women, because the Dalit are poorest of the poor and very underprivileged people. So God told me to focus on my own people. It doesn't mean that we are ignoring poor women of other castes, but mainly targeting the Dalit Caste. We also give training to people of other castes. This involves everyone irrespective of caste or religion.

In April 2007, we started our first tailoring training for Dalit women and for a few women of other castes. We took 56 women for the first batch and our first training took place on the LIGHT Home premises in my village, Gollanapalli. We broke into two classes and had morning and evening sessions. We have had some other women who came from our neighbouring villages by walking four kilometres each way for the training. They took afternoon classes commencing at 12 noon, walking in summer temperatures between 40 to 43 degrees. In India, summer is very hot, however, all the women were keen to receive instruction and improve their circumstances and those of their children.

Our tailoring training program is designed as a four month course. In the training we teach tailoring, embroidery and wool knitting skills. We have classes from 10am through to 4pm. We have selected these times to fit in best with the women's daily tasks of cooking for their families and other household duties. The training includes free material and access to sewing machines and tuition. We also give homework to trainees.

Our tailoring program is designed to equip trainees with each and every skill that they need to generate income for their family. On completion of the four months training, we donate a sewing machine

to each woman. So far we have trained 174 women who have each received a sewing machine.

The women who benefit from this training were formerly in hopeless situations, unable to change their circumstances. After four months they go to their homes with joy and their hearts are filled with hope for their future. In our training we share inspiring and challenging stories to encourage them. We tell stories from the Bible to help them to rely on God for everything they do and to have faith that God will give them victory. Words have been encouraging women to become self-reliant.

You may wonder where the evangelism is in all these good works. We are not to just meet physical needs. We want to meet the spiritual needs of each and every woman who comes to our training. So in order to reach them, we share the gospel with non-believers. By the grace of God, we are seeing women coming to Christ. Praise be to God. In the hearts of some women the gospel seed is planted. We have been praying for them to come to the knowledge of Christ. So by giving tailoring training, we are meeting the physical needs of the whole family and their spiritual needs as well.

The following examples are some testimonies from women whose lives have been changed after doing our tailoring training program.

*My name is **Bujji**. I am living in Gollanapalli village. I come from the Dalit Caste. I am married to an alcoholic. My husband works in quarries (mines) as a daily wage labourer as many do in my village. I also worked in quarries along with my husband. Sometimes we used to get 20 rupees, 30 rupees and sometimes 70 rupees if we have worked very hard. We have three children. My husband works in quarries from morning to evening. When he gets money in the evening, he appears in front of a wine shop. He buys*

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*alcohol and spends the entire money on it. He comes home with empty hands. He doesn't look after me and our children. He even beats me. I have been suffering from my alcoholic husband for a very long time. Sometimes we did not have enough food for my children. Those situations made me very sad and I wanted to take my own life because I had been going through lots of problems. But my children's future kept me alive. At one stage I have decided to do something which would give me good income. I have worked in quarries and on agricultural fields. It was not good income. I was in search of other works that would give me more income. At that time brother Elisha started the Tailoring Program in our village. I thought this would be good for me. God has given me good skills in hand works. So very soon I fell in love with tailoring and embroidery training. I came to training every day without fail. I got so much encouragement, inspiration and confidence from the training. After the training, I was given a sewing machine. Now I am stitching my people's clothes and earning good money. Now I am able to feed my children without fail and I am sending my children to school. I am also saving some money for my elder daughter's marriage. Now my life is going well. Now my husband is also slowly changing and encouraging me in my business. My life has been changed in a miraculous way that I never thought of. Thanks to Light Tailoring Program. It changed my life.*

*My name is **Kumari**. I live in Telaprolu village. I come from the Dalit Caste. We are ten children to my parents. Our family is very big. My father passed away a few years back. When my father was alive, I studied Year 10. Once he died, I stopped my education because there was no one to take care of my education. My mother is very old and cannot work anymore. All of my brothers and sisters got married. All of them have their own families and burdens. So they are not supporting me, my mother and my younger brother who*



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*is not married yet. So, my younger brother worked in agricultural fields as a child labourer getting money to feed us. I was very sad to depend on him and very much depressed. I wanted to do any job at least to feed myself and my mother. I am not good at agricultural labour. So I was searching for other works that I can do. At that time, I came to know about Light Tailoring training program that has happened in two different villages. I heard how it has been changing the lives of village women. So I thought that this might be a time for me to be part of this training. So I joined in the training program when it was conducted in our village, Telaprolu. In our training, I have gained skills in tailoring, embroidery and in wool knitting. Above all I have gained confidence which is such an encouragement to me. So now I am 100% confident about my future. After training I was given one sewing machine to take home with me. Now I am doing business with that machine. Now my life is going very well. My life is completely changed since I did the tailoring course. Now I look after my mother and myself. Now I am saving money for my marriage as well. Now my life is filled with hope. Now I can lift my head and can walk with dignity. Thanks to LIGHT Home for taking this great project which is giving dignity to women, like me.*

There are many stories like these two about how women's lives changed after attending our tailoring training program. We are so happy to see the smiling faces and happy families whose lives are being transformed completely through our training program. God has a special plan for every single individual who comes to our tailoring centre.

It is always a big challenge to raise finances to run the tailoring training program and to give one sewing machine to each trainee on completion. We do not wish to send any women home without a sewing machine as the benefits of their training cannot be utilised.

For this reason, we need money to buy sewing machines. This is where the challenge arises. Finances are always a big challenge for us and an opportunity to exercise my faith in God. As we prayed our God would be answering our prayers. He opened the doors of heaven and provided the finances to buy the sewing machines for our past graduates. When we shared about the tailoring program with our friends, they listened to God's call in helping the women. Some friends helped us to buy one machine and others helped us to buy more. Every time we have had enough money to give a sewing machine to each trainee. Sometimes it took more time than we expected, but we waited on God for His timing.

As human beings, we want to do things fast. We want to see answers to our prayers straight away. But sometimes that doesn't happen. We all need to learn to wait on God's time which is perfect time. So through the tailoring training program I learned waiting on God's time which brings glory to Him.

### **Feeding the Poor Project**

On December 24, 2007, as a Christmas gift, we gave food and new clothes to widows and old people in our village. On January 1, 2008 God gave me a vision to care daily for these widows and old people by giving them their daily food needs.

On the first morning of the year 2008, I was praying to God to lead and protect us in the New Year. At that time, one passage from scripture came to my mind: Matthew 25:35-40, *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord when did we see you*



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*hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? Then the King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

At that time I didn't know why God showed me this passage. While I was praying, a woman came to see me at my office. I invited her in. As soon as she came into my office, she fell on my knees begging for food. She hadn't eaten for the last few days. I told my mother to give her some food. Afterwards she began begging me for some food each day. As she would ask me for food, again Matthew 25:53-40 would come into my mind, and I was led in the Spirit that this was what God was telling me through the passage. I was told by the Spirit to look after this woman and other widows who are dying for lack of food.

I prayed to God to give me strength and courage to stand firm in this vision to feed the widows and people who were dying due to lack of food in their old age. The LIGHT Home building land was very small and didn't have space for another building to start a feeding program. While I was praying for a place to start this feeding program, God showed me Chintagunta village which is about four kilometres from our LIGHT Home. I was surprised that God was showing me this little village as I had never thought of this village which is very small and has no facilities. But God knew where we needed to work most. In this Chintagunta village, all the people are Dalits (Untouchables). No people from other castes live in this village. A mud road full of potholes leads to this village and there is no good grocery shop, barber shop, medical facilities or doctor. The villagers have to go to the nearest larger village for

everything, which is a four kilometres round trip. There is no bus to this village. 400 people live in this village and there is one government run school. Mostly the children don't get up to Year 10 in high school, discontinuing due to poverty. All the people depend on seasonal agricultural work and everybody is living below the poverty line.

There are a number of widows and old people in this village who have been rejected and neglected by their own children. Some have no partner and some do not have children to look after them. For many reasons they did not have food.

Old age in India is a big problem. There are 81 million old people in India. Nearly 40% of senior citizens living with their families are reportedly facing abuse of one kind or another, with only one in six cases actually reported. According to government officers the incidences of elderly couples being forced to sell their houses are very high. Some elderly men have also complained that in case of a property dispute, they feel more helpless when their wives side with their children. Many of them suffer in silence as they fear humiliation if they speak up. A phenomenon called 'grand dumping' is becoming common in urban areas these days as children are being increasingly intolerant of their parents' health problems. After a certain age health problems leading to losing control over one's body; not recognizing one's own family owing to Alzheimers, are common. It is then their children begin to see their parents as a burden and may throw them out of their homes. Some put their old parents or grandparents in old-age homes and forget about them. So God put these dying old people on my heart to look after them.

In June 2008 after my return from Australia, we first bought 447 square feet of land in Chintagunta village for this feeding project. We soon acquired some other land to make one acre. We thought of

having a small building on this property where we could feed the people. Construction started in October 2008 and was finished by February 2009. In February 2009 my friends came from Australia to dedicate the building for the Glory of God, and the feeding of 50 widows and old people commenced. This project is called: LIGHT Aged Day Care Centre.

Though we had a place to give food we didn't have finances to feed the people. We did not have finances to buy the food. We didn't have our own cooking vessels for this project. Even there were no chairs for the old people to sit and have meals. I realized another prayer point that I needed to uphold in my daily prayers for financing this project. When we started our first day of feeding, we did not have a single dollar towards this. But I started it just by looking to Jesus. I prayed each and every day for the finances to come in for the food. Our prayers were not in vain. On February 17, 2009 God provided finances for the entire month of February in an unexpected way. At that time my friends from Western Australia came over for my wedding, and attended the feeding program with me. On seeing the importance of the project, we all prayed together.

After prayer my friends said that they would like to support this project for one month as they were led by the Spirit of God. I was so happy as I could see God's answer to my prayers. My faith had been honoured again. God is faithful. A little faith in a great God results in wonders. That is what we have been seeing since we started this ministry.

We now had finances for February, but no money for the coming months. So again I needed to come down on my knees to pray to God with the weapon of Faith to give victory for me in overcoming the financial need. God answered prayers and opened the door. Every day and every month is a challenge for us to continue this

project. But I am not tired of trusting God and relying on Him for everyday miracles. In fact I love depending on God for every need because it is thrilling and amazing to see how God provides. I am delighted to tell you that we didn't stop this Feeding the Poor project for a single day because of lack of finances. God has been so faithful to us and has been providing without fail.

Our feeding project has made a great difference in the lives of old people as they are receiving their daily bread (two meals) and new clothes at Christmas time. Every day they come to us with smiles on their faces. Their lives are happy now. Here are two testimonies from two old people who are getting food from our centre. You can hear from them how their hopeless lives became hope-filled lives.

*My name is **Siromani**. I am 68 years old. My husband died a few years ago. I have only one daughter who is married. She is living with her husband and she has her own family. Before my husband died, my life was so good. My husband looked after me very well. After his death, the problems started. My life and future became dark. I did not know how to lead the rest of my life. At that time I had one hope and that was my only daughter. I thought my daughter would look after me in these last days. So I went to my daughter full of hope. But very soon my hopes were dashed. As soon as I went to my daughter's house, I could see the faces of my daughter and her husband darken. They didn't like my presence in their house. They don't want me to stay in their house for a long time. They told me to stay for one or two weeks, not any more. I cried in my heart over my daughter's behaviour towards me. I did not want to stay there and I left home without knowing where I should go. My heart was filled with grief. I was too old to work. So I had only one option; that is begging. So I started begging for my living. I was visiting each and every village begging. Finally I ended up living in Chintagunta as I have relatives here. I was*

*struggling. At that time, I came to know that there would be a Day Care centre soon in the village where old people will have two meals a day. That was the greatest news I ever heard in my life because I can have food and can live without fear of hunger. As soon as they started feeding, I joined in and now I am getting food there. Now I don't have to fear about food. I am getting food and clothes. My fate has been turned from darkness to light.*

***Narayana** was a good worker and farmer. He worked his entire life to raise children and made some money to give to his children. He also bought one acre of land with his earnings. He selected girls for his sons and arranged marriages for them. He divided all of his property and money among the children. Then he started living with the children. In the beginning, they looked after him very well. But slowly they changed. They started criticising him for not giving them enough money. They started murmuring at him. His sons became so selfish that they did not want to give him food. His daughters-in-law took advantage of their situation and started giving him a hard time. They denied him food. In a short time he went from being a respected elder in the family he became an unwanted person. He was so depressed about his condition. There were times where he was going without food the whole day. He went to bed without food. He could not share his situation with anyone as it would give his children a bad name, so he faced all those problems silently. He was thinking of other options to get food without depending on his sons and daughters-in-law. A good day came in his life when we started our Day Care centre in his village. So he thought this was the option he was looking for. So he came to our centre and he is getting enough to eat. Now he is no longer depending on his children for food. He is a happy man.*

All these people we are feeding are Dalits. We are taking care of these wonderful people in the Lord and giving them food. One



Hindu man asked me, (he doesn't know how God provides) "*How are you giving food to these people?*" He knows that I also come from a poor Dalit family and I myself don't have money to feed these people. He wanted to know how all these good works are being done. I took his questions as an opportunity to share about Jesus with him. Then I said to him, "*Well, this is a good question. But I have a good and perfect answer.*" I said to him that I have a partner who has been taking care of all of our financial needs. We are in partnership with Him and He is looking after our needs. He looked at me in a strange way and asked me, "*Who is that partner?*"

I told him boldly, "*His name is JESUS.*" If you trust and believe in Him, He will look after you. He was shocked at my answer. Then he realised that I am confident in the Lord. He does not have that confidence in his 30 million gods and goddesses. I said to him again that I am venturing with faith. My God will not let me down. I have full confidence in the Lord and as I have been walking in partnership with my Provider. He hasn't let me down so far and He will not let me down. So with that same faith and confidence we are going forward that God shall meet our needs from his riches in Christ. (Philippians 4:19).

### **Garden of Eden Income-Generating Project**

Sometimes we make a decision which doesn't seem right at the time but later has a great impact. Buying land at Chintagunta is like that. We first bought a small block of land at Chintagunta village for feeding the poor. But later on some more land which was next door came up for sale and we bought it too, giving us one acre in total. Originally we had different ideas for that land. So we bought that land with many ideas and plans. But later on that land became a great blessing for our LIGHT Home and for the feeding project. So

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after we bought the land, God started giving me a clear vision how to use this acre. That vision is the Garden of Eden Income-Generating Project. What this means is that we wanted to use this one acre of land for generating income.

At present we are supported by faithful friends and sponsors who have hearts of compassion for helping the needy children of India. Our aim is not to always rely on outside sources but we want to make LIGHT Home and its ministry completely self-sufficient in India. This is our ultimate plan.

God has shown us different things to do on this land. The first thing we wanted to do was to grow vegetables for the children. At the beginning we had our FAITH (Food Always In The Home) garden but now we didn't have enough space for it. We always thought to grow veggies to save money buying them. Now it was time for us to use this land for growing veggies. So we started growing vegetables on this land.

The other thing we wanted to do was to have water buffalos and cows for milk. We use milk to make yoghurt/curd and butter milk for the children. Every day we were buying milk but still we were not getting pure milk as we were cheated by farmers mixing water with it. Now we can give good nutritious milk products to kids and old people. Also, we want to sell it so that we can raise some income out of it.

We also wanted to buy sheep to raise and to sell meat to raise income.

In February 2009 we received \$20,000 AU towards all these projects. By the grace of God, we bought an extra piece of land that was in the middle of our one acre. We bought five cows and 80 sheep and started growing our own vegetables. Other people came

along to help us look after this project.

Our land is next to the road and it was open. Wild animals such as cows, buffalos and dogs were coming into our property so we had to do build a fence. We prayed to God and He opened the door for a new fence. Now we have a strong fence around our entire property.

We dug a bore well on this land but to our disappointment the water was salty. At that time, the local village government came forward to give us village tap water free of cost. So soon we had water coming from the village tank and we were growing wonderful vegetables. God helped our work and gave us wonderful fruits. But it didn't last long. As we needed water for growing vegetables, growing grass, drinking water for cows and goats and for feeding the poor, the present water was not sufficient. So, we needed to pray for other water sources that would give us good and continuous water supplies. So we started praying for another bore well. At that time we saw a place which was about 300 metres from our Garden of Eden project. We started negotiations with the landowner but he saw our need as a good income source for himself and raised the land cost so high it was unaffordable. We tried to negotiate for two months but eventually realised it wouldn't work. Eventually we found some land that was over one kilometre away. It would require a lot of money to dig the underground pipes but God provided \$4,000 AU through one friend and some extra money from other friends.

We started digging the bore well for one kilometre long. Many people mocked at me when were digging the bore well because it would be very hard to dig that long pipe line. And also only the local village government of rich people can dig that long pipe line. People mocked that this young man would drop this project in between as it would be too hard to do it. But for God nothing is

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impossible. Every morning I had a special personal time with God just concerning this project to help us to bring the water from one kilometre away as we would need water to grow vegetables and for live stock. I had a lot of stressful moments and mocking. However I didn't give up. I knew that this was the place God showed to us and He would give us water. Also, I wanted people know how big our God is through this venture. After much hard work we finally completed digging the bore well and water is coming to our farm land. It was a big project and involved a lot of stress. After finishing the bore well project we are so happy. All the people who mocked at us realized that for God it is nothing. They were silent after that. Our God is big and the water is pure and sweet. He does good things, though sometimes they are quite challenging.



**Garden of Eden Project**

## Chapter 10

# Stepping Out in Faith

**E**veryone has faith in some way. But sometimes our faith is not effective or in other words we don't do much with our faith. God gave faith to everyone. But we need to put our faith into practice to see many great miracles in our lifetime. The Bible says it is not possible to please God without faith. In this chapter I want to encourage you to trust God and go ahead with the faith that God has given you. It doesn't matter how much faith you have but it matters that you do something with the faith that God has given you.

**What does it mean to live by Faith?** Do we really need faith to do God's ministry? In these days everything is mechanical and people are working like machines. We are so busy in our hectic lives that there is little time to think about faith.

We like everything to be planned early. We go with that plan and we put our trust in it. We don't trust God fully. Too often we rely on ourselves or others for support. It is really a sad thing.

Our God is the giver of vision and He will surely provide the provisions for the vision He gave us. He wants us to simply go ahead with our faith and do great things for God. When we step out in

faith and start doing God's work, He will surely reward our work. This is what I have endeavored to do. I am not telling you that I have complete faith in God and I am a great man of faith at all times.

For nearly four years, I was very frightened to start the orphanage, LIGHT Home. I am a common man like you. I come from a very poor Dalit family in India. As my family was struggling to feed themselves, I had no idea how to get the money for an orphanage. This was my greatest challenge by far. I was looking for human support first and secondly God's support.

This was my situation between 2003 and the middle of 2006. However God worked with me and gave me the faith I needed. God turned a fearing man into a bold person in the Lord. God slowly gave me faith day by day to trust Him completely. He was so gracious to me in teaching me faith.

After waiting on God for a long time, God really talked to me and mostly challenged me with two questions, 'What are you waiting for and why are you waiting?'

These were the two questions that I got from the God instead of some encouragement and financial support. But these two questions really challenged me more than anything else. At present you may also be waiting on the Lord to do something, as in your business or to start some kind of ministry.

You may be thinking that this is not God's timing to start. Or you may think, 'Why is God not answering my prayer to make the path right for me to do this particular work or ministry?' Here I would like to help you to know that God is waiting for you to take the step and do it. Maybe God is saying you right now 'What are you waiting for and why are you waiting?'

When God challenged me with these two questions, I couldn't

## *Stepping Out in Faith*

sleep for some days. I was so much on fire to start the orphanage. I couldn't wait any more. I just wanted to start it.

As I was challenged by God, I started Light Home in my own house without any promised support or other words any man's support. I chose to trust God for His heavenly support and to look at Him only. Since I started Light Home, I am always looking at HIM and trusting Him for every need. I always trust one thing – God who gives the vision will surely give the pro-visions. This is helping me to get going on the mission that God entrusted to me.

My faith started like a small mustard seed and started to grow day by day. I haven't got the faith that I have now in one day: it has been a process and a journey. God taught me to trust Him in small things first and then slowly in big things. The dreams I have, seem very big to many people (as you will read in the next chapter). However they are not big to my God because my God is bigger than my dreams. He gave me the dream and He will help me to see that dream in reality. Why should I fear when God is with me?

Here I also want to acknowledge that when we do God's work or even in our personal life, challenges are common. I am not saying that God's ministry is walking on the roses all the time or that we don't have any challenges. In my personal opinion as Christians we have more challenges than others. However we have Hope which others don't. So we have to remember this.

Sometimes, because of the challenges of the ministry I have to cry out to the Lord as David in the Psalms. There were times that God seemed too far away from me. In those times, God was not answering my prayers and was so quiet. I was deeply discouraged by the challenges that I was going through and I needed God to intervene and to deliver a miracle. But I didn't see God near me.

At those times I wanted to cry, just cry. But there was no place

that I could hide myself in my house because it is a very small house. Wherever I go, people can see me. But I wanted to cry out to the God, literally. At those times the only place I could hide myself was our one and only toilet where people couldn't see me. So I used to go to toilet and used to cry out to God. I did it literally many times. However there was still no sign of God.

There are times that I learned some lessons from God while He seemed far from me. The main lesson is, what does it mean to live by faith when God seems so far away in my life? It is so easy to praise God when He is answering all of our prayers and making everything possible for us. But about the times when everything seems so wrong and unpleasant? Do you have courage to praise God in those times? Can you say *Thank God* when you are going through sufferings?

At first I didn't understand what God was teaching me when He seemed far away from me. But slowly I came to know that God was trying to teach me something - to trust Him more and more, to press into Him though I feel He is far from me. So God has taught me many things as I just step away for some time.

I am so grateful to God for everything He taught me and has been teaching me. Maybe this is your personal experience too. Some of our friends get angry with God when they face troubles and trials in their lives. They get away from God and tell the world that there is no God.

Once I was that person. I thought poverty came from God. If our God is God of blessings, why did Christians or others have to suffer for food? I became angry with God and I proclaimed that God was rubbish. Some of our friends are also like I was.

Here we have to remember one thing that God allows these challenges in our life to be strong in Him or He is going to going to



## *Stepping Out in Faith*

give us a big job to do which needs lot of faith. So learn something from every challenge you are facing and come closer to God day by day.

Sometimes we don't have food to eat or a place to live. Do not worry. Believe that God will provide. Sometimes it may take time but you have to know that He faithfully provides for the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field. So do you think God will leave you or forsake you?

Remember one thing that when you are going by faith, there are always many challenges that come to you. Mostly we face challenges from believers and friends. There may be some people who will doubt your calling or vision. Maybe they will try to own you or put suspicions on your work. Here I want to encourage you to expect those things so that when you face them you won't be hurt more.

I was so hurt when I experienced those times. I didn't know that people would do that. But the world is full of those people. Do not be discouraged though they are discouraging. Do not give up. Be strong and be courageous. God is looking at you and He will help you to come through every challenge you face. Know that God is in control of everything. He will help you through. But learn something from every challenge and each day that you face. May God give you more strength to face those challenges.

There are times we feel and think that we want things go fast and want to achieve our goal soon. That is good. But there is a danger in it. If we want to achieve things fast, it means we are relying on us and it is "we or me" wanting to do it, instead of asking God to do it.

There were times that I wanted to see my dream very soon. I was pushing God to do it soon. I was thinking more of how to see

dream, not asking God to help me to see. I am telling you honestly that I felt like this a few times. But God who is full of grace rebuked me and told me to trust Him in that dream. At that time I stepped back and relied on Him more.

As human beings it is easy and so tempting that we want things to go fast. But know things will happen in His timing, not in our time. So we have to wait for God to do things in His time. It may take some months or years, but be patient and know that God is at work. While I am encouraging you with these words, I am encouraging myself as well. Satan's trap makes us rush and makes us believe in our own strength. But my dear friend, do not fall in to that trap. Be careful and come closer to God every day so that you will have a strong wall of protection from God.

You might feel that you're not worthy, however none of us are; but remember in spite of our doubts, fears or shame, it is through Jesus Christ we approach the Throne of Grace. So look to Jesus first and always. He is the Source of Limitless Blessings.

Faith is "believing what God has said and acting upon it." I'm not sure that God is concerned with what motivates our faith. Maybe it is what God tells us in his Word or it could be what he has done for us. The important thing is to put that faith into action. James tells us that faith without works is dead, and Paul tells us that we are created to do good works.

Faith is, as Scripture says, "Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Faith is believing that God is who He says He is – even when things don't go the way we want them to or think that they should. As we surrender our lives to Him He accomplish His purposes in them. I know God's faithfulness and character as He has proven Himself to me so many times, so I am confident that He will guide me and help me even as I struggle with

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the challenges and everything else. This is not a surprise to Him and He has a plan through it all.

I'd like to offer a couple observations on Abraham. First, I'm greatly encouraged by the fact that Abraham was thoroughly human. While he is known for his faith he also relied on himself rather than trusting God. He lied that Sarah was his sister rather than trusting God to protect; and of course he and Sarah become impatient so he had Ishmael by the maid rather than waiting on God, and so it goes on. If this is walking by faith then there is hope for the rest of us!

The most remarkable thing about Abraham wasn't his performance but rather that he "was a friend of God" — his relationship. Abraham sought God and we see that God responded. How often do we just turn away? Instead, we find that Abraham engages, even bargains, with God on how many righteous people it would take for God not to destroy Sodom. There wasn't anything Abraham could do to earn this relationship other than show up, engage and obey.

There is one verse that never fails to shine boldly from the pages of Scripture for me, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

The Word of God is THE key to understanding what faith really is because faith is infused in the Word of God and imparted to us when we have ears to hear. It is the very Voice of God vibrating throughout our being (spirit, body, mind, and emotions) in a tone that puts us in harmony with our Creator and HIS will.

It is this same mega-powerful Voice that spoke the Earth into existence that enables me to say, "Amen" to whatever God calls me to do. His Word tells me that He is going to gently lead me, give me knowledge, understanding and whatever resources I may need to accomplish His will. He is going to shine a light unto my path – not

push me over the cliff into the dark.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26). To understand that we should go through verses 14-26 and see what James is really talking about. Verse 26 can stand on its own, but for true understanding let’s read the context of the chapter. Verse 14 is where James starts to speak of faith and works. Verse 14: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?”

I found that James spoke very literally when talking about the gospel. So, let’s try and answer his questions in this verse.

Question: Does it “profit a man” to “say he has faith” and “not works?”

Answer: I say it does not profit someone to simply say he/she has faith. I believe one has to do works to let others know he/she has faith. Faith is something that can go away without works. Like love, when you don’t show it, you can’t feel it.

Question: “Can faith” alone “save him?”

Answer: Again, No. It can however put a man on the path to be saved. It is the first step to being a believer in anything.

Verses 15 and 16 go together, they say: “If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what does it profit?”

Having faith alone won’t accomplish anything. Just having faith without works is like saying you love someone but never showing them you do. It is easy to say words, but what about doing works to affirm those words? Verse 17 of James: “Even so faith, if it has not

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works is dead, being alone.”

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in his first Epistle the following: 1 Thessalonians 1:3 “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith.” It really can’t be done. You cannot show faith without doing an action; works. They go hand in hand. Work is an action. Are we putting our faith into actions? Matthew 7:20 reaffirms this by stating: “Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.”

Not only is Christ warning us against false prophets in this chapter, but he is also explaining what to look for in followers of Christ. Fruits are our works. James 2:19 goes on: “You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe and tremble.” We can have faith in Christ but our works show that we are followers of Christ. Even the devils have faith in God. The difference is they don’t show faith, they show fear by trembling. Are we fearful or faithful?

David put his faith into action by walking up to Goliath and taking him on face to face, and having the faith that he could cut his head off despite the great size and strength of Goliath. The Israelite army had faith they were God’s people; they shouted the Lord’s name and made a tremendous noise with their voices and weapons, but when Goliath stepped forward to make a challenge, David was the only Israelite whose faith was alive and the only Israelite who stepped forward to take up Goliath’s challenge.

Being a man after God’s own heart like David is a rare characteristic these days, and to be a man after God’s own heart you need to put your faith into action just like David did. A majority of Christians are like the Israelite army that didn’t have the faith to step up to Goliath and put their faith into action. It’s easy to go to Church on Sunday and pray but it’s very hard to be that Shepherd boy who actually stepped into the real battle and take on Goliath. It

takes a live faith to step into the battle zone toe to toe with the enemy, it takes a live faith to step up to Goliath and have faith that God can deliver you and destroy your giant enemy. If you want to be a man after God's own heart, you need to step up and step forward. You need to step forward and face your enemy face to face.

After sharing all of my personal experiences and thoughts, I would like to encourage you to go forward with the vision and dream that God has given you to fulfil. He is the author and finisher of our faith. So just trust that God will finish the work He has started through you. Once again I am telling you with boldness that God will provide the provisions you just take a first step.

Here I would like to ask you one thing. I want you to think this very seriously. Just imagine how God created the entire universe in six days. Just imagine this seriously. Here I want you to stop reading the book and look around. If possible, just go outside and look as best as you can. Think about mountains, oceans, seas, river, plants, animals, sun, moon, earth, stars, human beings and whatever you can see. Just imagine how God created all these things that we can see and can't see. Just imagine how God created all these in six days.

I hope here you getting the picture of how BIG our God is. Everything you can see and you can't see is created by God. Nothing is created without Him. My friend, our God is bigger than our imagination and thinking and dreams. Many times we limit our God. Many times we depend on our own strength and our plans. But we ignore the fact that our God can do anything. Nothing is impossible for Him. Whatever our dreams (big or small) are just to trust God that He will bring them to pass. May God help you to trust Him completely!

## **Chapter 11**

### **Children's Issues**

**V**ishal, a six-year-old boy from a very poor family whose income is less than \$2 a day, begs every day to earn enough to eat. Whenever or wherever he sees someone, he starts begging, repeating the same line again and again: "give me one buck."

When asked why he begs, he replies innocently that he begs and gives the money to his parents. With that, and without uttering another word, he moves on to the next person.

Many children like Vishal who live far below the poverty line in India do not go to school but only beg. Their day starts with begging and ends with begging. Vishal begs because his family's income is not sufficient enough to give him three meals a day.

#### **A tale of two India's**

Beneath India's impressive growth is a tale of 'two India's, while one India is on a rapid development trajectory, the other has 300 million people living below the poverty line, and wide gender, caste, ethnic and regional disparities"<sup>1</sup>

39% of the population (15 and over) are illiterate, 127 million people do not have access to an improved water source, 33% of the population has access to improved sanitation and 46% of children (below 5 years) are underweight. India is the second fastest growing economy in the world with an 8.8% increase in GDP in the last financial year and has emerged “as a global player in information technology, business process outsourcing, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals”.

- India has 146 million malnourished children under age 5, the most of any country on planet earth.
- 25% of Indians live below the poverty line.
- 40% of the people in India cannot read or write.
- One-third of India’s children cannot attend elementary school, usually because there is no local school to attend.
- India has more than 25% of world’s child deaths.
- India has more than 20 million child labourers.
- The World Bank estimates that the number of children in India orphaned by AIDS is approaching 2 million.
- Infectious disease risk is high for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, dengue fever, encephalitis, rabies, and malaria.

In this chapter I would like to share the challenge and issues that Indian children are facing.



## **Children Begging**

*Between the dark and the daylight,  
When the night is beginning to lower,  
Comes a pause in the day's occupation,  
That is known as the Children's Hour.*  
(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

There is a saying that childhood is a kingdom in which no one dies. In India, such sayings cannot be taken for granted. For many children in India today, there is no Children's Hour, no pause in the day's occupation of begging.

Many parents compel their children to beg because they consider it an easy way to earn money. Suraj, an eight-year-old beggar, says, "Please give to me in the name of God. God will bless you."

In India, child begging is considered a bad act. But behind every child beggar there is a cause. There is a need to check out and eliminate this type of begging from a country like India where people say "children are the country's future."

The number of destitute children begging in the street is becoming alarming. Begging children are a common sight in many urban centres. They beg where human traffic is high – at busy street intersections, in front of supermarkets, temples, churches and mosques, banks and markets. Usually aged less than 15 years, these children are extremely poor and face severe living condition. They are often exploited, and they are also likely to be victims of human trafficking, sexual abuse and violence.

We see a happy ending for the stars of the film *Slumdog Millionaire* – but for real slum dwellers the future is bleak.

In cities or towns, we have restaurants and roadside hotels where they sell services such as collecting firewood, tending animals, street vending, begging, prostitution and domestic labour. Children that don't work have no food. Next to the hotels there have dust bins where the hotel throws out the leftover food. For millions of orphans and poor children those dust bins are the place where they can get food. Just imagine, how hungry you have to be to eat banana peel? Children dig in the dust bins for food. Sometimes this is the place where fights start because everyone wants to have some food. So the strong defeat the weak.

Every place we go to in town we see many beggars coming to us for money. At the traffic junction, we see children on the streets running after cars and vehicles for money. It is very risky and dangerous. Sometimes it takes their life. But they run in midst of running vehicles for just one or two rupees.

Begging syndicates are not unknown in India – it regards sympathy as a market to be exploited. The children get just enough to feed themselves while the leaders of the syndicates keep the rest. Furthermore, after reaching the age of physical maturity, the girls are then sold off into the flesh trade while the boys become slaves or labourers. It is difficult to find a girl or boy between 13 to 16 begging along the streets when their value lies elsewhere.

I read in a newspaper that one baby girl was getting milk from a dog. Her mother didn't have milk to give to her child so she went to find some, and sucked milk from the dog. This really touched my heart. It is really so sad to see those situations.



**Child labour**



## **Child Labour**

Child labour in India is a human rights issue for the whole world. It is a serious and extensive problem, with many children under the age of fourteen working in carpet making factories, glass blowing units and making fireworks with bare little hands. According to the statistics given by the Indian government there are 20 million child labourers in the country, while other agencies claim that it is 50 million.

Poor children in India begin working at a very young and tender age. Many children have to work to help their families and some families expect their children to continue the family business at a young age.

The situation of child labourers in India is desperate. Children work for eight hours at a stretch with only a small break for meals. The meals are also frugal and the children are ill nourished. Most of the migrant children, who cannot go home, sleep at their work place, which is very bad for their health and development. Seventy five percent of Indian population still resides in rural areas and are very poor. Children in rural families who are ailing with poverty perceive their children as an income generating resource to supplement the family income. Parents sacrifice their children's education to the growing needs of their younger siblings in such families and view them as wage earners for the entire clan.

Most Indian street children work. A common job is rag-picking, in which boys and girls as young as 6 years old sift through garbage in order to collect recyclable material. The children usually rise before dawn and carry their heavy load in a

large bag over their shoulder. Rag-pickers can be seen alongside pigs and dogs searching through trash heaps on their hands and knees. Other common jobs are the subject to the strains and hazards of their labour, but are also denied the education or training that could enable them to escape the poverty trap.

### **Bonded Child Labour**

The most inhuman and onerous form of child exploitation is the age old practice of bonded labour in India. In this, the child is sold to the loaner like a commodity for a certain period of time. This labour is treated like security or collateral security and cunning rich men procure children for small sums at exorbitant interest rates.

The practice of bonded child labour is prevalent in many parts of rural India. There the bonded child is allowed to reside with his parents if he presents himself for work at 6am every day. The practice of child bonded labour persists in spite of many laws against it. According to the statistics given by the Indian government there are 20 million child labourers in the country, while other agencies claim that it is 50 million.

The children are bound to work for their employers in exchange of the loan taken by their parents or families, and are unable to leave because of the debt. They are also paid a very paltry sum for their labour. Most of these children are the Dalits.

Bonded labour traps the growing child in a hostage-like condition for years. The importance of formal education is also not realized, as the child can be absorbed in economically beneficial activities at a young age. Moreover there is no access to proper education in the remote areas of rural India for most

people, which leaves the children with no choice.

The children who are sold as bonded labour only get a handful of coarse grain to keep them alive in return for their labour. Sometimes their bonded period extends for a life time, and they have to simply toil hard and depend on the mercy of their owners, without any hope of release or redemption. The impoverished parents of the bonded child are usually poor, uneducated landless labourers and the mortgagee is traditionally some big landlord, money lender or a big business man who thrives on their vulnerability to such exploitation.

Government officials recognized that children were doing bonded work in factory premises. But they deliberately employed their energy in running public awareness campaigns and made claims of creating propaganda against child labour instead of punishing erring employers and freeing and rehabilitating the bonded children.

There is a major link between caste and bondage in Indian society. Many Dalit families function as bonded labour due to caste-based discrimination and violence and not poverty. The caste system is one of the main foundations for bonded labour. Dalits or the so called Untouchables are denied access to land in India, forced to work in inhuman conditions, and expected to perform labour for free. This is due to the so-called upper castes boycotting them socially and subjecting them to economic exploitation. This attitude of society keeps the poor families bonded in a scourge of perpetual poverty and labour.

Hundreds and thousands of children toil as bonded labour in India's silk industry and the government is not able to do

anything to protect their rights. Those children who are working in India's silk industry are virtually slaves.

A young girl named Sunita is frequently beaten, harassed and even poked with red hot knives by her employer. She suffered inhuman treatment for months as a domestic servant until she could escape one night from her employers' apartment in Bangalore.

*Clinging on to the drainage pipes at the rear of the building, Sunita had stealthily crept down below, where a tea vendor, Raju gave her refuge and food for the night. Next morning Sunita's tale of woes shook the neighbourhood. She was badly ill-treated and her body was with full of wounds. These wounds were enough for the public to call the child helpline and place her in local children's home.*

Sunita used to be beaten even for petty faults. "Her employer used heated spoons and knives and poked her with these as indicated by the burn scars all over her arms and legs." It is surprising to note that her employers were educated people – a doctor and his software engineer wife. This story was published on *The Hindu* newspaper on April 3, 2005.

There is not just one Sunita story? There are millions of Sunita's stories in India. There are millions of children who work in building constructions, carpets, roadside hotels, making beads, match boxes, agriculture, fireworks and in many hazardous fields.

They have very tender hands and those tender hands should hold a pen and book, not hammer or other iron instruments in

their hands. God has created them to be a child, not a child labourer. Our Lord Jesus Christ loved children a lot while he was on the face of the earth. Many times he said to his disciples, *Let the children come to me*. We see how much Jesus loves the children in that small passage. So as Christ's followers, we have inherited that same love from our God Almighty.

Is there any end for these under-privileged children lives? Can we do anything to give better life to these children? I don't want to offend you by asking all these questions. However I want you to know about the children who are going through a different life from yours. Life is not just about getting a good job, earning good income, having nice luxury and having an easy life.

I am not against to all these things. Even I want to give all these to my one little daughter Christina. Everyone wants to have a good life and wants to give good future to our children. That is not wrong. But it is wrong if we forget other children who are suffering just to have three meals a day while we waste God-given resources. We need to do something with what God has given to us.

I strongly believe that we can change a person, a community and a nation with good quality of education, a real education that changes their lives. Education is a privilege rather than a right for many of the children of India. There are schools available to the wealthy, but the majority of Indian children live in poverty and are not given this opportunity.

Although many children are enrolled in government schools, actual attendance is low. Many children can only attend school



when they are not working. Therefore, lower-class Dalit Indian children's education is neither consistent nor secure. So I am so passionate about giving a quality education to my fellow Dalit children to uplift them from the darkness of poverty to have LIGHT in their lives.

***We cannot waste our children, not another one, not another day! It is long past time for us to act on their behalf***  
(Nelson Mandela).

***You make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give*** (Winston Churchill).



**Child poverty**



**Orphan**

## **Chapter 12**

### **My Dream**

**A**t present we have 75 children in the Light Home: 50 children living on the campus and 25 children coming daily to have food and tuition as we do not have enough accommodation room. We also have 150 children in the waiting list (as per January 2011). To many kids we had to say “No” because of lack of finances and also limited facilities.

Our Light Home premises are very small and there are not enough places for the kids to play and have fun. When they are playing, each one shares nearly four feet of space for everybody. Kids are jumping on each other due to lack of space. As kids are growing their physical and educational needs are changing. So we are praying and trying to expand the facilities to cater to the growing needs of children. Without proper facilities it is hard to meet their needs. Even if we want to take more kids into Light Home, we need to have extra facilities. So for all these reasons we need to have to expand the facilities what we have.

God has given me a dream to meet growing needs of

## *An Incredible Journey by Faith*

children. Here I would like to share this God given dream with you.

*I have a dream to take Hundreds of Dalit children in our LIGHT Home. I want to start an English medium school Christian school with International standards for our Light Home kids and for surrounding villages' poor kids. I want an English Medium School as English is the language of the modern Indian economy. Because rich parents' children typically learn English at expensive private schools, they are qualified for further academic studies and jobs in the new Indian economy. But Dalits are poor and they cannot send their kids to English medium schools where they have to pay lots of money. So I want to give corporate level quality education FREE of cost to our Dalit children and others as well. I want to give a real education to the children to change their lives forever. I strongly believe that education is the key to change their lives. We need a Christian school where kids grow with good biblical values. I also want to give university level education to the children to give them full fledged education. I want to give education for Dalit children from elementary to University level. I want to have a big play ground for kids where they can play cricket, volleyball, basket ball, tennis and other games. I want to build a good swimming pool for kids. I also want to build a Hospital for our children and for poor people where they can be treated free of cost. Above all I want to bring all of our children and people to the knowledge of Christ.*

*And mostly I want to make our Light Home and its projects entirely self-dependent within India so that we can raise our own income within India. To make it a self-reliant ministry, I*

## *My Dream*

*want to have rice growing paddies, vegetable growing lands, dairy farms, chicken farms and goat farms. By having all of these we can raise our own income and be a self-dependent ministry within India.*

This is the dream that God put in my heart. I'm sure you are thinking that this is a big dream. I acknowledge that it is a big dream. But I do not fear at my dream. ***I know I am small, I know my dream is big and mostly I do know that my GOD is BIGGER than my dream.*** He will bring my dream pass. It is not about me and it is not my work. However it is God's work and He will make it real. But I have a faith to trust Him that He who started the work will finish. In chapter 10 Stepping out in Faith, I shared that God has been teaching me faith. God taught me to trust Him in small things first and slowly He helped me to trust Him for bigger things. So I am enough able to trust God for bigger things as He is BIG.

I like William Carey's words "*Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.*" Our God is a BIG God and we should dream Big, I believe. Our dreams should bring glory and honor to our creator, not for me or not for us. So I want to bring Glory to God through the dream that God has given me. I have been praying for this dream to come to pass. I am sure that it will come to pass in His time.

So here I am with a dream. Again I am venturing my faith with God. He is my partner and supporter. My supporter and partner will never let me down, I strongly believe. For every God-given vision there is His pro-vision.

*An Incredible Journey by Faith*



**Income-generating Projects – tailoring & agriculture**



## Conclusion

I have a dream to see one day. I want to see all of our kids getting to know Jesus as their personal Saviour and Lord, and I want them to have a close relationship with their Creator. And I also I want to see them sharing gospel with others and making others disciples. When we all get to heaven, I want to hear kids testifying that brother Elisha shared the gospel with us and we came to know Christ in our lives. So I want to hear that, “Because of Elisha I came to know Jesus in my life and came here.” This is my dream that I want to see.

Would you like to hear such testimonies from the kids and people when we all get to heaven? Without your help the task is not finished. You and I have to partner together to change the lives of these people.

Romans 10:13-17 says, “How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?”

So how can these children hear the gospel unless someone speaks? And we have to ask this question, how can they preach unless they are sent? So you and I have to preach the gospel to them. If you are not able to preach the gospel to these children and

people in India, at least you can send someone on your behalf to share the gospel. God has given the vision and burden to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the needy children India. We have a privilege of seeing many children and people coming to Christ through our ministry in India.

I encourage you to seek the Lord and see if He is asking you to help one or more children in our LIGHT Home. If He puts this in your heart, please do not hesitate to contact us. You will receive the photograph and testimony of the children you are praying for and supporting.

We have a sponsorship plan. It takes \$30 USD or AUD / €27 Euros / £20 GBP to support one child per month. With your kind support a kid will have food, clothing, education, medical supplies and above all he/she will get to hear the gospel. Your help will change in a child's life forever.

If you support today, if you invest today for God's kingdom, one day in eternity you will get to see the children and people that you supported present before the throne of grace. And they will testify that because of this person I came here. So would you like to hear such testimonies from the children and families! Then start doing something today. Let us make difference in the lives of needy Dalit children.



**Contact Elisha and LIGHT Home**

*Email and Website on page 2*

**You can help (Australian account):**

Account Name: Anna Disher Memorial Account

BSB: 112-879, Account Number: 108 998 378

Bank name: St. George Bank, Tamworth

**International account:**

Bank Name: CORPORATION BANK

Beneficiary Account Name: LIGHT SOCIETY

Beneficiary Account number: SB16015506

Beneficiary Bank Branch Swift code: CORPINBB203

(OR) IFSC Code: CORP0000203

Beneficiary Bank Branch Code: 0203

Beneficiary Bank Address:

23-11-86 N.P Road,

SATYANARAYANAPURAM,

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