

## Capstone Ministry: Inception and History

**A small ministry's experience of the wonder and power of God's vast love.**

### **The beginning**

#### **Events that precipitated Capstone Ministries:**

As we stood in my lab in a free moment between seeing patients, I recalled he had clearly exhibited each fruit of the Spirit in the many years he came into my office to discuss his company's pharmaceutical drugs. He was a Christian-no doubt. Up to that point, I had previously taken a number of medical mission trips around the world but recently I felt called to take a venture into teaching God's word to the spiritually dark subcontinent of India. I enjoyed Bible teaching and a break from medicine would be good. An opportunity came up and I needed to put a team together.

God said: "Go ahead, ask him to go." John had actually been looking for such an opportunity. He joined our team and little did we know then that God would call us to team together with Capstone Ministries for the next few decades and counting.

In the fall of 1998, our team of six set out for India. God blessed us with three pastors as well as two experienced Bible teachers. None of us had ever visited the country. After the trip, we all agreed it was a country and culture beyond anything we had imagined. The people are bright and industrious but the majority are overwhelmed by a life of grinding poverty and hopelessness.

The spiritual darkness is pervasive. Statues of idols are seen both inside the Hindu temples-when their large doors are swung open wide- and outside in public view. We have seen them in Hindu homes we have visited.

We were scheduled to teach groups of about twenty five pastors in one or two all day sessions in three different cities spanning hundreds of miles. Each of us taught theological subjects of our own interest. There was therefore little continuity but it proved to be stimulating. Translators were needed which slowed the pace of teaching by half.

Simple meals were served at lunchtime- always rice with a sauce, often chicken or a vegetable added. It gave us a chance to get to know some of the pastors- those that spoke some English. Typically the Indian men ate with their fingers as was the custom. The Americans were given forks which I did not turn down.

I saw one of the pastors going through the trash containers looking for used styrofoam coffee cups which he carefully retrieved and placed in a paper bag for reuse. It was then most evident -the degree of poverty that many suffered.

Our first session was in a cramped room In New Delhi off a side street. We had to maintain a low profile not only for our protection but more importantly for those we were teaching. Persecution from a radical and powerful Hindu sect was pervasive throughout the country but worse the further north you traveled. The police typically turned a blind eye to the violence. The Indian constitution advocates freedom of worship, but it became clear that laws were not respected-from traffic violations to the murder of Christian pastors.

Upon concluding our teaching for the day, we had time to take a small tour of the city. The six of us stepped outside and looked around to hail a cab. Out of nowhere a cab pulled up and offered a ride. We had a problem. The cab was an enclosed wooden box bolted on top of a three wheeled motorcycle with an open entrance in the back and wooden benches inside. None of us would be suspected of suffering from malnutrition so we asked the obvious question.

“ You really think you can carry all of us?”

Whether he understood English very well was unclear but the challenge was obvious. “Yes,” he said with a roll of his head which we learned is a common Indian gesture meaning-“who do you think I am?- no problem.” We climbed in the back and we were barely able to squeeze into the benches. To our surprise the cycle strained into action and was moving at a good clip as long as the road was level. But at one point we noticed a distinct drop in the speed and could hear the motor struggling. We looked out and realized we were on a slight incline-possibly two degrees. The suffering engine was becoming painful to listen to and we seemed at risk of going backwards into traffic at any moment when-not if -the engine gave out completely.

Our only recourse was for half of us to jump out and start pushing. With the reduced weight and the extra push we were able to get moving again once we hit level ground. We jumped back in quickly not sure if the driver was going to stop for us or even if he knew we bailed him out for a moment.

This was our first introduction to the extraordinary adventure-and danger- of life traveling on two or more wheeled vehicles over the streets of India. We usually drove in cars-either cabs or with those ministries working with us that owned cars or vans. On return trips, the ministry we initially worked with had a large decrepit van and their driver was the most skilled of any I have experienced in the country-or anywhere. He was the rock star or the MVP athlete in the world of motorized

vehicle transport drivers-and he was taken for granted by those that don't appreciate a raw talent sitting before them

In America we get annoyed when people honk-and sometimes the resultant road rage leads to disastrous consequences. In India drivers are upset if you don't honk. Signs are often posted on the back of trucks requesting that you make some noise. The problem is that there is a constant din of honking cars, trucks or motorcycles on the road at all times. Everyone is honking at everyone simultaneously-so there is the constant nerve racking question: who is honking at you and which one is about to crash into you?

My first experience in this life threatening environment was in the back seat of the ministry van and it was one of disbelief. Traffic lines painted on the roads, that haven't already faded, are completely ignored-as are the stop signs and lights. Families of four-a mother holding an infant sitting behind her husband on a motorcycle with a young child sitting in front of him -would weave precariously between cars and trucks in about two inches of space. Helmets were seldom seen.

Every driver is in a frantic state to get to their destination as soon as possible. Surprisingly I saw very few accidents on the roads. If an olympic event is ever conceived that would entail extreme speed, precision, courage and recklessness-this is it. India would sweep the intracity driving podium every four years. It would be interesting to measure the stress hormone levels of these drivers-not to mention the passengers.

Just when I thought I had seen all there was to see on an Indian road, a few days later a companion nudged me as we were traveling on a potholed four lane highway just outside a major city. He pointed to the shoulder of the road where two huge elephants were loping along the edge of the road at a good clip with a couple riders sitting on flat platforms strapped to the elephant's backs.

And just when I thought I had experienced all extremes that were possible in the field of ground transportation in India, years later I took an overnight train ride. I was placed with three strangers in a cramped cabin with two bunk beds. None of them spoke English. With some elementary sign language I was able to get a bed. One of the men snored loudly all night which was an added bonus. The bathroom, I learned, was down the aisle and into the next car with an interesting jump from one car to the other. After waiting in line, I was finally able to be introduced to a radically new concept-the bottomless toilet. When I stepped in and locked the door, all I found was a hole in the floor into which I saw railroad ties flying by.

Getting back to our teaching trip, our group traveled to a number of cities repeating the same Bible studies. The participants were hungry for the Word and

it made discussion very interesting. The last city was in Bhubaneswar on the southeast coast. The day-long session we stepped outside to a backstreet on a warm evening with the sun setting. We heard music playing above the constant din of car horns and the usual noisy bustle of the masses. To our right was a procession of about fifty people led by a young couple sitting on an ox drawn old wooden cart with wooden wheels four feet tall. The wagon looked to be two hundred years old. They were in the center of the narrow street with a long procession following them dancing and chanting. We inquired with one of our pastor students as to what was happening in front of us.

“It’s a Hindu wedding,” he replied. At that moment some young participants in the trailing procession asked us to join them. John jumped in and slowly danced his way down the road with the cheerful revelers. Knowing both my singing and dancing would wreak havoc on any occasion, I spent my time trying to think how I would explain to John's wife how he disappeared.

“Well he was dancing and singing in this Hindu wedding procession down a dark street behind our teaching room and just disappeared into the night.”

“Yes, we’ll find him. There's only half a million people in this city-small compared to most cities in the country.”

As I was running out of reassuring ideas, John came walking up the street winded from his exertion. We were impressed with how open the local people were to having strangers-from a foreign country and culture- take part in celebrating their wedding party. This made the shocking news we received three weeks later after we returned home that much more incomprehensible.

A Christian family from Australia had a ministry to a leper village in another part of the city. They had a van they used for their work and one night a group of radical Hindus surrounded the van and set it on fire with the father and his two sons inside. None survived. It is a sobering reality check of the price Christians pay in India for their faith.

On the last day of our trip the team split up on the way home, for various reasons, with the remaining three of us having a long layover in Bombay. One of the Indian pastors we had met on our trip recommended that we visit sister Jaya who had started a Christian ministry in Bombay, in the largest slum in southeast Asia, many years prior. We were able to contact her and she agreed to see three total strangers from the states. Jaya was in her sixties and quiet but carried an authoritative presence that was obvious. When she was married at a young age and moved to

Bombay with her husband, her Christian father asked her a simple question: “What is Christ calling you to do?”

With that seed planted she began to search for areas of need. It was not hard to find. The huge slum in the city was rife with poverty, woman surviving at the mercy of the sex slave trade, orphaned children, hunger and homelessness. Spiritual darkness left no hope. Sister Jaya had her calling. Over decades churches were planted, orphanages built with schools, women were given jobs and skills to allow escape from the enslavement.

It was our privilege to visit this woman and her family and learn more of the work God is doing through her in the Bombay slums. One door after another opened and we found ourselves visiting forty young orphan children that evening as they were getting ready for bed. As dusk was enveloping the slum, we wandered down a dark, narrow, treeless alley with an open sewer draining in a gutter to the side of the path. We came to a decrepit building with a sign outside: Shelter Ark Orphanage.

When we entered the building we met children of various ages but most appeared to be ten years or younger. They were eating a meal of rice and chicken-eaten from a bowl with their fingers- as they sat on a worn linoleum floor. They leaned against the walls on three sides of the room. A single dull light bulb hanging from the center of the ceiling emitted a faint glow making the children’s faces barely discernible. The room was without furniture.

Their expressions, as they stared at us, were a mixture of concern and curiosity. It occurred to me later that some of them had possibly never seen a caucasian face before. They were comforted seeing Sister Jaya and her husband with us. The children were very orderly and well behaved. They immediately responded to each of Jaya’s requests.

After the meal, they sang Christian songs for us and then prepared for bed. We prayed for them and then followed them upstairs as each took a thin, small rug from a pile in the corner of the cramped room. The rugs were spread on the floor with barely a square inch of space left. They settled down to sleep-no pillows, no blankets and no screens to keep insects from coming in through the open windows. No change of clothes were evident anywhere except for what they had on-and that is what they slept in. Laying shoulder to shoulder, there was not a sound as we quietly crept down the stairs. We left them alone- there was no adult to stay with them.

We then traveled a short distance to another slum-the largest in southeast asia. Decrepit buildings were stacked side by side. and again noted- an open sewer line ran along our path leading past their shelter. This was a smaller orphanage of about

fifteen children, but they were older-in the the ten to fifteen year old range. They sang Christian songs for us as well and we prayed for them.

John showed a magic trick-holding a small sheet with his extended arms covering his shoulders to his knees. He then dropped the sheet to his waist covering his feet. He slipped one shoe out of his loafer and flexed that knee. Then the sheet was raised revealing an empty shoe and a missing leg. He dropped the sheet and then again raised it knee high -this time the leg was restored but the other leg was missing. The kids loved it-but couldn't wait to look behind the curtain.

We walked out into the bleak night air and were overcome with the stench from the open sewers and the constant rustling of thousands of busy people, with looks of futility, hustling to survive in this confined space. We were overwhelmed by the spiritual darkness and foreboding despair.

From that moment, John and I knew we couldn't let these children live this way. We prayed for affirmation, guidance, and empowerment. So began Capstone Ministries.

### **John's account of the inception of Capstone Ministries**

It was mid-September, 1998. I had recently hosted our third annual Medical Mission Banquet. As a pharmaceutical representative, I knew several physicians who regularly made medical mission trips to underserved parts of the world. They often asked if my company would donate certain of our medicines for use in treating patients on the mission field.

Because of these relationships, I decided to invite these physicians to a banquet meeting each year and share how God was working through their medical mission trips. It was exciting and inspiring to hear them share how God was working and using them in such a life changing way.

One of the physicians that I invited each year was Dr. Robert Fehr. I knew he had been on several medical mission trips and that he would be interested in hearing how God was working in different parts of the world through his medical colleagues. Unfortunately, his busy schedule never allowed him to attend.

As I stood in his office hallway and briefly shared the highlights of our recent banquet meeting,

I made this statement. "I've been wanting to go on a mission trip, not a medical mission trip, but a preaching/teaching mission trip." With a surprised look, he replied, "really?" I said, "Yes, I am quite serious, why?" He said, "Because I have been praying for God to send me someone who would be willing to go to India, on a preaching/teaching mission, and I think you are that guy!"

I said, "I think you are right. Let's pray about that." We did and God answered.

In November, 1998, we went to India, through a mission organization called "Advancing Native Missions". Our preaching/teaching mission was called "Operation Barnabas International" and was a ministry of encouragement to one hundred native pastors in three areas of India; New Delhi, Noida and Bhubaneswar. It was a wonderful time of preaching, teaching, praying and encouraging fellowship.

Afterwards, we made a trip to Bombay, India, to visit a small orphanage operated by a native Christian family. Sister Jaya Thasiah had been ministering there for nearly twenty years and was very gracious in explaining how she had been providing for slum orphans, at Shelter Ark Orphanage.

Located in the largest slum in southeast Asia, the orphanage was housed in an old, dilapidated building that was small and overcrowded. The children eagerly sang and shared Bible verses with us before they went to bed. Their bed consisted of a small thin mat that was placed on the floor. They were essentially shoulder to shoulder on the floor.

Sister Jaya explained to us how she received the orphans. Either a mother would bring her child there and say, "If you don't take my child, he will die. I cannot care for him." Or, the children are found wandering alone in the slum, begging for food.

What we saw in the orphanage broke our hearts. What I saw in the slum was overwhelming.

Malnourished people in the garbage dumps, eating contaminated food and drinking polluted water. Growing up in southern West Virginia, I had seen abject poverty, but nothing I had ever seen prepared me for what I was witnessing here.

Shortly after we arrived home, I had to make a quick trip to the grocery store.

Inside the store,

I started down an aisle and it hit me again. I was overcome with grief and started to cry. For I realized that I could go down any aisle and get whatever I wanted to eat and know that it was clean, nutritious, and safe to eat. Then, I remembered what I had seen in the slums of Bombay. Those children in the orphanage who had so little and those in the slums who had even less.

During my next visit to Dr. Fehr's office, we discussed our mission trip and all we had seen and done. Bob asked me how much longer I was going to work. I told him probably ten or fifteen years. He said, "Yeah, me too. Maybe then we can do

something more in India.” I said, “Bob, after what we have seen, we can’t wait that long, we need to do something now.” He quickly agreed.

After a time of prayer, we felt led to start a non-profit ministry to share the gospel and help relieve the suffering children we saw in Bombay. We determined from the beginning that the ministry would be led by volunteers and that 100% of the funds raised would be used for mission projects: Faith, Hope and Love. Board members would be required to pay their own ministry expenses.

Thus, Capstone Ministries was founded.

In time, God provided sufficient funds to purchase land in an agricultural green zone, where we were able to build an orphanage and Christian school. Then we moved those children from the slum to the new Shelter Ark Orphanage in Pannel, India.

Our “Project Love” team then provided furniture and playground equipment for the children and made frequent trips to provide clothing and spiritual encouragement to these children.

We were greatly blessed to watch them grow and see the day when some of them entered college. The orphanage has become self-sufficient by charging tuition for students in the community who attend the Christian school.

“Project Hope” was established to provide free medical clinics in the slums and tribal areas of India. This serves as a springboard for evangelism. “Project Hope” sends medical teams to India regularly that also provide health and hygiene training to women in these areas.

“Project Faith” was established to provide solid Bible teaching and Great Commission training for native pastors who have had no formal Bible education. Capstone Bible Institute provides free course material, in both written and audio format, that has been translated into seven Indian languages. This material will help train pastors to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

Capstone Bible Institute also has extensions in Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Africa. Our objective is to reach, teach and disciple others for the glory of God

Little did we know that when God brought Bob and me together for an “Operation Barnabas International” mission trip to India, that He would establish Capstone Ministries and touch so many lives through Faith, Hope, and Love. To God be the glory!

Pastor John Lowe



John and I are the only board members that have served all twenty five years to this point. John has been the wise counsel and ever faithful to the mission. He overflows in Christ's love which uplifts everyone around him. Despite the demands of pastoring his church, he remains dedicated to spreading the gospel to as many as God allows us to reach. The ministry would not be the same without him

One statement he made has always stayed with me: "Let's pray for more than we know we can do. When it happens we know it was from God."

## **The History**

India is a nation of extreme need and great potential. As many as 700 million people, in a country of 1.3 billion, live in extreme poverty in either slums or poor rural villages. The Capstone Ministries board responded to a vision of providing care for the needy: for orphans- and later lepers as well- but also for Biblical discipleship and teaching of pastors, evangelists and believers and finally providing and supporting medical care for the poor that have scant access to their health care needs.

Projects Hope (medical care/ leper support/individual support for those in need), Faith (Discipleship/Biblical training) and Love (orphan support) evolved in the subsequent years.

### **Project Love:**

#### **ShelterArk Orphanage**

In a few years we had raised enough capital to buy land in a beautiful rural area an hour outside of Bombay. It was next to a rice paddy and a farmer was often seen in the spring plowing the submerged field with an ox drawn plow with wooden handles that he steadied as the moist soil was overturned and rice seedlings were planted. The same scene was probably reenacted every spring over many hundreds-possibly thousands-of years.

On a return trip, John's church donated funds for the orphan children's needs and John led a few individuals to purchase new clothes for each child. They went bargain shopping for new dresses for the girls and pants with shirts for the boys. Jaya's daughter Rani came along to bargain down the prices which were always high initially. Negotiation was expected with every transaction-whether it be foreign or native shoppers.

Estimates had to be made as to the size of each child-and it proved to be amazingly accurate. A room was found in the larger slum hostel where the boys and girls took turns changing into their new clothes. They were then assembled in that room while our mission team of seven sat in an adjoining larger room waiting for the show to begin.

One by one the children came out to show us their new clothes-girls first. Words are inadequate to describe the elation on the faces of the young ladies when their name was called and they each paraded before us to much applause. They were wearing a new dress for the first time in their lives! The boys, as well, proudly showed off their handsome attire. We looked forward to having the children in their new and safe home.

Initially, a six foot stone wall was built around the one acre plot of the future orphanage to prevent squatters from moving in and later to protect the children once the orphanage was built. Squatters feel entitled to move into any unoccupied land and build a ramshackle home of sticks and cardboard. They would climb nearby electric poles and tap into the power source- often with tragic results.

After the wall was completed, a large two story building was erected providing a home for more than fifty orphans. Next to it, a few years later, a Christian school was constructed and expanded over time. It is expanding with each passing year. Today, hundreds of local Hindi village students from preschool through High School attend the school campus with the orphan children. Their small tuition payment meets the expenses of the school and orphanage.

Finally a playground and grassy field were constructed within the compound. We continued to visit the orphan children for many years and watched the dream grow in God's guiding hands.

Donna and Don Sokol were two board members, in the earlier years, who made the greatest contribution to the orphanage. They were devoted to the welfare of the children and oversaw Capstone's involvement in developing the home and school. It would not be what it is today without their dedication and love. They have cared for some of the most needy children, helping them to receive a full life in Christ.

A particular blessing was to have my three young daughters visit the children at the orphanage, at various times, on one or more occasions. It was a gift to see them bonding with boys and girls of a vastly different culture and life experience. I thank God that they each have a heart for the less fortunate. My girls also experienced the slums and entered a world that was far different from their narrow experience of life in America.

Thanks to the generous donors supporting Capstone Ministries over the years-and Capstone's commitment to putting every dollar donated to the need-we were able to pay for the land and construction on it, in total, leaving no mortgage payments needing to be met.

With the operation of the orphanage and school covered by tuition payments, Capstone was able to pull away from any financial obligations and we found we were being led to other areas of the country for ministry-particularly in training lay leaders, making disciples and medical work and other areas of need. For many years we were unable to revisit the property and children. Finally, in 2018 a few board members had the opportunity to go back-including John and I who initially prayed for God's blessing on the children.

It was a nostalgic time to walk on the thick green grass of the inner courtyard on a bright sunny day and hear the young girls (the boys needed a separate campus) laughing as they chased each other in one game after another. It was a weekend day and only the orphan girls- and Rebecca-were on campus.

Rebecca appeared to have Down syndrome when I first met her decades before on one of our first trips back to India-although it was never mentioned by her parents. She is the granddaughter of Sister Jaya who founded the slum ministry and Jaya has since passed. Rebecca's mother Rani, is Jaya's daughter, and she now runs the ministry. Rebecca and I would usually get into some active games of Uno on each visit. I managed to lose every game. Thankfully I'm not a card player by profession.

Rani's husband Gabriel is a pastor. Now that he has retired from the insurance field he is able to devote all his available time to church duties. What no one knew-possibly even him- was that he is a gifted landscaper. He has transformed a small home they built on the orphanage property, as well as the compound itself, into a lush, botanical garden.

As I stood gazing at the beauty around me and heard the girl's joyful laughter I was overwhelmed by God's wonder and goodness. It was an emotional moment to experience God's love and provision overflowing. What an answer to our prayers decades ago when we went to see the children preparing for bed in their home in the slums. We are privileged to see God's work unfolding before us- and to experience the bountiful blessings that are poured out daily. The unspoken creed of Capstone Ministries has been to pray, obey and don't get in God's way. It works!

Also memories of some of the children that have passed through here came to mind. It hasn't been without challenges and lessons learned and many continued prayers. One of those flashbacks was of Nelson. He was a tough kid, at least that's what he wanted you to think. He could cuss (in Hindi) like a sailor. Any perceived

threat and he would get his fists up. No one was too big or intimidating for him-especially when he thought his sister might be in danger. She followed him like a shadow. Nelson was Blessing's protector. Nelson was six years old. Blessing was four.

Abandoned in the slums by their widowed, alcoholic father, they begged on the streets for money to buy food. When that didn't work they had to steal food from street vendors. Their future looked bleak. Sister Jaya had planted a number of churches in the slums and members of one of those churches found the two begging on a busy street corner. They brought them to the newly constructed orphanage with the promise of food and shelter. A short time after they arrived Blessing had been adapting well, but Nelson could not give up his slum survival lifestyle. He would steal food from the other children or the kitchen and hide it in any safe place he could find on the campus.

He was blessed in that he had loving house parents-Connie and her husband Mike Hurst- from Knoxville. God called them to quit their jobs and leave their families to move to India and become caregivers for over fifty children shortly after the orphanage was established. They were the only true loving parents most of the children ever knew. Mike said it had been his calling from a young age. They were a remarkable outpouring of love and sacrifice and a tremendous blessing to the children who never knew loving parents until Mike and Connie came into their lives.

They were finally able to convince Nelson that he would always have food as long as he lived at the orphanage. A year later Nelson and Blessing were happy and adjusting well. They excelled in school and knew many Bible stories and songs. One day Nelson came to Mike asking for something. When Mike gave it to him he responded with- " thanks Dad." At that moment looking back on Nelson's time in his new home, Mike realized what a transformation God was working in Nelson's life.

God would intervene once again in the lives of these two children. Their mother had died shortly after Blessing was born. Their father began to drink heavily-possibly as a means of coping with his grief. He would often be absent for days or unable to grapple with family needs when he was home. The children had to survive on their own by whatever means were necessary. While his children were residing in their new home he came to a saving faith in Jesus. This new life empowered him to stop drinking and maintain steady work as a laborer. He wanted his children back home. After two years in the orphanage, the children were reunited with their father and are doing well.

Another child came to mind as well. Moses was a five year old when his single mother, abandoned by her husband and in desperate poverty, set herself on fire on a slum pathway with Moses looking on aghast as his life was being destroyed before his eyes. Locals came to save her but she didn't survive. Moses was brought to the children's home but didn't speak for over a year. With care and support from his new Christian family he slowly recovered from his shock becoming more sociable and doing well in his school studies. Capstone paid to put Moses through college where he received a degree in computer science. He is now employed and reports on facebook that he is doing well.

There were two brothers that had a great impression on me on that first visit to the slum dwelling the children called home. They were dwarfs and stood about hip high on me in their early teens. Both had very dark skin and gleaming white teeth. They had disproportionately large heads and were clearly very bright. Their single mother was a rag picker in her local garbage dump and could not afford to pay for her children's needs. Thus the children came under the care of Sister Jaya. Selvan, the oldest, and I formed a bond the first time we met. I asked him what he wanted to do with his life. Without hesitation he said he wanted to be a pastor. It was a brief encounter that night but I was careful to look him up on return visits.

I recall one visit to the slums, when I went to the orphanage looking for one of my friends and found Selvan all alone sitting on the linoleum floor in the empty room staring out the window- no books, no games, nothing to occupy himself. He gave me a sad smile and my heart went out to him.

“Where is everyone,” I asked. He shrugged his shoulders.

The new orphanage homesite was nearing completion and it reassured me that this sad encounter would not happen again. The hostel was almost complete and it couldn't be soon enough. Not surprisingly, Selvan did very well in school and I hoped and prayed that he would go on to be the pastor he felt called to be- that he would be a blessing from God.

I have thought of Selvan often over the years and I kept a few pictures of him and his mates in my tiny Capstone office in my garage. I was in the office preparing materials for an upcoming Capstone Ministries board meeting one afternoon. when I happened to glance up at the picture of Selvan taken over twenty five years ago. It was old and faded -hanging from the cinderblock wall in a cheap frame. It left a powerful impression. Now, twenty plus years later, looking at him in the picture standing in front of the other children, clapping as they sang hymns for us on that first visit- I looked at that bright, earnest face and wondered where God had taken him.

I felt compelled to try to find him and see if his vision of being a pastor had come to fruition. Rani and Gabriel-the current ministry leader and her pastor husband-who are now houseparents on site at the orphanage providing close supervision of the children- were the only sources available to me. They had his email address! I wrote to him immediately and received a quick response. A pastor he is!

He sent me over thirty pictures of the ministry God entrusted to him. He was caring for the elderly, the widows and children as well as being an assistant pastor to four churches.. He looked the same with the addition of a mustache-and a more serious look on his face.

In January of 2023 I was able to talk with Selvan via the international WhatsApp app on our cell phones. We had not spoken in decades. He was fifteen when we first met. He is now forty. In our brief conversation, he conveyed some of his subsequent history. He told me he graduated from Bethel Faith Spark Bible College in 2015. It is a two year program with about forty students, located in Coimbatore-a city of just over two million in southwest India. In this city is another Bible college that Capstone has partnered with for many years-South India Baptist Bible College (SIBBC).

Selvan was never able to live in the new orphanage we built in the beautiful rural setting. It was just completed when he finished his high school studies and he moved back to his home village further south from Bombay about two hours east of Coimbatore in the southern tip of India..

After returning to his village Selvan worked in a business office and after a number of years he earned enough money to start his theological training. In 2013 he graduated from the Bible college and again returned to his home to become the pastor he aspired to be when we first met. Recently, he sent me one hundred pictures of himself, his church and all the ministries he and his church are involved in.

Selvan was eager to join our discipleship study group (see below under CBI). He attended the first two lessons but he was absent for the third lesson and I texted him to tell him he was missed.

“Hi, praise the Lord uncle (a term of respect used in India when addressing someone older). I missed class because I went to a cottage prayer,” he responded.

“Prayer is certainly more important than the class,” I texted. “I’m not familiar with the term ‘cottage prayer’.What is that?”

He called me later that night and explained that he goes to the home of each of his church members and prays with them for an hour or so. Each day he chooses a different member until he has reached them all and then starts over. Those that have urgent prayer needs are given priority.

He made the next discipleship lesson and then gave the same lesson to some church members as our model suggests. He sent me a picture with him sitting in a chair leading the discussion.. He was flanked on both sides by students with the discipleship booklet in their hands.

Selvan now texts me daily, typically with the message: “Hi, praise the Lord uncle.” One morning he called me and asked me to pray for a church member who was bitten by a python and was admitted to the hospital. He sent me a picture of the man’s swollen leg that was bitten. It had white speckled spots extending to the knee from the toes. I’ve seen nothing like it.

Many of the other orphan children have also gone on to college or a trade school. One graduate received a degree in education and came back to teach at the school. A number of marriages were arranged for the girls since they had no family to fill that role. The Bombay orphanage is now self-sustaining thanks to the small tuition payments hundreds of Hindu parents from the nearby villages pay to send their children to the Christian school on campus.

Recently we have started another, much smaller orphanage in Hyderabad-a large city in South India. There are eight boys living in the home of a pastor and his wife. Capstone pays tuition for them to attend a local school. Both foster parents receive a small salary. The two oldest boys are in high school, a year apart and first in their respective classes with hopes of qualifying for a scholarship. Capstone bought a used van to transport the children to school and other activities. We are occasionally able to meet with the children via zoom.

**Regarding Project Hope-** we have sent a number of medical and dental teams to the slums and poor villages to provide care and share the gospel. Jewel Birdwell, a long standing board member and one who grew up in India as a missionary child, has led most of the medical teams in various areas around the country. Jewel is a PhD level nurse practitioner who has a heart for the Indian people that she grew up with. Knowing the culture and one of the languages is a great asset, but it’s her heart for the people that makes the greatest impact. We are thankful for her dedication and leadership.

In addition, we are also partnering with Baer Christian Hospital, founded by Dr. Mary Baer in 1912, on the southeast coast of India, to support her original vision of providing medical care to the needy. Dr Baer graduated from Woman’s Medical

College of Pennsylvania, the world's second medical school exclusively for women, in 1895. She and her sister, a teacher, were called by God to serve the needy in India.

After extensive preparation, they set sail for India landing in the small village of Cherala on the southeast coast. Dr Baer began seeing patients in thatched huts and her sister established a school. By 1912 Dr Baer was able to raise funds for what would be the large, two story Baer Christian Hospital. In the subsequent six decades it would serve over one hundred thousand patients.

When India received its independence from Britain in 1947, most of the foreign missionaries were asked to leave the country. The hospital struggled without foreign resources and in the 1970s it was abandoned and fell into disrepair. Mary Baer's vision appeared to have died with it.

However, there were two children born at her hospital shortly after she retired. Both were Christian and would later marry. They would have a profound effect on the rebirth of Dr Baer's vision. Against all odds, Fred and Lilitha were able to overcome the challenges set before them. Lilitha attended a Christian medical school in India and trained as a pediatrician in the US after marrying Fred. She established a practice in Atlanta. Fred received his PhD and would do AIDS research at Emory University in Atlanta. In 2003, after raising their children, they were called by God to restore the hospital that brought them into the world- to renew the vision of the doctor who dedicated her life to the needy of that region.

They sold their home and left their families in the states to move back to the city- and hospital- of their birth and childhood. They invested a great amount of their personnel assets to remodel the Baer Christian Hospital making it one of the finest in the area with a fully equipped ICU, surgical suite and birthing center. They retained its primary objective from one hundred years ago- to serve the needy.

Capstone has sent medical and dental teams to the site and provided funds to pay half the cost of a new medical van used to provide medical care to remote impoverished areas surrounding the hospital. The van is currently used in conducting eleven medical camps each month in surrounding villages seeing about twenty five patients at each site. Capstone also sends thousands of dollars each year to support the hospital and staff.

Lilitha worked full time as one of the physicians on the small medical staff. She continued to work tirelessly into her eighties. One day, at one of the rural outreach clinics, she began to develop chest pain. She was admitted to a regional hospital but died from complications after a cardiac procedure. She was eighty-three years old. She will be greatly missed.



Her husband carries on with the mission.

They are currently seeking approval for converting the unused second story of the hospital into a christian nursing school. Again their personnel funds, as well as that of their family members, are providing most of the financial burden. Covid has hampered the approval process but the work is expected to start the summer of 2023.

On one of my visits, Fred took me to meet and pray for a young man they have been seeing through their medical outreach clinics. He had worked on a nearby cashew farm with his wife. India is the world's primary exporter of cashews. This region's soil and climate is conducive to raising productive cashew trees. The tree produces a fruit that looks much like an apple-and is in fact called an apple. The cashew nut grows at the bottom of the apple and is twisted off by hand or it falls to the ground when fully ripe.

The apple ripens before the nut and it is edible also with a somewhat bitter taste. The nuts, once harvested, are then roasted to enhance the flavor and finally a machine is used to crack the shell to enable separating the nut from the shell. It is encased in a toxic oil -urushiol-which burns and cracks the fingers and the fumes are very irritating to the eyes. The work is labor intensive and done usually by women who are paid about 2-3 US dollars each day based on the weight of shelled cashews they can produce.

Their fingers become stained black from the oils- and with cracks in the skin the burn is intensified. Peeling out the nut from the shell is arduous causing arthritis in the finger joints over time. Protective gloves often can't be worn because they limit the grip on the nut as it's being removed. It is the only livelihood available for these workers whose families' survival depend on this income.

After driving into the rural countryside miles from the hospital, we climbed a gentle sloping hill on a narrow dirt road. The hillside was bare but for a few scattered trees. Grass huts with small fire pits before them, were widely spaced about the grassy slope. The primitive village was deserted- except for a few elderly individuals tending their fires Everyone else was at work in the long rows of cashew trees whose canopy covered the valley below or in the large rectangular building in the center of the cashew forest where the cashews were processed.

We parked the car and walked a short distance to a thatched hut about the height and width of a grown man-the arched entrance was dark without a door. It was eerily quiet. Having done medical work around the world, seeing the worst living conditions and medical needs in places such as rural Haiti and the slums of Bombay had given me a glimpse of human suffering that previously could not be

imagined. In a few moments an encounter would leave an impression on me like none before.

Our small group stood a short distance facing the dwelling. A pastor had joined us from the area who had been ministering to the workers for some time-often in conjunction with the medical teams. The pastor called out his name. There was nothing but silence. Glancing in the distance across the valley, were the tall, brick chimneys of the cashew factories with smoke spewing into the clear sky.

The pastor called again-louder this time. We heard a slow rustling within the darkness of the hut. My attention was drawn to a tall, extremely thin man emerging from his lonely abode. Each slow step seemed to be extremely laborious and painful. He stared at the ground with a look of overwhelming sadness. A bandage covered a weeping wound on his leg. He glanced up only once to acknowledge us. When he drew near to us he slumped on his knees to the ground-the effort exhausting him.

The young man had AIDS. He had passed it on to his wife and she to her two young children. He was now too weak to work and appeared near death. His wife followed him-her calloused hands holding a two year old child. The older child was sent away to live with relatives.

Words were hopelessly inadequate portraying the plight this family was enduring. My hand rested on the boney shoulder of this broken man. Groaning petitions were lifted up on the families' behalf. Tears rolled down his face. Christ had just recently come into his life-giving him the hope he desperately needed. He didn't understand English but he was experiencing the love of God. Despite our meager efforts, God was comforting him.

### **Medical Mission to the Bombay Slums**

I had a moment and gazed down the long line of patients yet to be seen. What I saw has left a lasting memory that I can still vividly recall today- many years later. Half way down the line was a young girl, of eight years, with tattered, dirty clothes and no shoes. Her black, straggly hair hung to her shoulders. She was holding a boy tightly in her thin arms with a determined look as she stared straight ahead. It was an image of strength and resolve seldom seen in someone so young.

The boy's head rested on her shoulder and his dark eyes gazed around the room at the myriad of activity surrounding him. He was a few years younger than her but was more than half her weight. Like his protector, his clothes were worn and his

bare feet were dirty. With the slow moving line, she must have been carrying him for some time. She couldn't hold out much longer I thought..

I had been waiting for my current patient's prescription to be filled, and at that moment I took my eyes off the two young children as the medication was handed to me. Through an interpreter, I was able to instruct my patient on what his diagnosis was and the medication he was receiving to treat him as well as the potential side effects of the medicine.

I then turned my eyes back to the girl. It was clear she wasn't going to put the boy down. It was also clear her emaciated little body will not have the strength to hold him much longer. With an interpreter I went over to her and tried to take the boy from her. She wouldn't let go of him.

A number of medical providers and volunteers comprised our team and we were seeing patients in the huge slum area of Bombay. We had a gifted and caring ancillary support group, made up of a pharmaceutical representative, a teacher, a pastor and a college student. The later group became our nurses, our pharmacists and our receptionists.

For a building in the slums, the room was moderate in size- open without dividing walls. Each exam area consisted of two chairs facing each other- one for the provider and the other for the patient. There was no privacy.

The long line would eventually encounter the triage coordinator who would then refer the patient to an exam area depending on their need and level of expertise required. Our medical team brought a number of medications for the most common medical problems we expected to encounter and these were stored in a corner of the room overseen by the overnight trained pharmacist.

We were limited in what we could evaluate and treat. Our diagnostic tools included stethoscopes, thermometers, otoscopes ( to look in the ear canals), glucose and blood pressure monitors. We brought urine dipsticks to evaluate for infection or bleeding in the urinary tract. An oxygen saturation monitor was used to screen for oxygen deprivation.

With limited diagnostic equipment, we were very dependent on a knowledge of common diseases prevalent to the area as well as obtaining as accurate a history as possible while speaking through a non medical interpreter. It was a challenge.

The young girl was instructed by the interpreter to come over to my treatment area. She looked around at those still in line in front of her and behind her and hesitated. She didn't want to accept preferential treatment. I told her I was

concerned about the boy's medical condition and needed to see him right away. That broke the ice. She carried him over to the empty chair across from me and sat down with a sigh of relief. Those in line clearly accepted that she needed to get some help soon.

"Who is this young boy you are carrying," I asked.

"He's my brother," she replied, holding her brother a little tighter.

"Where is your mother and father?"

"My father left a long time ago. I don't know where he is. My mother has to work everyday."

"So you take care of your brother when your mother is working?"

"Yes," she replied, subconsciously holding him a little closer once again.

"Do you have any other brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"Why did you bring your brother here?"

"He fell this morning and couldn't walk. I think he broke his leg," she replied as she motioned to the outside area of his lower right leg. ( the mid lateral right fibula ) and started to pull up his ragged pant leg.

Through the interpreter, I was able to receive a fairly in depth history of the injury and his risk of fracture based on the type of trauma and a diet lacking in calcium in what appeared to be a low level of chronic malnutrition. The exam showed a moderate area of swelling over the lateral mid right fibula with some tenderness. He was able to weight bear-after quite a bit of encouragement- with mild pain after he overcame his initial hesitation.

My working diagnosis was either a severe bruise or a greenstick fracture of the fibula (this is a nondisplaced fracture common in children with fairly malleable bones. I have an adult medicine practice at home and therefore have not seen child age injuries in decades but felt fairly confident with the assessment.)

The tibia, which runs parallel to the fibula, bears most of the body's weight from the knee to the ankle. Greenstick fractures of the fibula have a good prognosis and could probably be best treated with a splint in this boy's case. Whether a fracture or

severe bruise, I wanted to obtain an x-ray for a determination. We had made contact with a local hospital that was able to do x-rays if a written request was made and signed by a doctor. We agreed to reimburse them later for costs incurred.

At this point I made a decision that I still regret to this day. After writing the request, I sent her to the hospital on her own thinking if she had the determination to get this far she could complete this last step. Through the interpreter, she was given directions to the hospital and she appeared to be familiar with the way.

I never saw her again. I should have assigned someone to go with her. We were all very busy and the long line of patients lasted all day-but we should have spared someone for a time. My hope is that she made it to the hospital and was seen and treated by someone there.

The lingering questions-regarding that moment and the future- still persist. What happened to her brother? Did she try to get to the hospital or give up? What kind of life did she and her brother live out? With that determination of hers did she have a chance to escape the cycle of poverty in the slums? It was a fleeting encounter with an extraordinary young girl. I could only pray for her future and trust God.

Early the next morning, my oldest daughter, who accompanied me on this trip, developed recurrent vomiting. The history and abdominal exam suggested a GI bug-probably viral. I went in search of phenergan to alleviate her nausea while she stayed in the room to rest and push fluids as tolerated.

With luck and some persuasion, I was counting on a pharmacy honoring my MD degree and giving me the needed prescription. Walgreens and CVS equivalents were not to be found in India's second largest city-at least not in the district within walking distance of the hotel room. Instead were narrow, run down shops with a single door entered from the sidewalk by a few stone steps. One of the shops was finally found to be a pharmacy.

Inside was a long narrow room with shelves, from floor to ceiling, full of various drugs in some disarray. Labels in English identified the drugs. Commonly prescribed medications such as antibiotics and antihypertensive medications could be pulled from the shelf and purchased without a doctor's approval. I was looking for an antiemetic with no success.

The casually dressed, middle aged man behind the counter suggested I try a small hospital a few blocks away. His English was excellent and his directions to my destination very precise. A few minutes later I was walking through a modest entrance to a three story building that had seen better days. Peering twenty feet

down a dark hallway I saw two women in nurses uniforms sitting on folding chairs talking.

“ Good morning. I was told you may have phenergan available. I am a physician from America and my daughter is having recurrent vomiting. Might you be able to help me please?”

The older nurse, with a smile said “follow me.” We walked down another long, dark hall and turned left and within a few steps we were standing in front of two large doors with a sign overhead-”Operating Theatre.” The nurse opened the door for me to enter.

“I can’t go in there. I’m not prepped.”

She swiveled her head which is the Indian way of saying “It’s OK.”

So in we walked. Me just off the dirty streets of Mumbai and the nurse. A doctor was leaning over the operating table, surgical instruments in hand, working in the right lower abdomen on a relatively young patient. He had a surgical tech assisting him and an anesthesiologist at the head of the table. I assumed he was doing an appendectomy.

The nurse went over to explain my request. He dropped what he was doing, turned around to me with a welcoming greeting in perfect British English and said-”I’ll find something that can help your daughter.”

I protested vigorously and stated I would be very willing to wait until his surgery was complete.

Too late. He was halfway out the door when he said: ”please follow me.”

We went across the hall to a pharmacy and he drew up 50 milligrams of phenergan into a syringe-enough for two separate injections if needed. We exchanged some information as to what brought us both to this point knowing we would not meet again.

He was ten years out from his training and serving this relatively poor area of the city. He felt called to do so with no intention of leaving. I explained that we were doing medical clinics in the slums and possibly that was how my daughter contracted her illness. I thanked him profusely for his act of kindness. He had pressing issues to attend to and we parted ways. It was a moment I won’t forget.

I gave Rebecca 25 milligrams of the injection and left her to rest in the hotel room and push fluids; promising I would be back at lunchtime to check on her.

Later that day we saw a wide variety of patients -some were treatable some were not. A number had suspected diagnosis, such as AIDS, but no confirmation without more extensive testing. Many of the patients had infectious diseases-often of the GI tract; not surprising with the poor sanitation. Much of our time was spent on preventative education on issues of this nature.

After a long and exhausting day, one of our last patients was a young mother with two sweet, shy young daughters about five and nine years of age. She saw our weariness and with a reserved smile asked us to come to her home for tea- a British tradition holdover of the colonial days. John Lowe and I readily agreed. They waited for us to complete the day's work and then escorted us to their home.

We left the clinic and entered the narrow, shadowy alleys that meander like underground tunnels through the expansive slum community. Most of the homes have two stories with a separate family on each floor. A rickety step ladder is often the only means of access to the top floor dwellings. An open sewer runs down the center of the alley way and it is common to see a resident taking a sponge bath outside their home with the soapy water running down the central gutter of the path.

None of the homes have plumbing so all waste is disposed of in this same gutter. We have seen long lines of women, standing in the hot sun, with large vases perched on their heads. They are waiting near the local water spigot to turn on at the scheduled time for their water allotment. This would be their daily ration for the entire family.

Many times I have walked through the narrow caverns of this slum-purported to be the largest in southeast Asia- and wondered what lay behind the thin curtain that served as the door and the entrance into the small domain the residents called home. Very few westerners have stepped into this unique slum environment that is the home for millions of families on the Indian subcontinent. It was an honor to be invited.

The girls ran ahead of their mother, very excited about their guests from America. They would occasionally look back to make sure we were coming and laugh at each other as they ran further down the alley that is all they have known as a neighborhood. We turned the last turn and the girls were waiting excitedly in front of their home.

Their mother pulled back the dirty cloth door and we followed the girls into the single room they called home. John had been eager to come with me. He and I

have been the ones on the current team who have visited the area the most and we have long waited for this opportunity.

The room measured about eight by twelve feet with a dirt floor. There was one small bed with a thin mattress and rusty springs in the corner on which the father slept. He worked as a cab driver all day and needed his rest, his wife explained in broken English. The culture and Hindu faith also gave preferential treatment to men with women placed in a subservient role.

A bare light bulb hung from the ceiling as the only source of light in this windowless home. A small electric burner sat on a short table against another wall and the mother started it to boil water for tea. Two old, well used, unmatched cups were laid before us as we sat on a mat on the floor. The mother cleaned them in front of us to silently give assurance we were in good care.

The home was very sparse. Thin blankets, still disheveled from the mother's and daughter's sleep the previous night, lay on the floor opposite the bed. The walls were bare with cracked paint. An odd machine dominated the center of the room. It was about the size of a suitcase with a two foot long handle on one side. Gears and a long shaft with a thick plate at the bottom made up the inner core

The girls noticed the puzzled look on our faces. One took a thin flat piece of metal, measuring two inches by two inches, from a stack near the machine and placed it on a mold which had become visible as her sister raised the handle causing the heavy plate to rise above the mold. With the thin metal in place the handle was pressed down by both girls with some effort. When they raised it back up a perfectly shaped bottle cap lay on the mold with shavings from the cut metal laying at its side.

The girls proudly showed us their handiwork and proceeded to make a few more and allowed us a try at it. Mom explained that this was their job-the three of them-to make bottle caps all day long for extra income. It took some time to absorb this.

These two young girls spend their youth in a hot windowless room with the stench of sewer outside their door. All day long they made bottle caps with their mother. Tonight they would sleep on those thin blankets on the hard dirt floor probably infested with a smorgasbord of bugs. In the morning, and every morning, they would repeat the same routine. Their diet was extremely limited and undernourished. They were born in this room. They will probably marry someone from the slums and have children in the slums and live the rest of their lives in the slums. It is all they knew.



They wouldn't learn to read or write. They wouldn't go to school and learn about the world, about art or science. They wouldn't challenge their minds. They wouldn't play in a playground or run through a field of grass. They wouldn't pick wild flowers. They would face the challenges of life with this one skill-making bottle caps.

An overwhelming feeling of thanksgiving and sadness swelled inside me. As a child growing up, I had friends and playgrounds and an excellent education and a choice of many careers. My children had the same. I have been blessed and unable to appreciate how much.

I tried to imagine one of my daughters living this life presented before me. It was too painful to bear. I was in awe of what the human body and the psyche could endure over a lifetime. But I was deeply saddened by the life set before these sweet, young girls. They would possibly consider this day as one of the highlights of their lives-the day two American men came to visit their home in the slums and learn from them, on their machine, how to make bottle caps. They were so proud to demonstrate their skill. They knew no better.

### **A crippled man's life is transformed**

Other endeavors to provide hope include Jerry. He is a bright young man born with total paralysis of both his legs. He has partial function of his left arm-enough to feed himself and do basic tasks albeit with extra time and effort required. He spent most of his life laying in his bed, seldom leaving his room. He has suffered from long bouts of depression.

Through the efforts of his brother in law William, who oversees the IT department at South India Baptist Bible College, and Capstone Ministries, Jerry leased a small internet cafe. It has computers and an old copier for public use. William carries Jerry up two flights of stairs every morning to reach the cafe. And every evening he carries him back down to his car on the way home from work. Capstone Ministries provided the financial support for this endeavor. This opportunity has transformed Jerry's life.

We inquired about his progress a few years after he established his shop-particularly in light of the Covid pandemic. The following is his unedited response:

*Dear Sir,*

*I am Jerry, Greetings! I am doing well by God's grace. Hope you are all well. I am so thankful for all the favor and help you have shown on me. I am filled with gratitude for the way you are remembering me.*

*As you know, I was in great difficulty in the beginning, because I was new to the business field. Later I could develop gradually to fit myself to the business through hard work. I could do online work for the government portal to help the people, such as government ID cards, Ticket bookings, printing and lamination. These are my major works. I learned short online courses to develop my communication skills. Business went well. I could fulfil my basic personal needs without depending on my family members. Thank you so much once again for giving me this opportunity.*

*When Covid pandemic was at its peak, my shop was closed for 2 months continually. Later I could open the shop part time but customer visits were very poor. My business went low again. Moreover, the printing machine which was the major support for my business went wrong and I could not do well. Both the Covid situation and the machine's failure gave me a great challenge.*

*Yet by God's unfailing grace, I could come up very slowly, for about 8 months.*

*I had to renew the old name boards for better advertisement to attract the new customers. I used some amount for this purpose from my savings. I had to go through a government certification process to get the permission for the online e-service exam and I have attached certificate. My customers are stable because they are happy with my service.*

*I am trying to get a shop on the ground floor to avoid depending upon someone to carry me to the first floor. This will cost me 1250 US dollars just for the shop advance. I also need a new printer machine for better development, which will cost USD 1500. I have been praying for these things. Please do favour me. I have attached the latest photos here*

*Thanking You*

*Yours Faithfully*

*Jerry Prasanth*

The Capstone board voted to make the needed payment for Jerry's ground floor shop and to pay for half of the printer to give him the incentive and sense of accomplishment by paying the remainder.

## **Training Nurses**

One of our Capstone board members-Jess- was born in south India to a large family. His father, a Christian, felt called to move his family to a more northern state where the gospel was little known. The father died in his forties after many years of dedicated service. Another son, Joseph, remains in ministry in the area and he wrote the following account regarding poor tribal girls that Capstone supported financially through nursing school:

Chhattisgarh State in India has mostly tribal population. The economy is based on Agriculture. The people are very poor. Prior to 26 January 1950 when India became a Republic, Evangelism was not permitted in the princely states such as Rewa and Surguja. However, after 26th January 1950 freedom of religion became a right in throughout India.

*In early 1951 Rev. B.J. Krupadanam (Jess' and Joseph's father) came to Ambikapur as NMS Missionary from Andhra Pradesh to preach the Gospel to the yet unreached people.*

*He made Ambikapur as his Head quarter and started preaching the Gospel with the help of Pastors and Evangelists from Jharkhand state. Many (thousands) accepted Lord Jesus as their personal Savior and took baptism.*

*Now the Christian population in Surguja region/ district has grown considerably. The 3rd and 4th generation Christians are studying in schools and colleges. For the upliftment of the Christians it was thought to train the girl students as Nurses so that they may become useful members of the society and the church.*

*Keeping this aspect in mind 4 Christian girls from remote villages (who were very eager to become Nurses) were admitted into the General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) course in School of Nursing, Christian Hospital, Mungeli in September 2018 with the help of Capstone Bible Institute and some of the friends and relatives of Dr.Jess Enochs.*

*The four girls completed their GNM course in November 2021 and are now working in different hospitals as Registered Nurses. Their names are Balamdina Minj, Kamldevi Minj, Saramani Tirkey and Anita Beck.*

*Balamdina is a very poor tribal girl. Her father died from Tuberculosis while she was studying GNM course. She is now working in Apollo hospital, Bilaspur as a staff nurse. It is a very prestigious hospital.*

*Balamdina and Saramani were both supported by Rev. Krupadanam's family during their schooling from Grade 2 and 3 until grade 12. Later for their Nursing training, they were supported by Capstone Bible Institute. Saramani is now working as a staff nurse in Sanjeevini Hospital, Ambikapur.*

*Kamldevi is from a very poor family. She graduated in November 2021. She is now working as a staff nurse in KIMS hospital, Bilaspur. Kamldevi's father is a Capstone Bible training*

*graduate. He attended the training sessions at Bilaspur for one year.*

*Anita Beck is from a very poor family background. She is from Ghorgadi village where Prakash church has been constructed. She is working in KIMS hospital, Bilaspur as a staff nurse.*

Of note, Jess Enoch has been a board member with Capstone Ministries for most of the last twenty five years. He has close contacts with those in the leadership roles of the Indian Christian community that have been indispensable to Capstone's success. His knowledge of the culture and his dedication to spread the gospel, probably inspired by his father, has been a guiding light for all of us.

### **A Saint in the Leper Village**

There may be no more pitiful people on the face of the earth than the lepers of India. India is one of five countries in the world that have a small but significant number of people with leprosy. Sixty percent of the world's lepers reside in India. As in Biblical times the lepers are isolated and segregated from the general population-confined to live in their own villages throughout the country. It is a life of loneliness, persecution and physical disability.

Fate has caused one such village in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh near the state capital of Raipur, to cross paths with Capstone Ministries. Biskot was in his last year of a Baptist bible college when he began to pray for God's guidance as to how he could serve Him.

He was led to share the Gospel message of God's love as an evangelist on the streets of Raipur. It was there he met the lepers begging on the streets. For the last eight years he has ministered to them three days each week in between his evangelist calling. He was only supported by his wife -a housekeeper in the city hospital.

Leprosy is caused by a very slow growing intracellular bacterium called *Mycobacterium leprae* which divides very slowly- about every two weeks. Treatment is usually effective but must extend from six to twelve months with daily antibiotics-due to the bacteria's slow cell growth. Symptoms of leprosy usually take three to five years to develop after exposure and are irreversible. It still exists in India due to limited access to medical care among the poor.

The bacteria invades the skin cells causing disfigurement-often on the face; and it invades the peripheral nerve cells causing loss of sensation and muscle weakness. The sensory loss makes them prone to injuries such as lacerations, fractures, burns

and infections of the extremities- particularly the digits of the hands and feet-any of which commonly lead to amputation. The weakness often leaves their hands and feet with a claw-like deformity. The bacterium may also affect the cornea of the eye causing pain and visual loss.

Throughout history mankind has dreaded the devastating consequences of leprosy. They feared that it was highly contagious, which it is not, and have established elaborate barriers to protect themselves from contact with a leper. For millennia lepers were isolated from the general population and had to announce their presence when in the vicinity of others. However, one must have prolonged and close contact with a leper to become infected.

The 120 people (forty of which are children and not all have contracted leprosy, as yet, making the need to treat those that are still infectious critical) in the village can only survive by begging on the streets. The deformities of their hands and feet preclude any manual work. Most have now been medically treated but it was too late to prevent the irreversible complications. We have made multiple attempts to have those not treated evaluated but the efforts have been hampered for two years by the ongoing covid epidemic. In early 2023 we plan to send our own medical team to the village to work with the local health care workers to assure that all of the lepers are treated and that the children are monitored closely for signs of early infection.

In spite of their deformities the people will walk or bike, as able, the three to six miles to the surrounding villages or to the large city of Raipur to beg for a rupee (about two cents) or a small portion of rice. Some will stay home to care for the totally disabled or young children. All are illiterate. Seventy have become Christians under Sika's discipleship.

With the recent Covid epidemic and a national home quarantine enforced, their livelihood was suspended. Confined to their homes they could no longer beg for food or money. They were at risk of starving. The government provided a small, but inadequate, fraction of their basic needs-God provided the rest: for their dire need through connecting Sika with Capstone Ministries-thereby supplying funds for additional food and basic necessities during the prolonged lockdown.

As the Covid pandemic has abated, Capstone Ministries has continued to send food and basic supplies for hygienic needs to the leper village through Biskot and another pastor -also a SIBBC graduate- living in Raipur. About every three months they deliver a load of supplies.

Biskot goes to the village a few times a week to minister to their needs and conducts a worship service on Sundays. He is starting a discipleship study with all

the believers to be done starting with one small group at a time to enable discussion. This will continue until all the believers have been discipled.

**Capstone Bible Institute (CBI) was Project Faith's** answer to Christ's great commission of Mathew 28- to make disciples and to teach others to observe all that Christ taught us. To serve this call CBI offers an in-depth discipleship study followed by Old and New Testament surveys. Quality Bible schools are in short supply for those pastors serving the 70 million, often persecuted, Christians of India. Most pastors have no formal theological training. CBI is unique in that it offers an audio component to serve the often illiterate parishioners and to aid in teaching and to supplement the written material for evangelists and pastors. Both the written and audio material are translated in seven major native languages.

Capstone Bible Institute (CBI) has developed a discipleship study which consists of eight in depth lessons in discipleship- the core of the gospel message- followed by Old and New Testament surveys of fifty two lessons. It is this "core" we pray that God will use to spread the gospel into the darkness.

Those that complete the discipleship study will be encouraged to use it to share the Gospel with others. And those that want to go on and study the Old and New Testament survey after the discipleship study will receive a certificate of evangelism and will be encouraged to train disciplers as well as to evangelize..

One of our models of sharing this material is via zoom, led by a team of one or two Capstone board members and one or two Indian teachers employed by Capstone, to reach pastors scattered around the country. After each lesson we ask the pastors to go back to their church and share the recently completed lesson with as many, but no more than ten, people (a small group to promote essential discussion) who may be members of their church or family or friends or new believers. Larger churches may be discipling multiple groups. We currently have eighteen pastors doing the study every two weeks. This means, ideally, about one hundred and eighty believers are being discipled each week.

It is a blessing of technology that I can sit in my breakfast room and have a discipleship study-with encouraged and active discussion-with eighteen pastors scattered over all parts of India. We hope to have many more groups- depending on God bringing more pastors into the program and more teachers to meet the waiting list currently in the hundreds. Ideally, many programs would be going simultaneously during the year and a half of study.

Those that want to pursue further study may take four units of study in the Great Doctrines of Scripture and receive a theology diploma from South India Baptist Bible College (SIBBC). This would give them one year of credit towards the three

year SIBBC theology degree. We have also expanded the CBI studies into Mongolia, Sri Lanka and countries in Africa.

Some pastors from poor rural areas have enrolled in the study but they do not have internet connection. In those cases we try to have two weekend conferences covering half the discipleship study at each. They are then given memory chips for the OT//NT surveys. One such group of thirty rural pastors completed the first lesson on salvation taught by our director Santhosh. Five pastors were convicted that they had not understood the gift of salvation nor believed in their heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9).

But through the verses of scripture pertaining to salvation and illuminated by the Holy Spirit they gave their lives to Christ and requested to be baptized by Santhosh after the meeting.

This was a very moving moment for Santhosh. He is a gifted teacher with a number of masters degrees and a love of scripture. I much enjoy teaming up with him in the study sessions. He has been a tremendous asset to Capstone as he oversees all of our expanding operations.

Over the years I have appreciated the price one pays for their faith in India. Religious freedom in India is a right entitled by the nation's laws but not supported by its authorities-or its majority Hindu adherents. There is a culture of rejection sown into the fabric of many Hindus-often violently rejecting any other faith. It is common for Hindu family members to banish a child or sibling that has committed to Christ. Murder is the ultimate solution and often the authorities and community turn a blind eye to the tragedy.

Many sad stories are shared about this persecution that is unheard of in America. One such tale came to my attention when I was at a Capstone Bible Institute (CBI) teaching conference at a Bible college that Capstone has been closely affiliated with over the last decade. We were sitting at a table during lunch after a session of teaching. The pastor was in his eighties-a humble, quiet man who exudes both a strength of faith and calm peace. We introduced ourselves and I asked Joel what he thought of the CBI material. He liked it. And so began an incredible story about his family and Christ in their lives over four generations.

It started with his grandfather. As a young man, his grandfather, born into a Hindu family, came to accept Christ as his savior through a Christian friend. Early one morning, while it was still dark, he quietly crept out of his home and met with his friend to be baptized in a nearby river. He was unaware that his father had gotten notice of the endeavor and was hiding in the woods near the river with a loaded gun. When the newly baptized son stepped out of the water he was staring at an enraged father with a gun pointing at his chest. Without a word his father pulled

the trigger. The gun misfired. He pulled it again. Again it misfired. In disbelief- and then in belief- he threw the gun down and asked to be baptized as well.

A short time later, the two Christian friends were determined to build a church for the followers they had established. Walking through a large estate one early morning, they paused and knelt on the ground to ask God for guidance. They then felt led to inquire of the owner of the estate to see if some land might be available for purchase. The elderly, Hindu woman saw the earnestness in their eyes and felt compelled to help them. Unaware of their prayer, she offered to donate a small plot of land- the exact spot where they had knelt and prayed.

A beautiful stone church was built on the location and still stands there today. (Joel was pleased to show me a picture of it). His grandfather pastored the church until his death when his son replaced him. When Joel's father died, Joel assumed the pastoral duties which he still fulfills today. Joel's son is a fourth generation pastor but he married a young woman from Scotland and they settled there to raise eight children and establish a church. He is not expected to come back to the church of his ancestors with the legendary history.

Joel is well known, in the mountainous area of his home, as the pastor that goes door to door sharing the gospel with unbelievers. I asked Joel about the future of his church-this gift from God.

“ I don't know but God will provide,” he said wistfully with a smile.

### **CBI in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is an impoverished island nation just off the coast of southern India. It has suffered through years of religious and secular conflicts and in the time immediately following the Covid pandemic a crushing inflation has caused widespread hardship. In the midst of this tribulation God has raised up a young and devoted pastor determined to spread the gospel throughout his nation. The following is his testimony:

*Family Background I am Nallaiya- Jeyaraj from Suruvil, Sri Lanka. I was born and brought up in a Hindu family. I have 4 brothers and 2 sisters, altogether we are seven in number. We were strong Hindus and we had a special room in our house for conducting pujas. As I was the eldest, I was the one to do puja in our house. My mother and I used to fast and pray to many different gods and goddesses. We never got a chance to know Christ as the whole village was under Hinduism. But later we learned that God had a plan for me and my family. Salvation As my family was Hindu, I was brought up in the teachings of Hinduism. Days passed by, suddenly I was affected by a disease. My liver swelled and pushed me into a critical situation. Doctor who continuously treated me said that they can't do anything. I was so afraid that the doctor said there is no way to heal it. My mother went to*



*many temples and offered many offerings. As I was the eldest my parents suffered a lot. Though they all fasted and went to temple nothing happened except spending money. One day 2 sisters came to our village and said about Jesus. We don't know the way to believe Jesus Christ. However they shared the goodnews that only Jesus Christ is the Saviour and He came down, suffered, shed blood, died on the cross and rose again on the 3rd day. My mother began to believe and trust in Jesus Christ. Whenever my mom took me to many temples, everybody said that I was affected by Demons. But the sisters who came home said that Jesus loves us. This was a great comfort for us. Then we began to believe Jesus Christ whole heartedly. What a miracle, I was healed in the Name of Jesus Christ! Until now I'm well and fine, no disease crossed my life. But I had a very big question in my heart, in Hinduism we had many gods and we can identify them in a statue, in Christianity they said that there is only one God. In Hinduism, they stand in front the statue and pray but in Christianity they pray without a statue. In such case I was in a confusion regarding these things who is God? How will He be? Will He respond their prayer request? Were my questions. So once again I started to worship God, I went to many Catholic Churches but no response for my prayer requests. 2 days later in the evening I felt the true living God speaking to me "Your sins are being forgiven". After that I surrendered myself unto Christ. But I did not do it whole heartedly in case I had gone through many problems in my teenage. Lord's Call for ministry and training For the first time I was planning to attend a youth camp in Colombo. Just before a week I had no money with me to go to the camp. When I was struggling I saw a Bible verse hanged in our house wall. When I saw that verse unexpectedly I felt that the verse speaking to me. Psalms 37:4 "Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart". This verse strengthened me. This was the first incidence which changed my life. Since that moment until now that Bible verse comforts me. This verse encourages me in the midst of many problems in my ministry too. Likewise I got the amount I needed for the youth meeting. My brother and my father gave me that amount. Then I joined the youth meeting. On 18th September 2002 youth meeting in Pallamai God called me for His ministry. I submitted myself to God's ministry as full time minister. I was baptized in 2003 April 26th and was named Zechariah. Moreover I praise God for Ps. Thevarajan, he was a spiritual father, friend for me and gave me many advices in many things and ministries. I learned many things from him spiritually. He didn't teach me Bible studies but taught me how to be close to God and the ways to have a strong relationship with God and How to listen to God through his experiences. This helps me to escape from many trials and temptations that crossed my life. Next effort was Apostolic Church sent me to the Bible college. I continued in 2006-2007, nearly 2 years I finished Bible College though I had many trials. I overcame them by God's grace. By God's grace I was able to study in India in 2009 and their God showed His mercy through many men though I had many challenges. But God helped me as He promised me. Once I was graduated in B.A.m.m in the Bible College. The Lord also helped to build and serve two churches. Now I go to the churches in the villages and teach the word of the God to the most backward people. Glory to the Lord! Little bit about Family I got married in 2010. My wife's name is Ann Mary. The Lord gave me a wife who is suitable for my ministry and my life. We have been doing God's work together. God blessed us with a baby girl and God took her back from us after three months. We were so disappointed but God gave us a baby boy and we were very happy. My son's name is Samuel Jenison. And again God blessed us with another girl. She is now two years old. Her name is Ann Jessica. My wife and I and 2 children have been doing God's work*

Jeyaraj has worked tirelessly through his country establishing many Bible teaching centers using the CBI material. John, Jess and I were able to attend one graduation with a class on zoom that he established via weekly zoom meetings that included students from all around Sri Lanka as well as Tamil speaking participants outside the country. It was an inspiring and memorable experience.

From its inception, Capstone Ministries has determined to have one hundred percent of every donation received given to the needs of the ministry. What little overhead we incur is paid for by board members. Our meetings are held in a church at no expense. The board members contribute their time on a volunteer basis. Anyone attending Capstone Ministries' mission trips pays their own way.

Capstone Ministries is indebted to all those that served on the board over the years and for the very generous donors who faithfully supported the calling. But none of the work God set before us would be possible without the many brothers and sisters in India who worked with us, taught us and inspired us-in particular our director Santhosh Kumar.

For over two and a half decades, God has faithfully guided Capstone Ministries and provided for the ministry's needs and we are dedicated to doing God's will to His glory through the love of Christ.

## Bombay Slums



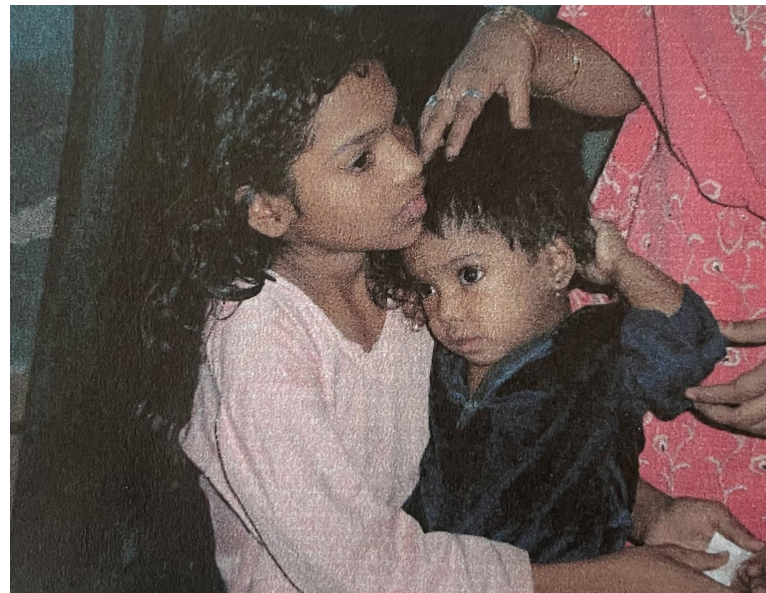
## Shelter Ark Orphanage for Older Children in Bombay Slums



## Younger Children Displaying Their New Clothes in Bombay Slums



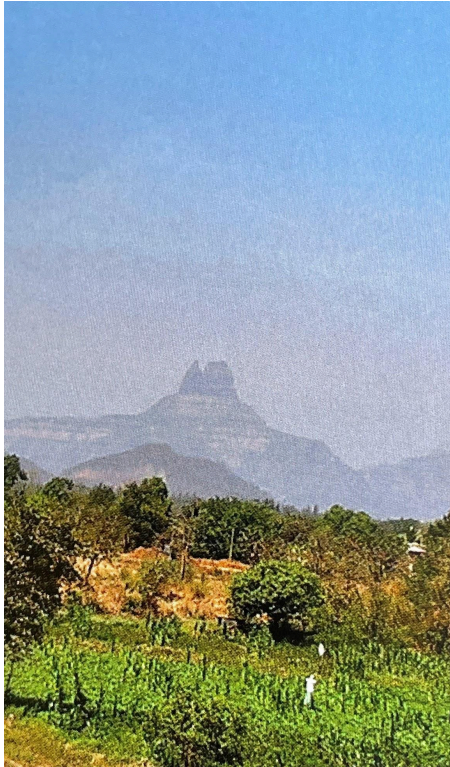
(right) Big sister with her injured little brother at the medical camp in the slums.



# New Orphanage & School Under Construction



## Present Day Orphanage & School



View from orphanage





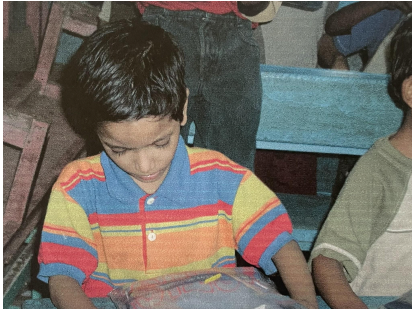
(Above: Pastor John Lowe at the orphanage with children.)



(Above: Orphan children's balloon race for Capstone team visiting)

(Left Photo: Pastor Gabriel with wife, Rani, who oversees the orphanage and slum ministry with daughter Rebecca at their home on the orphanage compound.

# Children in their School, Sleeping Quarters & Playground



Moses, new to orphanage shortly after his mother's tragic death.

House parents, Connie & Mike Hurst, enjoying time with the children.



**Jerry's  
Computer & Printing Lab**



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**Santhosh Kumar With Tribal Women and Their Pastor  
Who Is Teaching CBI Discipleship**



Santhosh Kumar far left.

## Baer Christian Hospital



Fred Chikkala, PhD and Lalithia Chikkala, M.D.



Physician and staff with medical van at tribal village



Inpatient Ward, Outpatient Clinic, and Church



Dr. Fred Chikkala supervising the outpatient clinic.

Young Selvan leading praise hymn at the Bombay Orphanage  
At Age Fifteen - 1998



Pastor Selvan Now at Age Forty Teaching Discipleship  
and Serving the Needy- 2023



## Village for People with Leprosy



Below: Meals provided by Capstone during Covid Pandemic with pastor Sika



## Poor Tribal Women Become Nurses



L to R: Anita, Kamldevi, Saramani and Balamdina in front of Christian hospital, Mungeli.

## Jeyaraj at Capstone Teaching Centers Around Sri Lanka



- 17/05/2023 Certificate Ceremony in Central Province.
- 18/05/2023 Certificate Ceremony in Eastern Province
- 19/05/2023 Certificate Ceremony in Northern Province



Three different regions have completed the 3 levels of CBI bible study, totaling 130 graduates.

## Rural Pastor Group Starting Discipleship Study with Santhosh

