



A PASSAGE TO INDIA

August 2016

They say travel broadens the mind. Well, boarding the night train from New Delhi Station certainly does that. It's like being in a crowd swarming out of Wembley Stadium combined with the largest takeaway restaurant in the world! Thousands upon thousands of people all going somewhere at the same time; a cacophony of sound; bag carriers with suitcases positioned precariously on top of their heads; and in the midst of it all, oblivious to what is happening around them, weary travellers sleep huddled in doorways.

Together with my team, I board a train that's heading north and find myself in a carriage with 20 others. My bunk is at the top - with all the comforts of a YMCA hostel - and the sounds and smells of night adding their own unique joy! The train departs, falteringly to begin with, and as my travelling companions smile at me, the rocking motion has a profoundly soporific effect.

Twenty-three hours later, as the sun reaches its peak, I am in a 4x4, making steady progress to a rural community where I am to spend some days teaching young pastors. Most have only had around six weeks' theological training and yet are leading congregations of over 300 people! Our arrival is a visible sign of support to our brothers and sisters in India whose struggles increase year on year.



Photo: Pastor Mukesh reads his Bible from his hospital bed. Persecuted because many in his church were becoming Christians, he was chased and beaten by an angry mob.

Christians living in India are facing a fiery trial in 2016. Anti-conversion strategies abound. Draconian legislation challenges the values of Christian-based schools. Missions and NGO's, that have so faithfully served the Indian people, are under threat of closure and the sequestration of their assets. Through all this, churches are served by our partners there through the provision of Bibles, Sunday School materials, literacy programmes as well as vocational education, Rapid Response teams and legal support. Dearest to my heart, though, is our *Standing Strong through the Storm* training for leaders and their churches, a biblical course that prepares people for persecution so they're ready to respond in a Christ-like way.

Bread of life

During a morning break, I drink chai with a young man who asks to see my Bible. He touches it lovingly, savouring each moment. "What translation do you use?" I ask. Somewhat embarrassed, he puts his hand into his back pocket and brings out a dog-eared notebook. It contains his favourite verses of Scripture, written by hand whilst going through Bible School. In other words, he has none. I am stunned: a young preacher, leading a church with no Bible? I give him my own; my little Gideon Bible will serve me well enough for the remainder of the trip.

It seems unbelievable that a young church leader with a large congregation doesn't have his own Bible. But it is often the case, especially when pastors are living on a shoestring, and that's why, for Open Doors, distributing the Bible is still core business. For hungry souls, it is the bread of life – and it's for sharing.

Photo: A pastor receiving a bag full of Christian literature at a 'Standing Strong through the Storm' seminar in Northern India.



Heaven to earth

"Our culture is so fixated about dying and going to heaven when the whole of Scripture is about heaven coming to earth." I love this observation from NT Wright. Time and again, all over the world, I have met persecuted Christians who get this straight away. They know that by living the Bible they can bring heaven on earth. Through them, God can 'set the world right', to quote Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven,

Reveal who you are,

Set the world right,

Do what's best – as above, so below.

Keep us alive with three square meals,

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others,

Keep us safe from ourselves and the devil,

You are in charge!

You can do anything you want!

You're ablaze with beauty.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Matthew 6: 5-15. (The Message)

I will never forget the look on that young pastor's face as I gave him my Bible: the incredulity, the smile, the joy – it was like witnessing a miracle! In his hand he was holding the revelation of God and His Son Jesus Christ to share with a lost world. 'Setting the world right' is most decidedly about seeing people travel from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and undoubtedly that Bible will have made him all the stronger to serve God's purposes on earth.

What a privilege to have been part of a miracle on that day – and one that is being multiplied 3 million times each year as Open Doors partners distribute Bibles in India and around the world. Please pass on my thanks to your church for being part of that miracle. By planting God's Word in the hands of believers who are willing to meditate upon it day and night, and put it into practice in their daily lives, you are helping to 'set the world right' and bring God's kingdom in.



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Open Doors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

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