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Chapter 1

VISION

October 2007-India

Begumpet International Airport is no longer operational. For many years it served the seven million people of Hyderabad, the City of Pearls, from the center of the metropolis in the heart of India. Begumpet's runway was large enough to accommodate Air Force One when President George W. Bush visited the city in 2006. But they shut it down. Today a new modern airport buzzes around the clock in Hyderabad. A new India is emerging.

Several years ago, when I arrived at that old airport, I believed our team was on to something important. We were on a mission. I pulled together a band of eight knowledgeable, smart, good people. And here we were, halfway around the world, on final approach in the middle of the night to touch down at Begumpet International Airport in a city once known as Bhagyanagaram, in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Before this trip, I had not even heard of Hyderabad.

I have traveled. I have seen hardship. But nothing prepared me for what I was about to see and hear and feel as the wheels thumped against

the concrete and squealed on impact while the big jet engines roared, reversing their thrust and braking us to a stop on the runway of Begumpet International in Hyderabad, "The City of Pearls," Andhra Pradesh, India.

Prayer is part of my life. It is not a ritual. Not a routine. It is a lifeline. As the flight attendant in a distinctly Indian version of English told us all to remain seated, I have a talk with God, right there from my cramped passenger seat. I tell Him that I am open. I want Him to show me something of Himself. I ask Him to make me aware of the needs and hopes and aspirations of the people I will meet; that I will somehow see them as He does. That I will learn something. Something powerful.

I look over at my friend and colleague Jay Hoff. We grin and nod. "We're here" is the unspoken message. "Can you believe it?"

FROM CALIFORNIA TO ANDHRA PRADESH

As the doors open and the pressurized cabin draws in the air from outside at ground level, I get my first sensory experience of India. There's a heaviness about that Indian air; humidity blending with the smoke of burning embers, the hint of rich spices, and the scent of human bodies that live without much fresh water, moving day after day up and down the crowded streets of the sweltering city.

Little boys and girls, some of them barely eight years old, emerge from the shadows selling trinkets and candies and chewing gum.

I'm a Californian, used to sunshine and breezes. The Los Angeles smog is diminished, they tell me, thanks to several decades of stringent pollution-control measures. So when I draw in that first lungful of India air, I know I have entered a new world—of smells, of pollution, of overcrowding. It signals a change in paradigm. Time for me to let go of everything I have brought with me; to shed prejudices and biases and this American superiority complex inbred by too much American-made television. Time has come for me to let it go as I walk onto the tarmac in

the dark of night and transition physically, mentally, and spiritually from California to Andhra Pradesh.

When I enter into the dilapidated terminal, even after midnight, the lobby clamors with commerce. The rental car counters, the shops, the newsstands, all crowded into every nook and cranny of space. Before long, a gang of young children approach. Clunker television sets flicker, pulling in their weak signal with rabbit-ear antennas. Little boys and girls, some of them barely eight or nine years old, emerge noisily from the shadows selling trinkets and candies and chewing gum. If they are not selling, they are begging.

"Money money! Help me! *Pleeeeeze!* One dolla! Uncle! PLEEEEZE!"

Another holds up a green pack of Wrigley's spearmint. "Gum? One dolla!" Then he pulls out a chocolate bar. "Candy? One dolla."

It is clearly a familiar routine. All of them are skilled, eager, charming. They tap their lips with their fingertips signaling hunger. Then they touch their bellies. They repeat the motion.

"Money money! *Pleeeeeze!* Help me! One dolla. PLEEEEZE! Uncle. Uncle!"

"No," I snap. "Not today." I was not very convincing.

One of our hosts sees my dilemma. He steps up.

The airport lobby is filled with upscale business travelers, most of them Indian. They wear blue and gray and black suits and carry expensive leather briefcases, stacked atop a carry-on bag on rollers pulled by an extended handle. One slaps shut his cellphone and slips it into his vest pocket. He turns, looks at me and then at the children. He looks away in disgust. He seems to be embarrassed that a visitor to his country would be accosted this way.

Then our personal host moves into protective mode. "Go away!" he says firmly, and he waves his hand signaling that there will be no money. The children step back. But only momentarily. They turn briefly to the businessman. He is outnumbered. They gesture him with a snarl. He growls.

The chorus of youngsters turns back to our host. "Go away!" he declares. "No money." He repeats it three or four times.

The leader of the pack delivers some impertinent message to our host I cannot decipher. I am certain it is insulting. They turn to the man in the suit. They repeat the gesture. He throws his hands into the air and continues on his way, head wagging.

The children go back to their mission, chasing after someone else in the crowd. "Money money! Help me! Pleeeeeze!" tapping their mouths and stomachs.

Our orientation session had prepared us for this assault. I turn to our host.

"Dalits?" I ask with slight hesitation.

"Dalits," he replies.

We were told beforehand to ignore the children. It was a simple survival technique. I did my background reading. I knew about child trafficking and the heartbreaking fact that these children were not simply street-smart entrepreneurs. They are the sole property of child abusers who release the kids on the streets where they meet up with foreigners who have money in their pockets. Whatever they might extract from pedestrians on their way to do business goes directly into the coffers of the ringleader. The lost children are thus cash machines for their "guardians."

> Who holds them when they cry? What kinds of cruelty are they exposed to? The questions close in on me as I try to ignore their calls for help.

For my own sanity's sake, I force myself to avoid eye contact. I just keep walking ahead. I am a father myself. By personal experience, I am a firsthand witness to the miracle of childbirth. The woman I love and respect delivered those three children of ours. I watched it happen, and in that moment of awe, something clicked. The overwhelming wonder of it all awakened me to the sanctity of life and as a father, instilled in me the instinct to protect even if it cost me my own life. The prospect that any

harm might come to any one of our children causes me to jump involuntarily into action. I see all children differently now that I have my own.

So, surrounded by these little people, grabbing at my arm, pleading, I wonder. Where do they sleep? What do they eat? What are they learning? Who patches up their skinned knees and elbows? Who holds them when they cry? What kinds of cruelty are they exposed to? These questions close in on me as I try to ignore their calls for help, and keep from meeting their wide, eager eyes with mine. All at once I see their captivating smiles . . . their laughter, tinged with a streak of street-mean . . . their childish warmth and big-city hardness, all at once. And so many of them fiercely competing for my "dolla."

I keep on walking. A sadness settles in. I see my team moving alongside me, their luggage in tow. I know they are thinking the very same thing. But we don't speak about it until later.

After the chaos of the airport and the city streets, traffic jams even in the dead of night, the hotel is a welcome sight. But after my encounter with the street kids and the sights of the crowded city, I feel uneasy with the opulence at the entrance. Marble floors and walls. Extravagant chandeliers. Fresh-cut flowers bursting out of colorful vases on glass-topped tables; leather seating in conversational groupings in a large space with a high ceiling. Well-dressed staff welcome me with a warm smile, offering assistance and directing me to my comfortable room. After a twenty-hour flight and a journey across multiple time zones, it all comes together in a perfect storm of sensory impact. I jump into the shower and then drop into bed between clean, crisp sheets. The pillow is soft. My whole body, relaxed. And then I hear it. Those little voices. "Money money! *One dolla! . . . Help me! . . . Pleeeeze!* Just one dolla."

They tap their lips, then their stomachs. Their eyes plead.

I fall asleep.

THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN HEART

The next day, we make our way to the mission headquarters. Along the way, I see scores of aging women hunched over brooms, sweeping sidewalks and gutters and entryways. The deep lines on their expressionless faces betray the years of empty, menial labor. I point to a group of them and ask our driver, "Dalits?"

He nods. "Dalits."

I can't take my eyes away from them. Meanwhile, the words of the children continue to echo in my head.

During our ride to the mission, city gives way to the countryside, but the poverty doesn't end. We eventually reach our destination and amid the silence in our group's vehicle, I know for sure the fact that every mind is racing, every heart is being torn in two.

Getting out of the car and climbing the stairs, we begin our "official" visit. There is a man waiting for us who will turn my life inside out.

Dr. Joseph D'souza is an imposing presence. Under a shock of jet-black hair, carefully cut and combed, impeccably groomed, he strikes an air of confidence and purpose. His handshake is warm as he locks eyes with mine.

"So you are Pastor Matthew Cork," he says in a strong, cheerful voice. I introduce my team. He knows several of them from previous visits.

Seated in a simple but nicely appointed conference room, there are some twenty-five of us around the table, eight from our California group. Dr. D'souza focuses on the task at hand. I pull my notebook and pen out of my travel case. I know I am in the presence of an extraordinary man. Several years before, our church had committed to supporting his work. I was here to learn and observe more.

For thirty-five years, he served the people of India as a Christian missionary. Just a few years ago, he went through a transformation that had profound implications.

Dr. D'souza's Christianity was considered by most to be a Western

intrusion, a distinctly foreign brand of religion held in disdain by the universities, ignored by politicians, and viewed as a threat by established Indian religious leaders. The work to which he had dedicated his life had made only painfully slow progress. From my preparation for this meeting, I understood that his heart had broken as he contemplated the plight of the "untouchables," the millions of Indians branded as "Dalits," robbed of human dignity and condemned to a lifetime of abject poverty with no hope of ever breaking out of this cruel bondage. The longer he lived among these people, the more he understood the nature of an endemic and ancient injustice and the deeper his commitment grew to becoming an agent of change.

He contemplated the plight of the "untouchables," the millions of Indians robbed of human dignity and condemned to a lifetime of abject poverty.

In that conference room on the first day of our visit, I learned that part of his radical transformation and commitment to the Dalit people came even in his family life. He married a Dalit: Mariam. Later, I heard the full story. Her beauty. Her smile. Her quick wit. Her elegant features. The sound of her voice energized him in ways he'd never known. Society stood against them, though. The prohibitions against such a marriage, drilled into his mind and heart from childhood . . . well, they were powerful.

However, the moment he realized he was in love with her, for the first time in his life, he simultaneously felt a smoldering, nearly uncontainable rage over caste-based and racial injustice. He couldn't look back; his commitment to this woman and to her people was forever secured. He rebelled against the traditional cultural mandates and, as a result, paid a heavy personal price. His parents. The extended family. Some of his friends. His siblings. His professors. They all shook their heads in disapproval. "Shame," they said.

He didn't care. What a prize. He never looked back. On their wedding day, a family was born—and also, a destiny.

That day, we get around to the specifics of this destiny—for the D'souzas, and, I would come to find out, for me. In 2001, Joseph recalls, everything changed, transforming his work from a quiet and steady operation of a few hundred dedicated Indian Christians into a national movement with a high profile encompassing the lives of thousands and thrusting him onto the global scene. A few years later we had joined with financial support. But we did not know all his vision, nor all of Andhra Pradesh's (and indeed India's) need for change.

Dr. D'souza makes a major statement of fact that takes me by surprise: "The work we are contemplating has historic social consequence. The initiatives will have national implications for millions of people in the emerging generation. A coalition of leaders from many religious and political backgrounds have come together to urge the eradication of a system that has crushed the spirit of an entire people for hundreds, maybe thousands of years. This is a critical moment in the history of all of India."

Then he turns to me in a serious and deliberate tone. "Pastor Cork, your church is the largest congregation that has come to support us. You are from the most capable nation on the face of the earth. A full 20 percent of our available resources for our work among the Dalit people come from your people in California. You have stood alongside to help us change the course of history. We could not do this without you. We are deeply grateful. Thank you."

Dalits are not considered human. They are used and abused, and they have no recourse or avenues toward justice.

His piercing look rivets me to my seat. The passion in his eyes is compelling. Palpable. The others in the room feel it, too. Silence.

To help us more greatly understand the movement and all its components, he gives us a primer on the Hindu caste system. When Mahatma Gandhi galvanized the nation over sixty years ago and won national independence from the British, the caste system's practice of "untouchability" was declared illegal. But the new laws were inadequate and never

enforced. The permanent branding of the Dalits and other "low-caste" people remained firmly in place. Separate drinking fountains. Separate bathroom facilities. Denied access to restaurants and hotels.

Dalits are expected to perform the most base of all social functions: caring for human waste, animal waste, discarded trash. Dalits are not considered human. They get no education. They are used and abused in the shadowy back alleys of the cities and the deep recessed forests of the rural villages, and have no recourse or avenues toward justice. There is no protection from law enforcement, no access to the courts, no political voice, no hope of upward mobility.

I sit speechless. I learn that the caste system and its practices are monstrously multifaceted—socially, politically, spiritually. Dr. D'souza goes on to relate how Christians in India have refused to stand idly by and have joined forces with others from differing backgrounds to address the injustice. Together they demand that everyone in all parts of society, from government officials to business professionals to academic leaders, join hands to eradicate discrimination in all its destructive forms. India must recognize this enormous human resource—the Dalit people—and open wide the doors of opportunity. "I have committed my life to this cause," he declares.

As D'souza continues, however, his tone shifts from staunch determination to resolute sadness. "We've lost this generation." There is an audible sigh as he looks to the floor. He pauses, then looks up. "But there is hope for the next generation."

I understand what he means. For Dalits over the age of twenty, the system has created devastating consequences: Dignity? Violated. Caste-based identity? Locked in. Basic education? Beyond reach. Subsistence trumps freedom. Tragically, adults in the Dalit community are conditioned to accept these atrocities as normal.

But a new generation is coming. It is the children, D'souza says, the children—*they* are the future. These young minds can absorb new possibilities.

They are hungry for knowledge. They respond to the message that they are fearfully and wonderfully made and that there is limitless potential beyond the squalid conditions of the neighborhood. As D'souza revs up the argument, I can hear the hope in his voice. He has seen this transformation firsthand. It is this remarkable transformation of individual lives that drives his aspirations for the future.

AN AUDACIOUS GOAL

"We have an audacious goal. I never imagined I would think in these terms." He pauses for a moment. "Over the next ten years, we intend to build *one thousand schools* for Dalit children." His emphasis is unmistakable.

He continues, filling in the detail. Then he makes his case. Clearly the vision possesses him and goes beyond logical human reasoning. Yet it has the power to lift up an entire population.

Upon hearing the enormous magnitude of this vision, this cause, this calling, a stark realization finally hits me. Did Dr. D'souza really say that our church's involvement represents a full 20 *percent* of all that was already happening with the Dalits? I was astounded that our church could make such a significant difference. We were changing lives; freeing the next generation. And at that point, we really hadn't sacrificed much at all. I had not yet challenged our people, compelled them to give. We had not yet communicated that we had a vision worth dying for. At that point, *I* did not have a vision worth dying for.

But that all is changing in this one moment as I and others from our group sit there with Dr. D'souza in an unprepossessing conference room in Hyderabad, India.

I sit silently, listening and seriously reflecting on the power of these thoughts. One thousand schools in ten years—that *can be* done. We *can* be a part. We *can* do 20 percent.

And then I do the unthinkable. I speak. All eyes are on me; Indians looking in my direction with anticipation and with gratitude for what we

had already done. I could see it on their faces. And then it happens.

In a small voice, but with a spirit of deep conviction, I say it out loud. "We can be 20 percent of this great vision. We can be responsible for two hundred schools over the next ten years. We *can* do that." I repeat it. The conviction takes hold of me. "And we *will* do that for your people."

Instantly, the magnitude of what I say publicly hits me privately. In that moment, I had just committed our church to roughly *twenty million dollars* over the next ten years. Doubt floods my mind. Worry grips me. If I could take it back, I would. But I know God is in this place, in this commitment. This is God's deal. My role is to listen and be faithful. So I take a deep breath and put on a smile. My team looks at me: *Are you crazy?* But at the same time, I know God is in this.

In those few moments, it becomes clear. I know my life, my ministry, my focus—all of it—is changing. But I still don't see how profound it really is.

"We *can* do that." The conviction takes hold of me. "And we *will* do that for your people."

This is the way it is with God. The picture may not be clear. The "how-to" seems incomplete, but the vision is compelling. It touches you deep within your heart and there is only one choice: the way of obedience. Am I willing to move forward, believing God and His Word about faith, or do I sit on the sideline until all the questions are answered, all the doubts are cleared up and all the risks eliminated?

The answer is clear, and I know what I have to do: I have no choice but to lead and to trust God with the results. I will be obedient, and I believe He will be faithful.

It starts to settle in and becomes personal. I, Matthew Cork, a pastor and former trumpet player from Missouri, am going to lead our church to be a part of something more significant than any of us could ever have imagined. We now have joined forces to bring freedom to *an entire people group*. It is a freedom that can liberate souls from the bondage of sin and

death. It replaces despair with hope and life. It is freedom from injustice, slavery, poverty, freedom from a caste system that considers millions of human beings made in God's image as worthless . . . untouchable.

I have been in India less than twenty-four hours. God has already rocked my world.

We have an open door, a platform to proclaim freedom to the minds of those who have been taught to see themselves as less than animals. We will play a part in bringing the ultimate eternal freedom of knowing this one called Jesus in a genuine and personal way. And as we play our part in what the Spirit is doing, God's church in our little town in Southern California will never be the same. I have been in India less than twenty-four hours. God has already rocked my world.

To this day, I do not know exactly what it was that came over me. I want to believe that it was a prompting from God. But I have been around long enough to know that I need others to help me sort out the difference between a holy moment and some personal impulse that is rooted in my own humanness. On the way out the door of the office, I grab Dr. D'souza by the elbow. He turns to me.

"My friend." I halt for a moment. "I want you to understand. What I said in the conference room is for real." Another pause. "As of today, I am committed to find the resources we need to build two hundred schools."

Dr. D'souza stops cold. Our eyes lock. His to mine, mine to his. A warm smile slowly expands, lighting up his face. I repeat my commitment with as much sincerity as I can muster. I extend my hand as confirmation. He takes it with both of his, and we exchange a handshake that signals a turning point for us both. It isn't one of those cartoonish, exaggerated handshakes born out of illusory enthusiasms. It is a firm, deliberate coming together of two men with the same passion to make things right. My eyes fill up with tears. I see the same in my new Indian friend as he sees his many years of seemingly unfruitful sacrifice begin to be rewarded. The slow progress of all these years is finally proving worth it all.

Releasing Dr. D'souza's grip and left alone for a moment as my group and I transition to the next of the day's activities, I take a deep, cleansing breath. Despite the overwhelming confirmation from our Indian partners and from the Spirit of God speaking to me so clearly, my emotions and feelings of doubt rage within me, swelling again like one of those unanticipated tsunamis.

"Cork," I ask myself. "Cork. What just happened? No approval of the elders. No consulting the congregation. You just put it out there. Have you confused the voice of God with intestinal rumbling? Are you simply caught up in the emotion and fatigue? Does this make any sense at all?" And then I did some simple math. I make one more quick calculation of the price tag on my verbal contract. *Twenty million dollars.* I repeat the number. Wow.

But repeating the figure over to myself in my head, instead of fear, I sense a deep confidence. And as crazy as it sounds, I feel no regret. Yes, a perceptible shiver went up my spine, but it wasn't anxiety. I guess we would call it belief.

And as all of these thoughts race through my mind, Dr. D'souza says, with a gleam in his eye, "Next, I must take you to one of the first schools built by your church." And with that, we pile into our bus and back out into the streets.

THE BRIGHT FLOWERS OF UDDAMARRI SCHOOL

Jostling about in the stop-and-go traffic and engulfed in the cacophony of sounds flooding in through the open bus windows, I can't take my eyes off the scene passing my window. The crowds. The rustic building materials. The slums. The people who go about their business up and down the swarming streets. I see it all now through fresh eyes; through the lens of my new friend and partner, Dr. D'souza.

Our bus pulls up to the entrance of the first of many villages that I would see in India. The scene before us still is the most profound picture

in my mind to this day: Uddamarri School.

The contrast of this rural village scene against the streets and slums of the city hits me like a lightning bolt. I see bright, rich colors of flowers in the tiny manicured garden. There are students standing outside waiting. The school principal formally greets us. The teachers stand watch, their students lined up in rows like a marching band, all dressed alike. Blue trousers for the boys, jumper skirts for the girls. Matching checkered shirts and blouses, held together by neckties and scarves. The children are groomed; clean hair and bright smiles.

A banner hangs on the wall. "WELCOME PASTOR MATTHEW CORK." At first, I am embarrassed. I am not the hero. That is for sure. My name is on the sign, but it is the folks back home who make this happen. It is also Dr. D'souza's diligence and indefatigable effort. And it is the teachers and the administrators and the community who came together to build this place against all odds. Yet here I am, greeted as a celebrity.

The children begin to sing, and tears come to my eyes once again.

The principal steps forward and welcomes me with the same warmth and enthusiasm I felt from Dr. D'souza. He then offers a prayer: "Thank you for our friends in America. Thank you for their sacrifice. May we embrace the future that is now ours. And may we embrace them as they have embraced us."

The children begin to sing, and tears come to my eyes once again. I am moved by their voices: so joyful, you can feel the hope and anticipation. Sometimes I think I am cursed by this inescapable, easy emotion always on the surface. But in this case, no one mocks my expressive personality. They sing a familiar song of worship and gratitude. These are songs that I would sing as a child.

But one thing is clear: these children of Uddamarri School understand the meaning of these lyrics way more than I ever did. They sing out, "God is so good, God is so good, God is so good—He's so good to me." Tears roll

down my cheeks. I do not feel worthy of this degree of affection.

It's at that emotionally charged moment that I flash back to Begumpet International Airport less than twenty-four hours before and that gaggle of street kids. "Help me! Money money! Uncle! One dolla! *Pleeeze*!" I recall their voices. And then my attention goes back to the students before me singing in full voice. *The contrast is stark. Street kids. Schoolkids*. What a difference. It steels my resolve.

The children beckon us to play in the yard. We kick a soccer ball. We high-five. Fist-pump. Our team shoots photos and then shows off the digital images. The children laugh.

Their English is not only understandable, it is lyrical and formal. "Hello sir, my name is . . . " I see respect. I feel honor. My natural instinct is to give both back.

"What would you like to be someday?" I ask. The answers coming from these Dalit children stun me. "I'm going to be a policeman." Another, "A teacher." Another, "A lawyer." "A doctor." "A pastor." I high-five each one for their ambitious plans.

We take a tour of the classrooms. The teachers have decorated the rooms as a serious learning environment. Science. Math. History. Reading. It is all there. On one wall, I see a motivational poster:

DO WHAT YOU CAN
WHERE YOU ARE
WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

It all comes together. Combine affection with nutrition with caring and competent teachers in an environment of support and encouragement. Then put all that on a strong spiritual foundation and children who would otherwise be cast aside or abused by a vicious system can become all they are meant to be.

THE CHILDREN OF PIPE VILLAGE

After our school visit, Dr. D'souza updates our plan. "After we freshen up, we must visit Pipe Village." I had heard of this place. I was eager to see the people inhabiting their unlikely residence. After a few hours, we arrive and I am greeted by the enthusiastic faces of several of the students we met earlier at the school. Looking past their smiles, I take in the reality of the environment surrounding me. It looks like the storage yard of a utility-sized manufacturing facility. As far as the eye can see, tubular concrete sections of sewer pipe lay on the ground, lined up in rows. The pipes lying on their side stand about six feet tall. Each one houses a family. Enterprising parents have devised ways to enclose each pipe, installing something of a flat floor. Some built brick walls on either end, leaving just enough room for a front door.

Each contains room for a stack of cots for sleeping. Tiny kitchens. Wood-burning stoves for cooking and for heat.

I look inside one of the pipe houses and see two school uniforms hanging over a bed.

The children introduce us to moms and dads and siblings. More photos. More soccer. More laughter. I look inside one of the pipe houses and see two school uniforms hanging over a bed.

Back at the school, these kids seemed so much like their American counterparts. So much like my own children—eager to play, on the edge of mischief, yet willing to conform and please their teachers. But here, in Pipe Village, I see them in the context of their families. I remember the poster—"Do what you can, where you are, with what you have." And as I look around me, it isn't much. My own notion of what I have versus what I need is called to account.

Some of the students have both a mother and a father. Others live with extended family. Most of these discarded concrete pipes would have otherwise been installed in the more affluent part of town to provide drainage. For now, they are cold tubular walls that provide shelter to about 250

Dalits. Amid the starkness of the surroundings, we are told that Pipe Village would be a different place if not for the school.

There is not much time for reflection; the children want to play. Looking around, I can tell that our team is falling right in line with this vision thing. They are hooked on these Dalit kids; hooked on the hope that abounds in this place. I will have a hard time getting them back on the bus. Nevertheless, we drag ourselves away from these young stars and we depart.

Back on the bus, none of us wants to talk. We are taking it in. Processing. I see tears and hear sniffing behind me. Pipe Village got to us. Something powerful is stirring deep within us. It's clear to us all: I think we have just seen history in the making.

Pipe Village got to us.
It's clear to us all:
We have just seen
history in the making.

For the next few days, we travel from slum to dump site to schools. We talk to teachers and administrators and more students. We listen to their stories. We tour the slums. Every visit confirms what we saw the first day we arrived. It is more than sensory overload. It leaves us with just one thought: how lives are being radically transformed through the power of education brought to communities where, before, there was none.

After three long days of emotionally charged touring, I found myself in a new city, Bangalore, exhausted and ready to do nothing but drop into my single bed. Peering through the half-plastic, half-polyester curtain that shielded my window from the noise and poverty of the street below, I saw the red flashing of the neon sign displaying the hotel's name: the Corporate Stay. At that moment in time, it seemed like a witty play on words. Have I become the corporate man? Have I been yanked out of my nice corporate cocoon and brought face-to-face with what I think my people need? No, it's not just what *they* need, but what *I* need.

The bed is hard as a brick. Reminds me of the concrete sewer pipes. The television set with rabbit ears on top is blinking away at the foot of my

bed. An Indian game show, flickering. Snowy distortion fuzzes it up. I hit the remote and turn it off. The room goes quiet.

I think of my incredible wife back home and our three children. I miss tucking them in. The regular story time. The giggles. The hugs. The endless, clever delay tactics. They don't want me to leave their room. I feel empty without them here. I look at their picture in my wallet. They smile back at me. I drift off to a welcome sleep.

A TIME TO WEEP

Suddenly, however, I am startled awake. It is perhaps three in the morning. I know I have had a disturbing, unsettling dream. But when I snap to consciousness, I have no recollection of the detail or the images. No sights. No sounds. No story. No people. I sit up. I am sobbing. Deep, heavy, repetitive sobs.

I have not wept like this in recent memory. I am glad to be alone in the room. It is a cry that comes from some distant place deep inside. I don't want it to stop. Rather than try to prevent it, I let it go.

I hear voices echoing:

"One dolla! Money money! Pleeze! Help me!"

A little boy taps at his lips.

"Dalits," explains my host.

"Your church is the largest congregation that has come to help us. You are from the most capable nation on the face of the earth."

"I want to be a doctor."

"I'm going to be a pastor" ". . . a policeman" ". . . a teacher" ". . . a lawyer."

"Our goal is one thousand schools."

"Money money! Pleeze! Help me!"

"Do what you can . . . where you are . . . with what you have."

"I think we have just seen history in the making."

So I let it go. I just lie back down and weep. My sobbing slips into a prayer. "OK, Lord. I don't understand all this. The money. The resources.

The schools. How do I explain this? How do I tell the story? How do *I* transfer the passion? The vision? This is not *my* vision. It is *Yours*. Your vision, Lord, has captured me."

I slip out from under my blanket and sheets, and do something I rarely do. I kneel down beside the hard bed at the Corporate Stay Hotel in Bangalore. I'm alone in my room. But not really. My face is wet.

"Lord God in heaven . . . I'll raise money. I'll talk to whoever will listen. I'll go to India . . . I'll go anywhere. These are not empty words coming from me now. This is what I am. This is *who* I am. I have been captured by what You have shown me."

I draw in a long, slow breath of Indian air. The room is dark. And still. I have only one more thing to say.

"Lord, I'm in. I am so in."

From that day to this, I have become a student of the movement that is transforming a nation.