

Stories from South Asia
CA WMU Annual Meeting “Relentless”

October 15, 2020

I. *Thank You to WMU*

It is a great joy to be with you today!

The WMU women are my inspiration. You are visionary, resourceful, and influential. You have been holding the ropes for workers and partners all over the world for many faithful years. Eva was telling me how, rolling with the times, WMU has reorganized to become a non-profit entity, still continuing on mission with resilience and creativity. Talk about a picture of relentlessness! My husband and I and our coworkers in South Asia, deeply and humbly thank you for your commitment to the global task that Jesus gave us to do.

II. *The COVID Times*

If it weren't for COVID, where would you be today?

If it weren't for COVID, what would you be doing?

It is as if we were all driving down various highway going about our business when suddenly the roads all got blocked! Here we were, stuck in our cars with our families, or without them, whatever the circumstances were!

The pandemic has disrupted our daily lives, challenged our families, shaken up our work, our communities, our churches, our country and our world.

If it weren't for COVID, my husband and I would have been back in South Asia. We were on stateside leave and due to return in May. We have been working in N. India for the last 22 years. In most recent years, we have been focusing on leaders and their wives in the area of soul care – encouraging them to stay growing and vital in their walk with the Lord in order to sustain their ministries.



Leaders' Family Retreat – June 2019

While we are waiting to return, we have been on temporary assignment to serve SB churches in California in whatever way we can: speaking, sharing resources, connecting people. It is a good time for us to serve our churches more closely. We have also been reaching out to South Asians around us and helping others to do so also.

III. What God is doing in India during Covid19

But I am here to share with you what God is doing in India in this time

To give you a little background about events in recent months:

India has almost 1.4 billion people, about 4 times the population of the US.

India's geographic size is about 1/3 the size of the US.

This means India's population density is about 12 times that of the US. Can you imagine the enormity of managing the pandemic for so many people?



Initially the whole country was put on strict lockdown for 3 weeks with no time to prepare for it. A period of chaos ensued because hundreds of thousands of migrant daily wage earners in the large cities suddenly lost their sustenance. In order to survive they began to migrate back to their home towns on foot, on bikes because all transportation was shut down.

Lockdown was extended week by week for 3 months, but eventually it was economically impossible to sustain, especially for India's more vulnerable people. So despite surging numbers of cases, workplaces, transportation and normal activities have been steadily restored. India is rapidly catching up to the US in numbers of cases. It appears the death rate from COVID is about half that of other countries. There are several attempts to explain this, but I feel that underlying them it is God's grace at work in some way. People we know personally have suffered food insecurity and COVID infection, but they are hanging in there. They have been reaching out and serving in new ways and I want to share their stories.

- 1) It is true that people have felt fearful about their future and are looking for hope and meaning in the midst of the turmoil. This has presented many opportunities to serve people and share how God loves us.
 - b) Our local church took up contributions so they could buy food supplies for families in need around them. This action has been multiplied many times over by churches all over India. Send Relief has raised funds for relief distributions through our friends and their local partners. The kindness of believers at the risk of their own harm speaks volumes.

c) One very large growing network of churches in smaller cities and towns in N India, distributed food rations to 200,000 people. Through contact with these families, bible storying groups were started in many homes. I cannot give you exact numbers, but the leaders report that hundreds of people are hearing the good news and responding and getting baptized. There is indeed power, salvation and transformation that happens through the good news of Christ.

2) In the cities such as ours, people have been much more restricted in their movements. Most of the pastors we work with are not tech savvy, but within a few weeks all of them had started online services using zoom and facebook. I credit this to the younger generation who stepped in to facilitate this. We were so proud of them.



a) Since going online, they have seen many nominal believers and people who had left the church become regular attenders. Many new people have joined in because it is less intimidating to join online than in person.

3) Ordinary people are stepping up to share their faith since pastors and leaders have been restricted to their houses. Families are using their lock down time to read the word and pray much more.

a) In a recent zoom meeting, Pastor DB shared with us that 5 new families joined online in the last month from the efforts of his members. Pastor R reported he has 10 people ready to be baptized.

b) Ordinary people are becoming new leaders. One of our partners have been serving people in a resettlement area in our city. About a year ago, a woman named Rekha came to know Jesus through them. We remember her as someone who was in need of much help. After COVID hit, our partner could no longer go there, so Rekha stepped up to help out. Recently she helped another struggling mother to find a job, and led her to know the Lord.

c) Our friend's wife Shanti was teaching children in Rekha's home before COVID. When she could no longer go, she continued to teach the 40 plus children by way of Rekha's daughter's mobile phone. Finally Shanti told Rekha's daughter, Priya, that she needed to teach the kids herself. At first she refused because she felt inadequate to do so. But now Shanti is teaching her one bible story each week through her phone, and she in turn shares it with the kids. I am told



they are using a discipleship movement curriculum to teach her. . . I wonder what lies ahead for her!

d) Another story is about a young believer named Sangeeta. She noticed that kids were struggling with their online school and needed spiritual encouragement. She has formed two whatsapp groups with 18 kids, ages 6 – 16, whom she knows from various places: her nieces, youth in her church, children of family friends. Every morning at 6 a.m. she sends them 3 – 4 verses, asks them to ask God what he wants to say to them, then to send her an audio message about it by the evening. Every Saturday they meet over zoom to share and pray. Indian children are very good at memorizing things. (I know because our two kids attended Indian elementary schools!) Sangeeta gives them one memory verse a day so they learn 4 or 5 each week.

4) One of our partners who works in a Christian radio program sums up what he sees God is doing.

“Previously, God spoke through a cyclone, or earthquake, or flood in certain places and to certain people. He has been warning people again and again, because mankind is lost and going its own way. But now through this COVID-19 he is speaking to every nation at the same time. He has brought mighty people and nations onto their knees. People realize that their wealth and power cannot save or protect them. People of God are learning the actual meaning of worship and dependence on God.”

IV. *Our enduring hope*

I would like to share some closing thoughts from the book of I Peter, which has spoken so much hope into my life these days. Peter had been an apostle for about 30 years at this point and was addressing believers scattered in various places who were suffering persecution and trials.

I will read I Peter 1:3-6, followed by verse 13.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Did you catch where our hope should be placed? It is not in my ability to control things, or the arrival of the vaccine, or the wisdom of our leaders. It doesn’t go up and down with my feelings of the day. It is a living hope – it is the living person of Jesus Christ. Can you think of a better place to put your hope? It is also based on his death and resurrection and what he has already given to us – an identity as his own children, including an inheritance that won’t disappear in the economic downturn, nor get burned up by untimely wild fires.

I Peter 1:13 says:

“Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.”

Because we have a living hope, THEREFORE . . . we can be alert in our minds, sober, ready for action. We are motivated to remove whatever is not fruitful in our lives and be set apart with Christ.

David Hisbiske, the pastor of Echo Church in S. San Jose put it this way,

The focus of my hope directs the movement of my life.

Do you think that the Lord is helping us through this year of unprecedented turmoil to refocus our lives and to think about his return? God may have given us intermediate hopes and goals which are all good, but let us make sure they line up with this living hope. I believe that will help us to be relentless in our love and pursuit of Jesus and his Kingdom.

Please remember our brothers in sisters in N. India in prayer.

For health protection and provision during these very challenging days.

That they would be strengthened to love those around them in practical ways and share the hope they have.

That many people would come to put their faith in the Lord Jesus.

For government leaders to have wisdom to plan and implement ways to overcome the pandemic.



If you are interested in learning more, please refer to:

www.imb.org/southasia

Pray ASAP – a daily prayer app for the people and workers in S. Asia

To hear more about our work, please ask Eva de la Rosa for our contact information.

Thank you so much, Alina