

First Step Ministries, Inc.

Rev. Lawrence E. Blakeslee

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The Trip to India—Preaching Boot Camp

Change Is Good
You can see I have a new newsletter format.

A special thanks to Pamala Smith who has been doing the layouts the previous year and set a new standard for FSM.

Thanks Pamala and all of God's blessings to you for your help.

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Always Breaking the Mold
My Heavenly Father seems to constantly want to break my "mold". Maybe it is based on the scriptures that He is the Potter and I am the clay. This is never truer than when He sends me to the uttermost parts of the world. Last year it was Mongolia. This year it was India. This was my first trip to India and really did not know what to expect beyond what I had seen on television.

As I reviewed the travel and meeting schedule sent me



The first meeting in the Indian town of Visakhatnam.

from India, I knew that this was going to be a challenge. During my three weeks there, it became "Preaching Boot Camp".

My largest meeting was a four-day convention and bible school graduation. More than one thousand people attended each of the four evening meetings. Average attendance was about five hundred for the morning and afternoon services. The meetings in the other towns and villages averaged about four hundred per meeting.

My travels took me from the East to the West coast of India, and in the southern third of the country. Some of the locations were completely off the beaten track. The trip was physically demanding because of the extensive travel from one location to another. This was complicated by a radical change in diet. I was so busy



Larry being honored with a shawl and a garland of flowers. The church laughed when I smelled the flowers. Not sure why but they thought it was funny. They smelled good!

that it was a struggle to get quiet time to pray and prepare for each message. The pace never let up during the entire trip.

Wolf Bellingrodt — A Friend In Heaven

On 5 February, I received a phone call notifying me of the death of a close and long time friend, Wolf Bellingrodt.

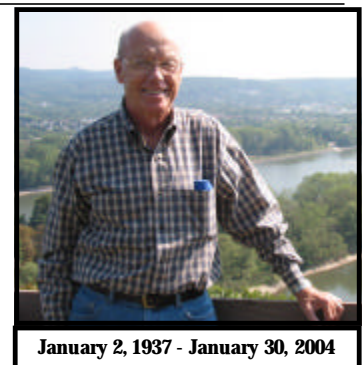
Wolf had been battling cancer and had just started treatment when a blood clot broke loose. In a very short time, he was home with Jesus.

I was able to find a seat on a

flight to Phoenix the next day and be with his family.

Miss you Wolf. Think of you and the great day we had, every time my train travels past the Rudesheim Denkmal. (Rudesheim War Memorial)

My prayers are always with you Trudy, Mark and Heidi.



January 2, 1937 - January 30, 2004

The India Trip (Continued)



Above: **Over 1,000 people attended each evening of the four-day, open-air convention in Pangidi.**

Right: **Just a happy teenage Indian girl and her Bible.**

Lots of Prayer

After every service, I laid hands and prayed for everyone who wanted prayer. During the three weeks, I personally prayed for over a thousand people. Sometimes it was for salvation, other times for healing, some just wanted to be blessed.

Praying for people happened all day long no matter what you were doing. At one location we stayed at the local pastor's house right next to the church. One afternoon I was taking a nap and forgot to lock the door to my room. While I was asleep, I had this strange sensation. It was a bit of a shock to wake up find a young couple standing by my bed. I was trying to wake up and figure out what was happening when someone came in and told me that they wanted to be prayed for right now. I guess so.



Hungry for the Gospel of Jesus

NO ONE WAS IN A HURRY. NO ONE WAS WATCHING A CLOCK. NO ONE HAD A "ROAST IN THE OVEN".

There was an obvious hunger to hear the Gospel. No matter how long the services would take, the Indian people were always attentive. It was common to have at least one or two hours of praise and worship at the beginning of every service. The praise team would sing and then a soloist would lead, fol-

lowed by some adults, children and teenagers. They used rotating teams of singers and musicians singing for about twenty to thirty minutes each. No one was in a hurry. No one was watching a clock. No one had a "roast in the oven". No one was in a hurry to beat the crowd to the restaurant for after service fellowship. The length of the service was not a concern. It was over when it was over. Everyone sat elbow to elbow on the tile floor with no cushions, no air conditioning and maybe a couple of small ceiling fans running.

No matter what venue, the men were on one side of the church and women on the other, the toddlers sat with their parents depending on the age of the child. The younger children always sat near the front of the stage. It also amazed me to see the small children so well behaved and quiet the duration of the service.



Two of the million Hindu gods found all over India. Note the size of these statues.



Death Is Only A Breath Away

While I was in Pangidi, preaching at the four-day convention, I witnessed a man die from a vehicle accident. It happened right in front of our van as I was being driven from the city out to the bible school compound to preach the afternoon service.

As this forty-minute trip began, I noticed I had an uneasy feeling about it. We were following a low speed farm tractor towing a huge trailer used to haul produce. The trailer was empty except for one man riding in it. As I was looking out the van's front window, I saw the tractor go out of control and move wildly from our side of the road to the opposite side into on-coming traffic lane and back. I thought the tractor was going to have a head-on collision but remarkably that did not happen.

But as the tractor weaved back and forth uncontrollably between lanes, the trailer was whipping back and forth like playing "crack the whip". The whipping action threw the man riding in the trailer out of it, over the side and backwards. He came down head first. If he didn't die from breaking his neck in the fall, then his body flopped under the trailer just in front of the rear wheels and the trailer ran over him. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

My driver slammed on the brakes to avoid

running over him. We waited a minute as people went over to the victim. It was chaos. We had to drive past the victim to get the van out of the road. As we drove past him, it was obvious he was dead. He probably died quickly because of the crushing internal injuries. Within a few minutes, people just picked up his body with his arms and legs and hauled him to the side of the road so the traffic could continue.

Salvation Prayer

If you would like to pray a salvation prayer and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, just say this simple prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father,

I believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, died for my sins and rose again. Please forgive me of my sins. I am willing to turn away from sin and now want invite Jesus into my heart and life as my personal Savior. Amen.

Continued below:

We prayed for him but he was gone and apparently not coming back. After a short time, my driver reminded me that we were late. The afternoon service had already begun and I was scheduled to preach. With nothing else to do, we left the accident scene and arrived at the church about

ten minutes later. Praise and worship had been extended until I showed up.

Within minutes of my arrival, I was being introduced and standing in front of about five hundred people. trying to get focused enough to be able to preach. When I started out, I told the audience what I had just seen. In my heart, I knew that my original message changed completely to a salvation message. Maybe it was the best salvation message I will ever preach. At that moment, life and death were a reality. Sometimes, we forget how tentative life really is and this was a shocking reminder that we are just "one breath" away from where we spend eternity, either heaven or hell. This adds much more meaning when we have chosen Jesus as our personal Savior. If you haven't made that choice yet, right now is a good time.

During my account of the accident, I noticed that there seemed to be a lack of a reaction from the audience about it. Later I carefully asked someone about it. They explained that life in India is not highly valued. Even with the Christians, there seems to be a cultural perspective about death. If you die from an accident of some kind, it was just a "bad karma day". Never the less, after my message, about seventy-five people came up to receive Jesus.

Below: **Saving your spot or seat is done the same way in churches**



One of the afternoon meetings at the four-day convention in Pangidi, India

Salvation Prayer (Continued)

If you don't have a Bible get one and start to read it. Ask God to direct you to a good Christian church. He will. It is that simple. Welcome to the family. This has been the best decision you have ever made.

Daily Power Interruptions



Above: Larry praying for a "future" Indian pastor. Right: Praying for the kids in town of Bhadravathi was the Easter Sunday theme.

Daily Power Interruptions

India is notorious for the electric power interruptions. Depending on the location, the electricity would be off sometime during the day or night. Occasionally it happened in the middle of an evening meeting. Nearly every morning it would happen for a few hours especially in one village. In one village, it was turned off at 06:00 and would be off for about four hours every morning. I also found out that when there is a major thunderstorm, the power company cuts the power to prevent the storm from damaging the electrical grid. We take a lot for granted in the West.



Wonderful People and Children — A Widow's Mite

The Indian people were warm and accommodating in every way. The children were incredible as always. Kids all over the world are truly incredible. Three different occasions, a child with a parent came up and gave me an offering of a few coins that were just a few cents.

Another time, a little boy and his mother brought me an offering of a little candy bar. In every case it was a humbling experience. You immediately remember the bible story about the offering of the widow's mite. Some who have the very least really do give the most. I

really, really prayed that God would give them a hundred fold blessing. These people were also used by The Lord to confirm to me that He will take care of me, too.

In each location, I saw children of various ages that clearly had a real and personal relationship with Jesus. The youngest was a little boy about four or five years old. I couldn't find out if he could read, but he toted a tiny beat up Bible everywhere he went. During praise and worship he would sing and raise his hands. During the sermon, he listened intently. (Pic on Page 8)

There is hope for India and the rest of the world, if not our generation of adults, then the future generation of teenagers and children.

People, People Everywhere

People, people, people are everywhere. Whether in the countryside, towns or villages, you are overwhelmed with the constant presence and density of people. In town, you can not believe that there are so many people around you all the time. If the density of the population is not enough then the noise from the constant horn blowing from the vehicles will get you.

India Trip — Ministry, Trip & Country Statistics

Ministry & India Trip Stats:

- Salvations: 500+
- Number of Sermons: 15 in 14 days
- Attendance Grand Total: 10,000 appx.
- People Personally Prayed for: 1,000+
- Miles Traveled / Ground: 1200km / 745sm
- Miles Traveled / Flight: 7900km / 4900sm
- Population: 1+ billion, second largest population in the world ⁽¹⁾
- Landmass: Slightly more than 1/3 of the U.S. ⁽²⁾

^(1&2) CIA The Worldwide Factbook - 2004



Above: One of our over-night trains. It was interesting. Left: "Just resting on The Word of God" The Bible is her "pillow".

Two Year Anniversary & Future Children's Program

On April 26th I celebrated my second year in full-time ministry. It has been a remarkable two years seeing God direct and provide. Being a missionary has its challenges but I would not change a thing.

No one really likes change. But in the days and times we live in, God really needs His people to be ready to respond to His direction. So it seems important to God to be "willing and obedient" to His direction. It has been and will always be my desire to be both. It is time to hear Him and be willing and obedient to do what I believe the Holy Spirit is leading me to do.

Future Children's Program

Since last years trip to Mongolia, God has

Dear Supporters,
A special thanks for all who have supported me both financially and in prayer. None of this ministry could have been done without you. I can't adequately express my heartfelt gratitude . All of God's blessings to you.
LB

rekindled my desire to again work with children's ministry. He has given me some ideas in reaching and developing children. Currently I am working on developing a

program to do this. As this program develops, I'll keep you posted on the details.



India's future championship Cricket Team for 2014

Projects & Finances

India

Please pray about helping me in these mission outreach trips. There are still some outstanding expenses associated with this recent trip to India since my hosts were not able to help with my expenses.

Upcoming Mongolia Trip

Mongolia is still in the future. The plan is to minister directly to the children in open outreaches and to the children's workers in Mongolia. The theme is to train this already available "Army" to reach their peer group and their families. Four Square

International has children's outreach materials called "Shoe Boxes". The Shoe Boxes include all kinds of children's materials and contain a variety of supplies to reach 750 kids. The

Shoe Boxes cost \$150 each. I would like to take a couple of these along also.

Additionally, two staff members from Trans World Radio - Singapore want to join me to visit some of the nomadic families.

They will be doing research to increase the support for more short-wave broadcasts in the Mongolian language. A few months ago, they informed me that TWR has been receiving great signal strength reports from Mongolia. TWR is extremely pleased and encouraged with these reports. Originally, the trip was planned for three weeks

June but lack of finances prevented this from happening. As money comes in, the trip dates will be finalized. Hopefully it can be made before mid September and the weather starts to move to very cold. Finances are needed for transportation, lodging and outreach supplies. This trip requires a full-time translator so there is that additional expense for food, transportation, and a stipend for their invaluable help. Donations will be appreciated.

THE RETURN TO MONGOLIA IS STILL IN THE PLAN AND MOVING FORWARD

German Factoid

Currency Conversion

Currently it costs about 20% of the value of a U.S. Dollar to be converted to Euros. What this means is of every U.S. \$1 donated is worth 80 Euro cents here in Germany.

Sales Tax

In Germany; you pay 16% sales tax on everything including food.

Current Avg. Living Expenses	Monthly
Apartment Rent & Maintenance	\$474
Electric Utilities	\$93
Telephone / Local & LD	\$72
Internet Access & Web Hosting	\$46
Radio & TV Government Access Fee	\$18
Food	\$135
Transportation / Local Bus & Train	\$91
Incidentals / Entertainment	\$30
Banking Fees	\$12
Monthly Total U.S. Dollars	\$971
2004 / Average Monthly Support	\$680
Monthly Deficit	\$291

India Trip (Continued)



Easter Sunday Service Praising The Lord, "He has risen!!" "Yes, He has risen indeed!!!"



Praying for a local woman with the help of a local pastor's wife.

The First Meeting in Visakhapatnam

The first meeting in Visakhapatnam was also happened to be my host's home church. The temperature was hot and humid. I found out that no matter what the temperature, the custom is that you preach in a suit and tie.

MY LITTLE JOKE DIDN'T REALLY GO OVER AND I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHY.

Occasionally they extended mercy and allowed me a little variance from tradition. By the end of the meetings, I would be wringing wet from the inside out. My first sermon was the

evening of the day I arrived. I had been traveling for over twenty-four hours with only a nap during the eight and half hour flight from Paris to Bombay. By time I arrived, I was exhausted and a little "punchy".

It is always interesting to hear the various praise and worship songs from around the world. During the praise and worship part of the service, the church sang a song that included

"hallelujah" in the lyrics. It was the only word that I could understand. Hallelujah translates the same in any language in the world.

Right after my introduction, and at the beginning of my sermon, I thought I would add a little humor. After all it helps get the crowd into your message. But remember that I haven't really slept for over twenty-four hours.

So, I told the audience that I had "learned" a little of the Hindi language since I arrived in India. Then I pro-

ceeded to say "hallelujah". My little joke didn't really go over and I couldn't figure out why. I thought maybe they just have a different sense of humor. With no response I decided to quickly push on to my sermon.

Later, back at my hotel room and in the quiet of the night, I realized why they did not laugh at my Hallelujah joke. In this region they don't speak Hindi either, they speak Telugu. Needless to say I did not try that joke out again the balance of the trip.

Multiple Languages & Dialects

In the region that I traveled, the spoken languages were Telugu and Kannada. One of my funniest moments was when I was being translated from English, to Telugu to Kannada. Little wonder why this service ran longer than "normal" after three translations. At times, I wondered if my sermon was turning into the game of "Telephone". One person tells another person and to another until at the end, you are not sure what ends up being the final message.

The Long Trip Home

I left Bangalore, India for the return flight home via Bombay, Paris then Frankfurt. The actual trip took a little over twenty-four hours but I was awake for thirty-six hours without sleep before I finally got back to my own bed. The return home meant the end of a two and half month period of travel. I was glad to be back home in Germany.

Stateside Trip — February & March

During my travels to Arizona, California and Florida, I was able to meet a

ONE THING I DID RECOGNIZE IS THAT GOD IS USING CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS IN A GREATER WAY.

number of pastors and share the vision of First Step Ministries. In California, I was able to attend a Sunday service at Rick Warren's church, Saddleback

Church in Southern California. Saddleback's Children's Church and facility is absolutely incredible. Pastor Rick

is the author of a number of great books, "A Purpose Driven Life" and "A Purpose Driven Church". They are recommended reading.

It was wonderful to see all that is happening in various local churches in the United States. It gives me a chance to identify trends or movements in the Body of Christ. One thing I did recognize is that God wants to and is using children and teenagers in a greater way.

Much of my time in Phoenix was spent doing hospital visits and praying for the sick. A couple of these visits were for scheduled surgeries but some were emergencies. Praying for God's healing is always a blessing.



Right: Divia and her grandmother listening to my iPod. It was a first for both of them to hear Western style Praise and Worship music.

Visiting My Family

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
United States Coast Guard



While visiting some ministries in Florida, I also took some time to make my annual visit of my family. William, Shawn and Antonella Shawn's daughter.

William, my youngest son, left May 4th for the Coast Guard Basic Training. He graduated from Basic on June 25 and has orders for the Coast Guard Cutter Alert stationed at Astoria, Ore-

gon. He will spend the next four years in military service. The Coast Guard is now directly connected to the Department of Homeland Security.

All young people that willingly join a volunteer military service should be thanked — especially during these times. Pray for him. Pray for them.

My eldest son Shawn and his family are doing well. Antonella, three and a half, is talking her little head off. Wonder where she got that? I departed Florida and the U.S. knowing that they are all doing well and I am very proud.



William & his fiancé, Stephanie Renee' O'Neal



A Saturday morning meeting with the local pastors.



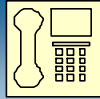
Ministry is about all of God's kids.



Transportation in India. Don't laugh, you can't imagine how much you can stuff in an "Auto".

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Above: **Daily cooking and cleaning activities around the church in Sriramanagar, India**



From Left to Right: **A future pastor**, (the little boy mentioned on Page 4,) **a drummer and worship leader**.



It seems that "everybody" helps cleaning pots & pans. I think he is the "Pre-Wash" cycle.