

## **Reflections and Memories From My Trip to India and Nepal**

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I have been home for several months, and I wanted to share a few of my reflections and memories of my recent trip to India and Nepal with the Scriptures In Use ministry.

The most common question people ask me is, “What did the Lord do in you and through you as a result of this trip?” This is such a hard question to answer. The two weeks I spent in the beautiful and exotic places of India and Nepal left me with many impressions, a sensory overload, a sensitive heart to what the Lord is doing there, and an awareness of the need in those dark parts of the world. It also helped me see what He wants to do in my life here. I will be sorting it all out over time and yet here are some of my reflections and memories.

Valerie and I have known Jim and Carla Bowman, the founders of Scriptures In Use, for over three decades. The Bowmans have served the Lord for twenty-five years and have unique insights regarding sharing the gospel and discipling believers in *oral cultures*. They have developed a training method that has resulted in the gospel being spread exponentially, churches being planted, and believers being discipled. Because of the Lord’s blessing, they have added to their training staff and have been approached by many mission agencies to teach them what they have been teaching in the field.

SIU is considered one of the leaders in the Orality Movement around the world. Valerie and I have served on their board for a number of years. Their web site is *[siustraining.org](http://siustraining.org)*, if you would like to check it out.

I was asked to accompany two of the men from SIU on their trip to India and Nepal to train some leaders in church planting and evangelism by using the narratives (stories) directly from the Scriptures. (Really, I begged Tim Brown and Dan Vannelli to let me accompany them so I could see them in action.) The guys asked me to start each day of the training with my thoughts from the Scriptures, as well as to pastor and encourage the trainees.

I appreciated this opportunity to feel useful, especially since those are the things I am passionate about.



Meeting both the Indian (30) and Nepalese (20) men and women who came for the training was the highlight of my trip. It was amazing to see people from totally different cultures that love the Lord Jesus and His Word, and are encouraged and challenged by the same verses we cling to. **The shared experience** of being snatched from the enemy's camp and the power of the gospel to change lives was so evident, especially in light of the darkness all around us.

I was also blessed to see their genuine love for their countrymen and country and their passion to share the gospel. Most of them do this at a great cost because of the cultural and national antagonism toward the gospel. Both groups of believers were sweet spirited, eager to learn, and very appreciative of whatever we brought to them. They are bold and courageous in their lives, and the Lord Jesus is using them greatly.



They reminded me of the believers described in Hebrews:

***“They were stoned, they were sawn in two,  
they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about  
in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of  
whom the world was not worthy)...”  
Hebrews 11:37-38a.***

For many of these believers, this kind of treatment is not theoretical but a reality of following Jesus, and yet they press on. I think the power of their lives and their appeal is that they have clearly counted the cost of following the Savior, which is obvious and ever-present. Due to their poverty, their distractions are fewer than in our culture. There is a clear sense of “setting their affections on the things above and not on the things of the earth.” Col. 3:2. They have a personal understanding of the greatness and power of God and are seeing Him work in their lives in wonderful ways.

SIU has discovered that people in mostly illiterate and impoverished countries have a tremendous capacity for exact memorization after just one or two hearings of the Scriptural narrative. After receiving the four levels of Scriptural training that are offered, many of the believers will have memorized over two hundred and fifty stories word-for-word from the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. They put me to shame!

***A little about the trip itself*** The trip was pretty taxing both physically and emotionally. The flight from Chicago to Delhi alone was fifteen hours. One concern I had beforehand was for my physical strength, but the Lord was very gracious to me in that I did well, strength-wise, for the entire trip. When I needed to rest, I rested. We were in each country for one week. The training schedule in India was very intense, and we did not have a great deal of time to see sights. We got a taste of India in Chandigarh, a newer, planned town in North-central India where we did the training, and in Delhi, which we passed through on our way to Nepal.

Poverty was pronounced and impossible to hide, and idolatry was so sad. When thinking about God, worship, and sacrifice, there was no sense of celebration but rather fear - constant, gripping fear that was almost palpable. It felt like hiking uphill with a heavy pack. I was reminded of what Paul said about the ultra-religious Jews:

***“Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”***

***Romans 10:1-2***

On one trip to the airport, we encountered a lower caste, poor, unkempt, pregnant young woman with two children. She was in the middle of traffic begging for money. Westerners are conspicuous targets because we are known for our wealth and generosity. That scene greatly saddened me, and I did not quite know what to do or how to respond to her poverty and need. I’m glad that we have a Father that knows each one of us by name and loves everyone.



***The traffic*** and getting from place-to-place was an experience in itself. Pedestrians, bikes, motorcycles, cars, and buses all were on the move. The road’s middle line seemed to be a “suggestion” rather than a law. One person said that if traffic in Mexico is normal, then India and Nepal have traffic “on speed!” The traffic flow seemed like a school of fish - fluid and having a life of its own. I expected to see many accidents but did not.

In India primarily, another interesting characteristic of traffic was that there were animals roaming freely in the midst of the traffic flow. As if getting around were not hard enough! Since animals are highly revered they are allowed to roam, and speedy travelers just try to avoid them.

Amazingly, many people have cell phones. We were in a Buddhist temple and a number of young monks passed by, talking on their cell phones! Even seemingly poor people had cell phones in hand.

My group had access to a cell phone, and the few times I called home I felt like I was right next door. It was a reminder of how flat the world is as a result of technology.

In India an unexpected treat was eating out one night at the local KFC. We had to choose between the “original” style barbeque and “curried chicken.” KFC and McDonalds have already reached the world, but where is Starbucks when you need one?

The generosity of the brethren was so touching. One of the church leaders in Chandigarh invited us over to eat at his house. He and his wife and two teenage children live in a place smaller than most efficiency apartments, and they fed us a feast. They sat and watched us eat because there was not enough room in their dining area for them to join us. (They ate after we left.) I’m sure the meal was expensive for them, and yet they wanted to serve us.

Katmandu was a two hour plane trip from Delhi. Our hotel there was more western and not as rustic as the one in India. We actually had brewed coffee available! Katmandu is a beautiful, congested city and yet very green. It is very hilly, and in almost every place where there is not housing, there are grain fields. It was harvest time when we were there, with much activity in the fields. All the harvesting I saw was manual and looked very labor intensive and difficult.



The Himalayas often peeked out from behind the ever-present cloud cover to the delight of all. Majestic, snow-covered, beautiful and spectacular are words that fall short of accurately describing the experience of seeing them.

Motorcycles are popular because they are less costly to drive than cars. Gas was about six dollars per gallon. One big surprise was to see an entire family traveling on a motorcycle: the husband drove with his wife sitting side-saddle in her beautiful sari, with two children, one in front of the dad and one between the husband and wife. Pretty scary! One of the families in the Indian training drove over ninety miles to come. This was a family of three - a husband, wife and a ten year old son.



On the one day we went sightseeing in Nepal, we got up at 3:00 am to drive into the Himalayan foothills and watch the sun rise on the Himalayan peaks. What a wonderful experience! Fortunately, we had a clear sky at our altitude even though the valley was completely covered by clouds and looked like a cloud ocean. As the sun rose, it lit each peak individually. It looked like the Lord featured each peak with its own spotlight, one at a time. It was almost indescribable.



Afterward, we drove down the mountain and visited the oldest part of Katmandu, the walled city called **Bhaktapur**. People still live within the walls, and it is a very active city with tourism being a big part of its livelihood. Our guide was a young man whose family has lived in the city

for almost two hundred years, and who were potters by trade. The buildings and settings were beautiful and the people were warm and friendly. Our guide took us to parts of the city where we saw no other westerners. By faith, we trusted this young man to lead us back to the city gates.



Now let me tell you about my “almost adopted daughter.” At the center of the city there were beautiful temples and many vendors selling their wares. There was a twenty-something young woman selling necklaces and I inquired about the price. I was not really interested, but in showing interest I set in motion a dialogue with her that lasted over a half hour. Not wanting to be rude, I was courteous but told her several times that I did not want to purchase a necklace. Yet because of my initial inquiry this woman, in her need and zeal, saw a potential sale. Her English was pretty good, probably because she was such a great and persistent saleswoman! The men I was with were amused by her persistence and my patience, and they were about ready to take up a collection just to reward her persistence.



Finally, I felt I better do something or she might follow me home and I made her a deal. I said, “I will buy a necklace under two conditions: one, you let me take your picture, and two, you take the money and return to the place we met.” She gave me a big smile, basically knowing she’d won! I bought a necklace and did not have to adopt her.

***The pathway of blood...*** On one particular day, everywhere we went in the city we saw big droplets of blood in the streets. It happened to be the day before a huge feast honoring one of their gods. The city had bought over

1,000 oxen to sacrifice to the god, and there were as many goats and chickens to sacrifice as well. Some of the villagers had started the sacrifices the day we were there, and there were trails of blood everywhere. I saw no sense of joy but rather obligation to sacrifice or risk bad luck or even retribution. And sacrifice they did! Fortunately the sacrifices were cooked and the city ate well.

In this multi-hundred year old walled city there were a multitude of temples and shrines. They were beautiful, and yet the reality of what they meant was so sad. The lost beasts were pictures of the lost men!



***“Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and to those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back.***

***Proverbs 24:13***

***“And Paul stood in the midst of the Aeropagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you...having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though HE is not far from each one of us...”***

***Acts 17:22-23/26b-27***

I don't begin to know how the Lord does it, but I do know that He promises to save anybody who even gropes for Him. I'm glad He is so big that He knows our hearts and will save any person who calls on His name. How we

need to pray that the enemy's blinders are removed from dark places and that people hear and receive the gospel.

**Visiting the "Monkey Temple"** was another interesting adventure. This large temple is hundreds of years old and is beautifully situated in the foothills outside of Katmandu. The view of the city from there is spectacular and the temple grounds are beautiful. The most unusual thing about the temple is that monkeys run wild there. They are cute, curious, pesky, and reign as kings. They put on a show for visitors and expect a handout for their work of being cute.



I came away from my trip with a mix of emotions, and I was thankful for the opportunity just to go. I also was struck with just how much I take for granted here in our country - food, health, tap water, and brewed coffee. I am very spoiled.

India and Nepal were beautiful even though poor and needy. The people were gracious and a pleasure to meet - yes, even the ones who were very zealous tradesmen.

Meeting the Christians there was my greatest privilege. They are great examples of believers and honor the Lord Jesus by living lives that are pleasing to Him. I am now more aware of the need to pray for these places

and the brethren there. I am also aware of the need to use our resources well in supporting the Father's work in faraway places. It was fun to watch the SIU team teach and genuinely love our brethren. I hope to be able to accompany them again.

Sometimes I get overwhelmed when thinking about the spiritual and economic poverty around the world. How can I have an effect? And yet, I'm convinced that the Lord has strategically placed His followers in their spheres (where and when they are born and live) so that each can shine as lights right where they are in families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and sporting venues. Everywhere our feet take us are the places that the Lord wants us to pray for, love, reach out to and boldly share the "great things the Lord has done for us." Luke 8:39. We are representatives of the Lord Jesus where we live.

**“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;**

**And He died for all, that they who live should no longer love for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf...Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

**2 Cor. 5:14-15, 20-21**