

*All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing!*

[Colossians 1.6]

What was true in Paul’s day, almost 2,000 years ago, is certainly true in our own day and age through the work of IREF in Andhra Pradesh!

During this year’s annual **Youth Conference**, held from 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> January, we saw God move in a mighty way to draw young people to himself and build them up as his disciples.



### ***There’s always something new!***

Although this was my seventh visit to India, it included many first-time experiences for me. It was my first visit to IREF’s Youth Conference; and what an inspiration it was to see 3,500+ young people gathered to hear the Gospel and learn how to grow as Christ’s disciples.

I enjoyed my first visit to a village church’s New Year/Harvest Thanksgiving service and celebratory meal, complete with a cake-cutting ceremony (my first since our wedding, 32 years ago!). I preached from 2 Tim 2.8, “Remember Jesus!”

I paid my first visit to IREF’s Industrial Training Centre, about half a mile from the main campus site in Repalle.



The Centre is currently training about 160 young men in mechanical and electrical engineering skills.

I went on my first March of Witness through the streets of Repalle, as the Youth Conference moved towards its climax.



And I even enjoyed my first games of ‘ball badminton’, a five-a-side racquet sport unique to South India. We wish the IREF’s girls’ team well as they defend the regional title they won last year, and the boys’ team who took the runners-up spot in their competition last year.

As I reflect on my recent visit to India, a number of features of IREF’s work stand out to me, features that our western churches would do well to emulate.

### ***Concerted Praying***

I was woken up on my first morning in Repalle at 4.45am (!) by the sound of happy girls gathering in the courtyard below to sing God’s praises and seek his blessing for the day, through prayer.

The first of my 14 speaking/preaching opportunities was to a group of 200 Degree

College girls who had gathered for a time of prayer and fasting to seek God’s blessing on the forthcoming Youth Conference.



And after each of the Conference’s evening evangelistic sessions, huddles of students could be seen gathered together to pray home the message delivered that night.

The whole work of IREF is undergirded by concerted praying of a kind only rarely seen in the West.

## Applied Listening

I taught lessons from the life of Gideon during the morning sessions at the Conference, beginning with a talk entitled *God's Unexpected Choice* from Judges 6. Later on during my stay, a young woman studying for a Master's degree described how she had become 'awakened' during the talks. "Gideon



was from a low caste family, just like me!" she explained. I had mentioned that Gideon was an unexpected choice on God's part because his clan was 'the weakest in Manasseh' (one of the smallest tribes in Israel) and he was 'the least in his family' [Judges 6.15]. I hadn't mentioned the word 'caste'; but I had pointed out that God delighted to choose people from 'unimportant' families to serve him. But God's Holy Spirit had made the connection for this young woman, and she was open to his word of revelation!

## A Passion to see People Saved

The theme chosen for this year's Youth Conference was *The Great Salvation* that God has provided for us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the verse from which the theme was taken also contains a warning. "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" [Hebrews 2.3]. "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name given to men under heaven by which we must be saved!" [Acts 4.12]. The evangelistic meetings carried a great sense of urgency for people to respond to the gracious invitation extended by Jesus, to be saved for all eternity.

## Tearful Repentance

I explored the story of Peter in my four evening evangelistic talks. We looked at

- his call to follow Jesus (Mat 4.18-22);
- his confession of Jesus as *The Christ, the Son of the Living God* (a King to be served, a Son to be heard, a Saviour to trust, from Mark 8.27-9.7);
- his crisis when he followed Jesus *at a distance* (Mat 26.58); and
- his commissioning for service, in response to the question, "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21.1-24).

Those who came forward in response to the Gospel appeals were often weeping



tears of repentance, as they had been deeply convicted of their sin by God's Holy Spirit.

## Fruitful Evangelism

Between 250 and 300 young people came forward on the Friday night in response to the Gospel appeal, with a further 100 or so standing where they were, because there wasn't sufficient room at the front of the tent to contain them all! A further 100 or more stood in response on the Saturday night.



On the Saturday afternoon, we had the joy of baptising 51 people in the River Krishna, some of whom had come to put their faith in Jesus during the Conference.



## Costly Discipleship

Several of those who shared a word of testimony during the Sunday morning service were tearful as they contemplated returning home to a potentially hostile reception from their non-Christian families. We assured them that "through faith, we are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold ... - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed [1 Peter 1.5-7]. Pray that this may be so!

## Keeping Praying!

Please pray for the **Medical Team** from the UK as they visit India from **28<sup>th</sup> January – 11<sup>th</sup> February**. And thank you for your wonderful level of support for IREF; over £25,500 has been donated so far!

*David Hunt*

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