

California Church Stands Up for India's Untouchables

They are called “untouchables,” or **dalits**—millions of Indian men, women and children born into a caste system that views them as impure, less than human. Despite laws to protect them, these outcasts face daily discrimination.

They are also the single largest victims of human trafficking in the world. Now, one Southern California church is on a mission to help free the Dalits of India through education, a **biblical message** of hope and a movie about their plight.

A Dalit's Destiny

Every single day, somewhere in India, a Dalit is humiliated, assaulted, raped, beaten and killed. Considered outcasts not even worthy to be in the caste system, the vast majority of them are poor, illiterate and survive on less than \$2 a day.

It was into this dark side of Indian society that Matthew Cork, lead pastor of Friends Church in Yorba Linda, Calif., stepped in and came face-to-face with the plight of India's Dalits. In 2007, on his first trip to India, he saw up close the challenges millions of them endure.

“I think God brought me to India to break me,” Cork said. “When I saw they were considered untouchables, considered less than an animal, I looked at myself, I looked at my own children—how could anyone ever be treated that way?”

He returned to the United States broken by Dalits' sufferings, yet emboldened by a call from God to try to help change their destiny.

“We believe that our job is to be the catalyst church in the West to free the Dalits in our generation,” he said.

His main partner in India is Dr. Joseph D'souza, founder of the Dalit Freedom Network. For some 30 years, D'souza has worked on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed in India.

"Today around the world there are more slaves than even during the time of Wilberforce. Modern slavery is a huge problem and India is the epicenter of this problem," D'souza said.

Educating the Untouchables

D'souza told Pastor Cork that education was the key to ending modern day slavery in India. In 2002, D'souza started Dalit Freedom Network with the goal of building one thousand schools for Dalit children.

Pastor Cork wanted to build schools after seeing how access to education can change the life of a Dalit.

"Because, you see, if you can educate them and they can begin to understand why they might be in poverty, if they begin to understand their plight, if they begin to see that they are created in the image of God and that there is opportunity and an English education brings them that opportunity that they would have never been afforded to them," Cork said.

The first Good Shepherd School opened in 1998. Today there are 107 schools across India, 42 funded by Friends Church.

The children attending these schools get more than just an English education.

"Almost everyday we talk to them about Jesus. We teach them Christian songs, teach them Bible verses," teacher Rebecca Solomon said. "We want the kids to know who Jesus Christ is and to give them an opportunity to experience the love of God."

Not Today

The excitement at the opportunity to get an education for so many of these young Dalit children is evident. They can't

afford to go to school so Good Shepherd doesn't charge parents a lot of money so these kids can attend.

Friends Church has committed \$20 million to build 200 Good Shepherd schools across India. To help raise more awareness and stir people to greater action, Friends Church has made a movie about the Dalits of India.

The film is called *Not Today*. It's a story about a rich young American from Orange County, Calif., who goes partying half way around the world with friends.

In the process, the young man is exposed to the seedy world of human trafficking. He winds up risking his life to help a Dalit father search for his little daughter he sold to human traffickers.

Brent Martz is creative ministries pastor at Friends Church and producer of *Not Today*.

"Hopefully when people watch *Not Today* they'll see this story of the Dalits in India, they'll see the story of human slavery and human trafficking and they'll be drawn into it, their lives will be compelled to get involved because they felt it," Martz said.

"Maybe they finally felt what its like to be a little girl who is taken from her father or even sold by her father," he said.

Not Today opens in theaters next April. Cork said profits from the film will help the church fund the building of the 200 Dalit schools.

An Eternal Legacy

Cork admits breaking the caste system will take lots of prayer. But Friends Church and Dalit Freedom Network are in it for the long haul, determined to be the catalyst that helps free India's Dalits.

"We are creating an eternal legacy where I know when I get to

heaven there's going to be thousands of thousands of Dalits there," he said. "They are going to look me in the eye and they are going to say, 'Thank you for making a difference in their life.'"