

Testimony Launches 9/11 Survivor Into Worldwide Evangelistic Ministry

Sujo John says some 30,000 people have accepted Christ after hearing him tell of his escape from the World Trade Center

Sujo John's miraculous survival from the Sept. 11, 2001, World Trade Center disaster has catapulted him into an evangelistic ministry that he claims has resulted in more than 30,000 decisions for Christ.

A native of Calcutta, India, John, now 29, was faxing a document from his office on the 81st floor of the north tower when American Airlines Flight 11 struck several floors above him. Fleeing down the emergency stairs he heard the second plane crash into the south tower. He tried frantically to call his wife, Mary, by cell phone. Four months pregnant, she planned to arrive early at her job in the south tower.

Upon reaching the mezzanine level, John said he was overcome by the incredible chaos. People sobbed uncontrollably. Mutilated bodies, chunks of debris and a mangled plane engine were scattered across the outdoor courtyard.

Directed to the underground shopping mall by a fireman, he searched for an exit. He heard a frightening roar. Seconds later warning clouds of debris from the imploding south tower engulfed the mall area. He rushed to a wall and huddled next to about 20 fleeing workers. He said he thought: "God, this is it. You gave me this opportunity to come down 81 floors, but death has finally caught up with me."

In a move that he says was prompted by the Holy Spirit, John shouted "Jesus!" and exhorted the others to call upon Christ and claim Him as Savior. "I heard them cry, 'Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!'" he said, "and then there was a deafening noise of the building going down."

Moving away from the wall he hit the ground. Buried in white soot and debris, he said he lay there for about 20 minutes before struggling to rise. Coughing up dust, he said he felt his way back to where the others had huddled together.

Despite the hazy smoke and ashes he saw their bodies scattered like rag dolls, crushed and smashed. He said he felt the Lord saying, "They made their peace with Me in their dying moments, and they are resting with Me in My presence."

Escaping before the north tower imploded, he learned that his wife was alive too. The next day he e-mailed about 20 friends and family that he and Mary were safe and warned them about the fragility of life. They forwarded the message to their friends, who did the same, and eventually it reached thousands.

"People were calling from all time zones," John said. "There were so many stories of people over the phone giving their hearts to the Lord."

The media bombarded him for interviews. His appearance on The 700 Club generated a firestorm of interest, with 426 viewers calling in to accept Christ. "There was a tremendous response to salvations because Sujo is proclaiming the ultimate truth of life, which is Jesus," said Cheryl Wilcox, senior features producer for The 700 Club. "He has a very profound simplicity

of faith.”

John was invited to appear on The Oprah Winfrey Show along with his co-workers, all of whom survived. But he backed out when Winfrey’s staff barred him from sharing his faith. The next week he was invited to speak at a large church in Kansas. The New York Times sent a reporter there to cover his story. Speaking requests poured in from all over the nation. He traveled every weekend, returning to his job on Mondays.

He says it was tough juggling speaking engagements with a career and family. In April 2002 he resigned his executive position to become a full-time evangelist (). “God started speaking to us, and when God says go, you go,” he said.

When John was a teenager in Calcutta, he says a missionary once prophesied: “God has a plan for your life. He will one day use you to touch millions of people around the world.” He sees that prophecy happening now; he has traveled to more than 270 cities in the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Norway and India.

During a recent service at Lakeview Christian Center, an Assemblies of God church in Indianapolis, John stirred the congregation. “They were glued to him for an hour,” said Lakeview senior pastor Ron Bontrager. “The story is so compelling. He puts us in the story and asks, ‘Where are you?’ About 40 people gave their hearts to Christ.”

“There are people slipping into eternity without Jesus,” John said. “Somehow my story connects with them because it was a national tragedy so I believe God has given me a key.”

Peter K. Johnson in Teaneck, N.J.