

Thousands Saved, Healed in India

11 million people have come to Christ, and 200,000 have reported healings during Harry Gomes' crusades

Harry Gomes is convinced it was Jesus-in-the-flesh who appeared to him one desolate night in southern India more than 20 years ago. He doubts anything else could have transformed a poor and desperate Hindu-turned-atheist into one of India's most prominent healing evangelists, who has seen millions come to Christ during crusades.

Since the mid-1990s, Gomes has held nearly 200 crusades throughout India, where he said more than 11 million have accepted Christ and 200,000 have been healed of migraines, asthma, paralysis, psoriasis, arthritis, blindness and other medical conditions. He said five people have been raised from the dead.

"I know it would sound weird in this age, but I don't think anyone who has had miracles happen in their lives would be surprised," he said.

Gomes said Yanam, a girl from a village in the southern Indian state of Pondicherry, had died of meningitis when she was brought to him. He said he prayed continuously for hours that she would be revived. "The girl woke up as if from a sleep and for many days people in my town kept talking about it," he said.

Although Gomes is not shocked by the miraculous today, he once doubted God even existed. When Gomes was a child, his mother

hoped her son would come to salvation. But her method of ensuring it was to scribble the name of the Hindu god Rama 10 million times in many notebooks.

When she completed the Hindu ritual, the 24-year-old mother swallowed poison and died right in front of 8-year-old Gomes, believing her son had been redeemed. Poor and unsupported, Gomes eventually adopted an atheistic worldview.

After attending college on an athletic scholarship, Gomes earned a master's degree in business management and pursued various business ventures. But he was soon more than \$3 million in debt.

He then contracted leukoderma, a skin disease that covers the body with white splotches, and began seriously contemplating suicide. In a state of pure desperation one night in 1983, Gomes suddenly saw a stranger sitting on his bed.

He said he slid under the blanket and lay there, praying. He thought Satan had come for him, the memory of his mother's suicide fresh in his mind. "I just lay there without even the courage to raise my voice," he said. "I hadn't read the Bible before or even seen any paintings of Jesus."

He said the man on his bed told him: " 'I am Jesus. I know your troubled heart. Don't worry, I will restore you.'" The presence of Jesus, Gomes said, "made me cry like a child."

After the experience, he said God told him to begin a chemical technology company, which quickly prospered and helped pay off his debt. In 1992 Gomes was filled with the Holy Spirit and completely healed of his skin disease.

In 1993 Gomes began his own ministry with some friends and relatives in the southern Indian city of Coimbatore. Funds came from donations and from selling off his business. Week after week, the outreach grew. "But I still was inside, a withdrawn person. I cried a lot in private. And I prayed to resolve [the pain]," he said.

During the 1990s, Gomes said, God brought him emotional healing and caused the small ministry to grow. Today it consists of a thriving church, a missionary-sending Bible school, an orphanage and healing crusades, which consist of five nights of 45-minute messages followed by intense prayer.

"It's Jesus who does the healing," he said. "We only need to believe and pray."

During crusades, Gomes doesn't touch anyone. He kneels down and prays, and within a half-hour people begin sharing testimonies of healing. Gomes said some people see miracle after miracle yet don't believe, which can produce resentment.

"In Warangal [eastern India], a guy came to hit on my face while I was preaching," Gomes recalled. "Angry organizers held him down, but I asked them to let him go at peace."

Gomes said that night the man was plagued with guilt for his actions, and the next day he returned to the crusade to repent. He now helps organize Gomes' crusades, traveling to cities beforehand to distribute pamphlets to homes within a six-mile radius of the venue.

In 2002, Gomes launched Harvest India Bible College (). Two years later he opened up Home of Hope orphanage after he said

God told him: "Every orphan child must be raised up as a missionary." The orphanage now cares for 100 children who have no home or are from broken homes.

Gomes' wife, Dillies, serves as a tutor at the Bible college and helps with the ministry's administration. Their daughter, Tejasve, is a post-graduate business student and their son, Shaswi, is in high school.

A long-term vision of Gomes' ministry is to see the once-hopeless orphans from Home of Hope eventually receive their three years of theology education at his Harvest Bible College and be sent out into ministry. Currently there are about 500 part-time and full-time students enrolled.

"Deep in their hearts people should enjoy health, peace and true joy of life through His Word," Gomes said. "That's the vision of my mission."

Vidyadar Sreeprasad in Tamil Nadu, India