

Indian Apostolic Leader R. Joseph Skinner Passes Away

Dr. R. Joseph (Ryntathiang) Skinner, beloved pastor and apostolic leader in Northeast India, was buried in his home city of Shillong this past week with thousands attending the outdoor ceremony.

What an incredible friend, brother, and follower of Jesus he was to Sue and me, whom we knew as "Joseph." He was a true apostle of God, but was too much like Jesus to ever tout himself as such. God used him powerfully to impact the church in India and beyond. He stayed in our home on numerous occasions and we would always awaken to fervent prayers and cries to God coming from his room.

The most powerful missions sermon I ever heard, he preached to our congregation in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, in which he talked about Jesus being the first cross-cultural missionary, and how He left the comforts of heaven and His status as God to come to lowly, fallen humanity. He then challenged us to be cross-cultural missionaries, willing to leave our comfortable cultural surroundings to tell people not like us about Jesus and what He has done for them.

Skinner practiced what he preached and taught the 400-plus churches and several Bible schools over which he had oversight, to target unreached people groups in Asia and send missionaries to those unreached people.

On one occasion he received a deep burden and concern for the people of the state of Punjab. Not knowing of a single Christian congregation in that Sikh-dominated state, he boarded a train with only the name of a Punjabi Christian he had met 20 years before, but with no address. Trusting God to lead him, he disembarked in a certain Punjabi city and walked

along the street asking God to lead him.

As he passed a certain house he felt an inner prompting to knock on the door. A man answered the door and Joseph asked, "Do you know ... " and mentioned the name of the man he had met 20 years before. The man answered, "He is my son and I can take you to him."

As a result of that Spirit-led visit, and other follow-up visits, there are today hundreds—maybe thousands—of house churches throughout the state of Punjab.

I never knew a person of such sterling character and integrity in life and ministry. The ministry he oversaw, The Assembly Church of Jesus Christ of India, also operates a Christian academy with more than 2,000 students and a four-year Christian liberal arts college fully accredited by the Indian government. They also operate an orphanage for girls and one for boys, as well as several Schools of Ministry.

In spite of all the ministry activity, I never received a fundraising letter or an appeal for money during the 35 years I knew him. But on more than one occasion he gave personal offerings to us as well as offerings into our ministry.

He was small in stature, but a spiritual giant. I pray that his spirit of unpretentious humility and radical dependence on God will be carried on by the younger generation in India. I pray also that we Christians in America will humble ourselves and realize that we can learn much from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world.