

This Biblical Illness Incapacitates the Poor, Leaving Them Gnarled and Limp

Gospel for Asia (GFA)-supported missionaries and workers will reach out with food, clothing and medical aid on Jan. 31, World Leprosy Day, to more than 4,000 sufferers in 63 leprosy colonies, highlighting the plight of those suffering from this brutal, but highly treatable disease.

“Typically, it is the poor who suffer most often from the effects of this illness—the clawed hands, the damaged vision, the lost tissue, the permanent limp from damaged feet,” said K.P. Yohannan, founder and international director of Gospel for Asia. “World Leprosy Day underscores the need to eradicate this terrible disease, while at the same time bringing comfort to those afflicted in the name of Jesus.”

Leprosy, a disease known since biblical times, still exists in small population pockets throughout the world, even though effective treatment is available for free through the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the WHO, approximately 180,000 people worldwide suffered from leprosy in the first quarter of 2014, the last year for which statistics are available. An estimated 50 children a day are diagnosed with the disease.

World Leprosy Day commemorates the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi’s death, who was a lifelong advocate for victims of leprosy. It is celebrated each year on the Sunday closest to the January 30 anniversary of the Indian leader’s death.

Gospel for Asia-supported missionaries and workers frequently participate in World Leprosy Day activities and work year-round to serve those who suffer with the disease. Last year, GFA-supported volunteers distributed blankets and food at

leprosy colonies and to leprosy sufferers around railroad stations. As part of their continuing ministry to leprosy victims, several volunteers at a colony in Lucknow helped leprosy sufferers receive sandals that would accommodate the ravages of their illness.

This year Gospel for Asia will expand beyond last year's efforts to bring blankets, food and medicine to leprosy colonies in northern, eastern and western India. They will be ministering in colonies in West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

People who minister to those with leprosy are often aiding people who have been shunned because of the disfigurements brought on by the disease. One female sufferer told GFA-supported volunteers, "When I would go to the hospital for a checkup, doctors used to throw the medicine [at me] [on the floor so they wouldn't have to touch me]. I don't know whom you are worshipping, but He is a loving God."

"Leprosy can easily be treated in today's modern world. Unfortunately, for those living in remote areas and without access to basic medical care, it continues to spread," said Yohannan. "As long as leprosy exists, we must obey Christ's command to comfort the afflicted and minister to them as His hands and feet."