

A Mother's Prayer: 'O God, Let One of My Sons Preach'

How I became a part of the astonishing spiritual renewal in Asia all began with the prayers of a simple village mother.

Achyamma's eyes stung with salty tears. But they were not from the cooking fire or the hot spices that wafted up from the pan. She realized time was short. Her six sons were growing beyond her influence, yet not one showed signs of going into the ministry.

Except for the youngest – little “Yohannachan” as I was known – every one of her children seemed destined for secular work. My brothers seemed content to live and work around our native village of Niranam in Kerala, South India.

“O God,” she prayed in despair, “let just one of my boys preach!” Like Hannah and so many other saintly mothers in the Bible, my mother had dedicated her children to the Lord. That morning, while preparing breakfast, she vowed to fast secretly until God called one of her sons into His service. Every Friday for the next three and a half years, she fasted. Her prayer was always the same.

But nothing happened. Finally, only I, scrawny and little – the baby of the family – was left. There seemed little chance I would preach. Although I had stood up in an evangelistic meeting at age 8, I was shy and timid and kept my faith mostly to myself.

I showed no leadership skills and avoided sports and school functions. I was comfortable on the edge of village and family life, a shadowy figure who moved in and out of the scene almost unnoticed.

A Welcome Wake-Up Call

Then, when I was 16, my mother's prayers were answered. A visiting missionary team from Operation Mobilization came to our church to present the challenge of faraway North India. My 90-pound frame strained to catch every word as the team spoke and showed slides of the North.

They told of stonings and beatings they received while preaching Christ in the non-Christian villages of North India. Sheltered from contact with the rest of India by the high peaks of the Western Ghats, the lush jungles of Kerala on the Malabar Coast were all I knew of my homeland. And the Malabar Coast had long nourished India's oldest Christian community, begun when the flourishing sea trade with the Persian Gulf made it possible for St. Thomas to introduce Jesus Christ at nearby Cranganore in A.D. 52.

Other Jews already were there, having arrived 200 years earlier. The rest of India seemed an ocean away to the Malayalam-speaking people of the southwest coast, and I was no exception.

As the missionary team explained the desperately poor condition of the subcontinent – tens of thousands of villages without any hope – I felt a strange sorrow for them. That day I vowed to help bring the love of Jesus Christ to those mysterious states to the North. At the challenge to “forsake all and follow Christ,” I somewhat rashly took the leap, agreeing to join the student group for a short summer crusade in needy parts of North India.

My decision to go into the ministry largely resulted from my mother's faithful prayers. Although I still had not received what I later understood to be my real call from the Lord, my mother encouraged me to follow my heart in the matter. When I announced my decision, she wordlessly handed over 25 rupees – enough for my train ticket. I set off to apply to the mission's headquarters in Trivandrum. {eo}

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