

# **HANDS THAT HOLD THE WORLD**

**THE TESTIMONY OF  
DR. M.A. "PAPA" THOMAS OF INDIA**



**BY DR. M.A. THOMAS AND  
JULIE FERWERDA**



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**Papa's faithful heart and loving hands have touched many lives and ministries worldwide...**

“The spiritual and physical needs in India are so enormous; it can be difficult to know where to start in trying to address them. M.A. Thomas and his son, Samuel Thomas, President of Hopegivers International, have not just made a start—they and those working with them are making a difference. This is especially the case in the lives of orphaned and abandoned kids who, by the grace of God and as a result of their ministry, can one day become a multitude of evangelists and church planters for Christ's glory. I encourage you to pray and become involved in the arrow process as God leads you.”

—**Franklin Graham**  
**President and CEO, BGEA and Samaritan's Purse**

“M.A. Thomas has an amazing heart for missions. This book clutches the hearts of those who would never even consider supporting a missions' cause. Founder of Hopegivers International and Emmanuel Ministries International, he has birthed a spectacular vision for reaching the lost in Asia.”

—**Ron Luce**  
**President and Founder, Teen Mania Ministries**

“I consider Dr. M.A. Thomas to be the George Mueller of our generation. His faith has changed the future of India and all of Asia. Our statistics are inadequate to tell the story—only eternity will reveal what God has done through this great man. My greatest blessing from this spiritual giant is more personal. When I was diagnosed with cancer and sidelined from active ministry and preaching, many ‘friends’ never called. My dear brother M.A. Thomas called on a regular basis to pray with and encourage me. There is no way to express what this meant to me.”

—**Ron Herrod**  
**Founder, R.H.E.M.A. International**  
**President, Southern Baptist Evangelist Conference 2008-2010**

“I have served the Lord for thirty years now in the world of missions, especially in North India, and I know for sure M.A. Thomas is irreplaceable. I got to know him more during my ten years with Gospel for Asia as its General Director. What the apostle Thomas was to the state of Kerala two thousand years ago, M.A. Thomas has been to Rajasthan in our times. In millenniums no one impacted Rajasthan for Christ like M.A. Thomas. He is an authentic missions leader whose love for the lost has refreshed the Rajasthanies like streams in the desert for half a century now. He is intensely passionate in his devotion to Christ, supremely sacrificial in his commitment to the lost, and very generous in his love for everybody.”

—**Ebenezer Samuel**  
**President, Serve India Ministries**

“I do not know of any other individual who has done more for Christ since the days of the Apostles than M.A. Thomas. His heart is always concerned with his orphans, several generations of whom have lovingly called him ‘Papa.’ From the first abandoned children taken into his own home some 40 years ago, to the tiniest baby of a prostitute today, his heart still weeps over the broken, the lost, the dying, the unloved, and the unlovely. He calls these ‘throw-away’ children ‘God's Orphan Army,’ and God has honored his faithfulness by saving tens of thousands of them who, in turn, have affected tens of thousands more lives through their lives and witness. M.A. Thomas has said, ‘Give me one million orphans and I will give you India for Christ.’ That has been his dream, his vision, and his passion for over 40 years. He has never wavered from his calling and vision to win one million souls for Christ. I consider it one of the great blessings of my past 88 years to count M.A. Thomas not only as a brother in Christ, but also as a very dear friend who shares my passion for the Word of God and for the lost.”

—**Dr. John A. Hash**  
**Founder & President Bible Pathway Ministries International and**  
**International Bible Reading Association**

“Dr. Thomas has battled bereavement, health problems, loneliness, want, poverty, and lack of resources, yet he has remained a tower of strength for his Lord. Not many have suffered this much, yet brought great heights for the Church in India and the spread of the Gospel so that men and women, and boys and girls, would be brought to the saving knowledge of the Lord. God bless Dr. M.A. Thomas, his family, and his beloved mission.”

—**Prof. Dr. James Thomas**  
**Vice Chancellor & Professor of Cardiac Surgery**  
**Padmashree Dr. D. Y. Patil University, Nerul, Navi Mumbai, India**  
**R.H.E.M.A. International**

“M.A. Thomas is a wonderful man, and my first and lasting impression of him is that he has changed the world for many people (especially orphans) because he is God’s man. He has allowed God to use him in India to minister to those that the world would forget. I have not met many men like him and feel exceedingly blessed that God put him in my path. He will continue to be used by God until he goes to be with our Savior in heaven.”

—**Don Burdsall**  
**The Boaz Project, Inc.**

“With great diligence, Dr. Thomas has assisted us in getting our *Sword of the Lord* newspaper into the hands of many hundreds of Christian workers for so many years. His vision for them to be Biblically sound and evangelistically fruitful has always been evident. We are grateful for this labor together.”

—**Dr. Shelton L. Smith**  
**Editor, Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, TN**

“I came to know M.A. Thomas through Hindustan Bible Institute, and Inter-Mission started sponsoring his first orphanage in the seventies. We embraced his vision and started sponsoring Bible students as well. My first impression was that he is an outstanding evangelist, with much faith and a great concern for the lost and the poor. He was always cooperating with us and the vision of Inter-Mission to include orphanages in the mission outreach enlarged his own vision. Later his vision for orphans became bigger and bigger, exceeding the number of children by far from what Inter-Mission could sponsor. It made an impact on countless Christians all over the world who started sponsoring [children]. A pioneer in India without equal!”

—**Jochen Tewes**  
**President of Inter-Mission Industrial Development Association**

“The Bible Society of India and North West India Auxiliary in particular, have had the privilege to partner with Dr. M.A. Thomas and E.B.I. (Emmanuel Bible Institute) in Kota for many years. Dr. Thomas is making Christ known to the people of Rajasthan, so that the desert will ‘blossom’ and ‘living water’ shall flow out of the lives changed and transformed by the Gospel. Dr. Thomas has shown courage in the face of persecution and affliction with fortitude and joy of the Holy Spirit. We thank God for his dedicated life and mission throughout our nation.”

—**Richard G. Khan**  
**Auxiliary Secretary, Bible Society of India**

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## Introduction

Welcome to a peek into the heart, thoughts, and life of a man who has changed the world.

A prolific writer, this book is mostly “written” by M.A. Thomas, though edited and pieced together from his weekly updates and sermon notes over the course of the last two years, as well as his personal journals. Otherwise, all of the quotes and facts in his testimony, as well as the testimonies of “his children,” were taken in interview form during one of three trips I made to India between February 2007 and September 2008. As much as possible, I printed the Bible version that he actually used in his notes, and otherwise the version is stated.

For those of you who know Dr. Thomas personally, I have preserved his “voice” and wording as much as possible so that you might actually hear him speaking to you. What joy to hear his voice in our thoughts! Also, you will note that throughout the book, I refer to him as “Papa.” Dr. Thomas is known simply as Papa to his children and many of us like myself who hold him dear and love him like a father.

This is a book of “types.” We are going to look at the ways M.A. Thomas is similar to many individuals in Scripture, which is how the book is organized. You will note that each chapter indicates at the beginning who is the primary writer (me or M.A. “Papa”), and in the chapters written by him, you will find an occasional “Narrator” insert when necessary for flow or clarification.

M.A. Thomas’ life is an open book. I believe your life will truly be touched and blessed by this man as you follow his spiritual journey. I pray you will come to feel as if his hands—and especially his heart—have reached so far into your world that you too can come to embrace him as “Papa.”



**As for the godly who are in the land,  
They are the excellent, the noble, and the glorious,  
In whom is all my delight.**

**Psalm 16:3 (Amplified)**

Prayer for My Grandfather

Sheena Elizabeth Sam

April 21, 2008

Dear Heavenly Father, kindly hear my grace;  
Bless my Grandfather with Your sweet embrace.  
In the palms of Thy hands, engrave his splendid name;  
Among the farthest lands, multiply his humble fame.  
Bear him up in Your arms, let not his foot dash against a stone;  
Never give him any harm, let not Grandpa feel alone.  
Set Your love upon him, 'cause he hath known Your name;  
With long life satisfy him; let him never be ashamed.  
Please be his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble;  
Be a guard in his day's length, let his joy become double.  
Preserve his going out, and his coming in;  
Let him be called "blessed," guide his heart within.

## Chapter 1: Hands that Hold India

*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Matthew 10:8 (NKJV)*

### **Julie writes...**

Papa's hands. The soft, smooth texture of the coffee-colored hands, holding mine in prayer as we sat cross-legged on the cool wood-surfaced floor, belied the many years of hard living. It was a life changing experience for me, being in India for the first time, especially with someone like "Papa." I naturally felt humbled and a bit too earthly, holding the hands of the man who had touched and changed the lives of countless "untouchables" during his lifetime—lepers, widows, orphans, sick, poor, dying—all with these same soft, gentle hands. It was totally, insanely the most unlikely place I could have been at the moment, but it also warmed me like a little beam of light streaming down from a crack in the window of heaven.

I had never been out of the Western Hemisphere before, hardly even out of the U.S., but here I was, in Kota, India, in February 2007. It was a rather frightening yet exciting opportunity that began with an unexpected invitation to visit this cacophony of culture, color, and socio-economic conditions in order to teach at a writers' conference. But when my plans changed, after I'd already purchased my plane ticket, some bizarre circumstances brought about a chance for me to visit Emmanuel Ministries International to see the work I'd heard so much about.

My first day in Kota, I was surprised and delighted to be invited to the office of the founder of this Christian ministry, one of the largest in India. As soon as I saw the tall, smiling frame of Dr. M.A. Thomas standing to greet me behind his desk—over six feet tall—I instantly knew there was something very special about him. "Julie," the warmth in the voice was unmistakable as he invited me in to sit down in the pleasant yet modest wood paneled room. Both desk and walls were covered with framed pictures of loved ones and meaningful verses—too many to take in all at once. "It is so nice to meet you," his big white smile flashed through graying beard.

I was a little nervous, wondering what I could possibly say that would sound halfway intelligent to this seemingly larger than life figure whom I knew so little about. I'd recently learned from others that he had greatly influenced India through his extensive and widespread ministries to the downtrodden. The Padma Shri Award (one of the highest Indian civilian

awards) for humanitarian contribution, the Mahatma Gandhi Award for his work with the needy, and his Mother Teresa Award for social justice bore the proof of his deep love and committed service to his countrymen. Most political and ministry leaders within India are quite familiar with M.A. Thomas, and I wondered if all that notoriety and influence had gone to his head. I waited, expecting him to begin our meeting by talking about his ministry and accomplishments.

After offering me a cup of chai he smiled and said, “Tell me all about yourself.”

It didn’t take long to figure out that M.A. Thomas, now in his early seventies and known as “Papa” to many thousands throughout India and even the world, was anything but preoccupied with himself. He wanted to know how was I, how was my family, what did I do for a living, what brought me to India, and *how could he serve me* for the purpose in which I came. All of this regardless of the fact that he has many awards, employees, responsibilities, health struggles, and pressing concerns of his own. In just a few moments of conversation, I found him to be a simple, warm, unhurried man, who was genuinely interested in others.

After many disappointing observations of the territorial behaviors and self-promoting attitudes of certain ministry leaders, I still found my skeptical nature zeroed in for inconsistencies, pride, or hidden agendas that first day. But I found only genuine humility and caring concern in every way M.A. Thomas conducted himself, both with me and the many others who interrupted him periodically with pressing matters, namely travel-weary pastors and flitting secretaries. He even took time out of our conversation to stop and pray with one of his pastors, right in front of me. I could tell that for both he and his village pastor, kneeling down in front of his desk—shoes off—was a practice as natural as breathing for both of them. My heart instantly warmed. Of course I was totally curious as to the nature of the urgent prayer session, but unfortunately all I heard was what I guessed to be in Hindi.

We carried on with talk about the ministry, me having a hundred questions as to the scope of the work, and he answering each one with childlike excitement, still displaying a fresh passion about his lifelong calling. Not one to be shy, I eventually decided to pop the question. “So, how do you reject the temptation for pride, especially with all you’ve accomplished and all the awards you’ve received?”

“I’m *commanded* to be humble—*it is my duty!*” his booming tone caught me by surprise. “After receiving the Padma Shri, one of my fellow laborers asked, ‘Brother Thomas, why are you going for more ministry after this? Why are you so greedy for all these rewards? The

rewards you are going to receive in heaven for the work you have already done is more than sufficient for you.’

“I told him, ‘Son, from the beginning until today, I never did any work for a reward, neither for here or for heaven.’

“When the President of India gave me this award at his house, I said, ‘Sir, I don’t know why you have chosen me—you made a mistake. I’m the least person to receive it because there are so many learned, great, sacrificial people, serving the Lord in a tremendous way...but I’m not going to return it!’” At this he erupted in a loud, endearing chuckle. It was all the more reason to feel put at ease in my completely unfamiliar surroundings.

“I have no reason to be proud of myself,” he continued. “You tell me one thing I should be proud of. I don’t have good health...”

“You apparently have faithfulness.”

“Faithfulness should not be a matter for pride, it is a product of character. I don’t think there is anything that is in me that I should be proud of...except maybe my old age.”

As we concluded our visit that first day, something inside me stirred. I somehow sensed that this was indeed a special, even divine opportunity, but just where it would lead, I had no idea. As I rose to leave his office, thanking him for his time, M.A. Thomas beamed another smile and said in his thick Indian accent, “Yeeeessss, Julieeee! Please come and see me any time—*any time*—while you are here in Kota. My door is always open.” Wow, a man and father figure over one of the largest ministries in India, meeting a nobody like me for the first time, and freely offering *more* of his precious time? I had a hard time imagining any American ministry leaders in the same light. Well, maybe Billy Graham.

It’s hard to put into words the warm blanket of goodness and tenderness that one feels upon first meeting M.A. Thomas. It’s more than the conversation or the laughter. It’s something deeper, richer, and discerned only in the silence of the spirit. Though I was a total stranger from a completely different culture, I felt peculiarly special and important to him—*loved even*—after only one brief encounter. These days, I know that’s exactly the way he makes everyone feel.

From that moment on, referring to this new stranger as “Papa,” seemed as natural as calling home. Leaving his office that day, I thought to myself, then and many times since, hanging out with Papa must be a little bit like being with Jesus.

## **Morning Devotions from Heaven**

Papa told me in the course of conversation that he gets up early every morning to have his prayer and Bible reading time—often lasting for two or three hours. When I awakened the next morning at 6:00, my opportunistic nature compelled me to want to take Papa up on his offer by going to see if I might have a morning devotion with him. But I also felt a little weird. What would he think? Would I be detracting from his sacred time with God? Was it appropriate in Indian culture for me to crash his early morning routine and would he be offended? All of these fears tried to keep me away, but compulsion and curiosity quite easily won out in the end. After all, it's not every day you come to India and meet a world-changer. It's not every day you might get a peek at how such a man of God spends his time in the Word and prayer. If I didn't take this opportunity now, it would be gone forever. Timidly, I knocked on his sitting room door and announced myself.

“Yeeeesss, Julie! Please come in and sit down.” Papa sat on a mat on the hard floor, Indian style, with his Bible and notebook in front of him, sipping on a cup of chai.

I can't describe the special time we had together that morning, praying and sharing from the Bible over Indian tea. Some things on this earth are too meaningful for words. But I knew without a doubt afterwards that he was the real deal. His love for God was unquestionably authentic.

And now, on this certain special morning 12,000 miles from home, sitting with our Bibles spread out before us on Papa's floor, all I wanted to do was to spend as much time with him as possible, finding out everything I could about this amazing man of God who has changed the course of history.

## **Miracle Birth of Samuel**

## Chapter 2: Saved by a Toe

*[Hannah] made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life..." 1 Samuel 1:11 (NASB)*

### **Julie writes...**

On October 14, 2008, Papa sent this email to his friends scattered throughout the world:

*Thank you for wishing me Happy 73<sup>rd</sup> Birthday today. Already I have received a few hundred happy birthday messages before 6:00 a.m. Seventy-three years back in 1935, the day of my birth, was not a happy day. My mother told me that it was a day of tears and sorrow...*

### **Saved by a Toe**

M.A. Thomas was born into a poverty-stricken family in the village of Kuzhikala in the state of Kerala, South India, on October 14, 1935. His parents, Abraham and Elizabeth, were so joyful when they discovered they were going to have another baby after their first child, a little girl, had been stillborn. So when his mother conceived the second time, she frequently left the chaotic house where nine family members crammed into two rooms, and headed out to sit in the quiet of the family-owned farm. There she prayed for hours at a time, often with tears, "Lord, if you give us a healthy son, we will dedicate him for your service."

Maybe her lengthy desperate prayers for a healthy son seem a little over the top, but in India, where sons are depended upon to provide for the parents in their old age, having a son is not just a matter of preference, but also a matter of survival. Add to that the widespread problems among the poverty-stricken such as malnutrition and disease, and her prayers were not unfounded. In fact, in these early years, her husband Abraham had nearly died from a battle with tuberculosis, but the Lord had miraculously healed him.

Finally the wonderful day arrived and the baby boy—the son of her joy—was born. It seemed as if a mother's heartfelt prayers were finally answered. But Elizabeth's joy instantly turned to despair when the midwife announced shortly after his birth that this baby, like his sister before, was also stillborn. Sorrow and weeping filled every corner of the house as the lifeless infant was wrapped up in a blanket before his mother could even see him and was taken to another room where he awaited burial.

In the mean time, Papa's uncles went out to the yard to dig a grave. Just before they took the baby out, the mother demanded to see her son. In her heart, she refused to believe that God had taken the son that she had wholeheartedly dedicated to His service. *Lord, you heard my prayers and gave me a son. Now my prayer is this. You raised Lazarus from the grave after four days. My son is now just born and is declared dead. Please, raise my son, too.*

Holding his cool form in her arms, she gazed over his perfectly formed body, watching and waiting for hands from Heaven to reach down to give her a miracle. Suddenly a movement caught her eye. "Look!" she shouted. "Praise God! He's not dead...his big toe is moving!" At this she grabbed her child and warmed him up against her body, the house filling with her shouts and laughter.

And so it was that the baby boy, saved by one wiggling big toe, found a place in this world, a miracle baby from the start. I asked Papa once how long it took for all this to transpire.

"How long had I been dead? I don't remember," Papa said, chuckling. "I praise God that He had a plan for my life. Including my birth, I have faced so many challenges and near death experiences throughout my life. When people threaten to kill me, I just say, 'Man, I was already born dead, and now my life is a new one. God has permitted me to live this many years and I'm so happy. Your words don't threaten me. Why should I fear death after seventy-three years of facing it?'"

After a couple weeks, Papa's parents decided it was finally time to name him, but they couldn't decide on what. Papa says, "When the priest asked what my parents wanted to call me, they said, '*Kuman.*'"

"The priest said, 'That is such an old name. Why don't you use a different name?'"

"We don't know what name to use. Why don't you give him a name?"

"So the priest thought for a while and said, 'Let him have my name—*Thomas.*'"

"Whether it is a doubting Thomas or a believing Thomas, I do not know. But that is how I got the name Thomas, and Abraham is my father's name."

Papa's full name is indeed a little tricky to spell, and surely a pain to write out on applications or legal documents! *Mullanakuzhiyil Abraham Thomas.*

For parents who have trouble conceiving children, Papa has a few words of encouragement: "Many people don't know whether we can pray for a child even before he or she is born, or whether we can call upon God for His mercy to give us children. See, the Bible is full

of incidents like that: Hannah cried and prayed unto the Lord for a son continuously; Elizabeth and her husband, Zacharias, prayed for the same; and Abraham and Sarah did the same when they were past child bearing years. And God blessed all their prayers.

“I still remember how God blessed us with two daughters, Elizabeth and Mary. After that, we couldn’t have children for five or six years, but my wife especially prayed earnestly for a son. She would tell me, ‘Kneel down and pray with me.’ So we prayed together an age-old prayer handed down for many generations, ‘Lord, if you give us a son, we will give him for Your service.’ And when God gave us a son, we also called him Samuel, and we praised God.

“It is my desire that all Christian couples and parents should pray together and ask for God’s blessings through a godly lineage. We must also be ready to dedicate our child, especially the eldest one, for the service of the Lord.

“Now, many people ask the question, ‘Will the child be willing for it?’

“See, it all depends on your prayer, your commitment, and your decision. I praise God that He answered my mother and father’s prayer, and called me for His work. And then I too dedicated my eldest child, and I’m so glad that she also is in the service of the Lord. I also dedicated our son, asking that he be made in perfect submission and that he would desire to be God’s servant. I am so happy all three of my children are serving the Lord as Christian parents.

“As parents, this was our greatest desire and commitment, to see all of our children serving the Lord. See, if God could remember the promise that Hannah made, and Elizabeth made, and Sarah made, and many other godly people have made, and use their children in such great ways, we must also be willing for that.”

### **Blame it on the Cat**

Growing up in poverty, Papa only remembers getting a full stomach when he attended weddings and occasional holiday events. Tapioca was the main daily fare, and most of the other produce they raised on their acre of land—coconut, peppers, jackfruit, yams, and bananas—went for income. Luckily, Papa discovered a tasty little treat from the banana tree flower that staved off hunger pangs.

“I’d go the neighbor’s house and break it off and say it was for ‘the cat.’ Then I’d bring it home, boil it, and eat it. The neighbor didn’t realize that the hungry cat was named *Thomas*. These days the banana flower is a real delicacy, good for kidney stones, ulcers, and other things. But in those days, only the cat knew about it.”

You'd never think a young boy struggling to survive in extreme poverty would demonstrate selfless compassion for practically every suffering person he met, which were a dime a dozen in his village, but his empathy for others in need grew stronger with each passing year. Even when his own needs were greater, he often gave whatever he could to help them out.

If he went to bed hungry and then was lucky enough to get a sack lunch of rice and vegetables the next day, he shared it with others at school who didn't have anything to eat. Though he only owned one pair of clothes, he happily offered the shirt off his back when he met someone who couldn't afford one. His childhood was spent running to school so as not to burn his bare feet on the hot roads. Years later he remembered that feel of burning feet and gave away the best shoes he'd ever owned to a shoeless leper he met on the street.

"God created compassion in my heart," Papa says. "It has always been there—since I was a child. As an example, I used to go fishing every day before school. As I caught fish, I would give them to anybody standing there because I knew they were hungry. This was the grace of God and no credit to myself, because compassion and generosity were born in me."

Besides sharing his meager possessions, his food, and his fresh catch of the day, on weekends he helped build huts for other poor people. When his chores were done at home, he often spent time helping out in other people's fields.

Unfortunately, there wasn't much Papa could do to improve his hunger situation. "In Kerala, our family was considered very honorable and respectable and that was a problem. That means that even in our neighborhood, nobody knew we faced starvation. Nobody knew. In our Indian custom, when you are in a respectable family like ours, it shameful to go and work as a laborer. So on Saturdays, I wasn't allowed to go find work or to go begging, because those were below our dignity. And I couldn't go and steal because my father was a preacher. The only thing left was to starve or to find banana flowers for the cat."

I once asked Papa, when he got tickled at his own joke for the umpteenth time, where he got his sense of humor. He said, "By my nature, I am a happy person and always have been—even as a boy. Early in the morning we had family prayer time. We'd sit together and sing at the tops of our voices. Then immediately, I'd go fishing before school, singing and running along the way. Then all the people in the neighborhood would hear me and say, 'Oh yes, the boy is up!' In later years at Bible College I was the same. When the president of the college, Dr. Gupta, would

introduce me to people at school or to his friends, he would say, ‘You remember that fellow running around here and there, singing, laughing, and making a commotion? That is Thomas.’”

### **Lessons from a Loving Dad**

Papa’s father (lovingly called “Appachan” by close friends and family) was a disciplinarian, but Papa remembers him as being better than any typical father he knew. He often spent time sitting, eating, and talking with his family. Even in Indian custom where the daughter-in-law never eats with their father-in-law, Appachan was always happy to have the whole family sit and eat together.

When Papa was young, he remembers his Dad as being a great teacher. “He used to ask me to be in charge of keeping the extra household money. One day I said, ‘Dad, why are you trusting me with the money? Don’t you know we are poor people and I am a young man? Don’t you think I’ll be tempted by this responsibility?’

“My father answered, ‘That is why I do it. I want to see if you’ll be faithful or not.’”

Appachan also gave his son the approval he desperately needed yet lacked from others. Papa remembers being humiliated each month when it was time to pay his school fees. He was usually singled out and sent home until he could borrow the money from someone, which meant that he missed his share of school. When he failed seventh grade, his uncles made a big scene, belittling him and pressuring his Dad to take him out of school and send him to work to help support the family. But Appachan, ever-encouraging toward his son, was quick to reply, “If my son fails the seventh grade for ten years, but he still wants to go to school, I will send him even if it means I have to sell my land for his education.”

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Since childhood, Papa had a longing deep in his heart to connect with his Creator. Living with some relatives temporarily to alleviate the financial burden on his parents, he discovered that out of seven uncles, not one of them went to church or “delighted themselves in the Lord.” So he and a cousin got themselves ready every week, and walked a couple miles to Sunday school and church. “Even though I received no encouragement from those family members, God put it in my heart to go to church.”

Sunday’s at home were quite different, however. The Sabbath was decisively for keeping “holy,” lest one incur a harsh sentence. Papa discovered this the hard way. “When I got into trouble, it usually had to do with fishing. One time on my way home from church, the water was

overflowing the banks of the river because it was the rainy season. And man, there were so many fish, and people were catching them. I was so excited; I jumped in and caught more fish than anyone else, even with my bare hands. When I brought the fish home, my Dad was so angry. He said, ‘Why did you fish on the Sabbath?’

“The signs of his shaping process are still on my legs! The discipline he gave me was hard, but I praise God for his training and making me into a straight arrow for God.”

**Looking Back on October 14, 2008, Papa wrote to his friends...**

*In the past seventy-three years since the day of my birth, the shadow of death has come near me many times, but the Lord enabled me to see my birthday for another year. Let me give the words from Psalm 16:8-11 that were brought to my attention on this most happy day:*

*“I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory [my inner self] rejoices; my body too shall rest and confidently dwell in safety, For You will not abandon me to Sheol (the place of the dead), neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (AMP).*

*I praise God that He has enabled me to see the path of life and to learn the secret of the fullness of joy. I praise God he permitted me to live seventy-three years to experience the path of the fullness of joy.*

*If you want inner joy and hope in your heart, if you want the stability that God offers, set the Lord always before you and keep Him at your right hand. Only then will you never be moved. If you want God’s companionship and escape from corruption, keep the Lord always before you and keep him on your right hand. This is what I want to do the rest of my days.*

*Praise the Lord for this beautiful word He has given to me on my birthday, and for the secret of joy, rest, and hope. If you are looking for a life full of purpose, joy, and pleasures, keep the Lord before you always. This is my dream and prayer for the rest of my days. May God bless you richly with all blessings and joy.*

## **Willing Spirit of Isaiah**

### Chapter 3: Lord, Send Me

*I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6:8*

#### **Julie writes...**

Papa was raised in a loving, God-fearing Christian family in a quiet village. Prayer and Bible reading were a part of the daily routine, and with the combination of his loving and compassionate nature, Papa grew up with every reason to feel secure in his relationship with God. However, there was one little problem.

Papa says, "I was living a devout religious life outwardly, but inside I knew there was evil in my heart. I lived under the bondage of constant condemnation and guilt, yet I could not blame any evil association in my life for my sin."

It was in 1956, shortly after the death of a good friend, when Papa heard a message that tugged at his heart to bring his human failures and wrongdoings and surrender his life to the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. "He saved me, a chief of sinners, and changed my life into a saint of God," Papa says. "That was the day I accepted 'The Good News which shall be for all people' into my life."

After that life-changing decision, Papa decided to go to Bible College in a city called Madras (now Chennai). It is here that he would discover the beginnings of his very special life purpose.

#### **God's Provision for Bible College**

Hindustan Bible College in 1957 had free tuition. Prospective students only had to come up with the money to travel there, which was still nothing short of miraculous for someone like Papa. But since Bible school was part of God's plan for him, his Dad came up with the money for a train ticket and sent him off at the station.

"My father gave me only twenty rupees to travel five hundred miles to Madras. So first I separated out two rupees for my tithe, and with the remaining money I purchased the train ticket. After that, I didn't have anything left in my hand for the 24-hour journey—not even enough to buy a cup of black coffee or to ride the bus from the train station to the Bible College. But I made up my mind that I would walk the three miles before I would take God's money. So I prayed, asking God to provide for my needs. Prayer was and is the number one source of power

in my life, both for my ministry and for my personal life. From the very beginning, I didn't have one resource to count on except for prayer.”

When he reached the train station in Madras, the first answer to prayer awaited Papa. His cousin was there to pick him up and take him to his home! “I was filthy with soot from the steam engine. I got to take a shower, wash my clothes, and even eat a nice meal before going to the Bible College that evening.”

On the way to the school that night, another answer to Papa's prayers happened when his uncle took him to a supply store to purchase his school supplies. In fact, though Papa didn't say one word to his uncle about what he needed for school, his uncle bought every single needed item!

“My uncle had been a Bible student once, so he knew what I needed,” Papa says. “He purchased one dozen notebooks, a bottle of ink for my fountain pen, some hair oil and soap, and a bed sheet. As we came out of the shop, he handed me ten rupees. With my eyes full of tears, I looked up to heaven and I said, ‘Thank you, Lord, for answering my prayers and providing for all my needs.’”

### **Surrendering to “The Mission”**

At twenty years old, Papa attended a special conference at the Bible College put on by an out of town guest. The guest delivered a message from Isaiah 6:8: “Whom will I send? Who will go for us?” Sitting in his chair, Papa heard the voice of the Holy Spirit within him, strongly urging him to offer his life for the mission field. That night he responded to this call, surrendering his life and future—his youthful dreams—to God.

Instead of feeling joyful or relieved at his discovery of God's calling on his near future, this newfound direction initially caused a huge burden of stress and anxiety. That's because in India, the burden of providing for a family falls on the son. Papa felt obligated to use his schooling to care for his aging parents, like every good son should. Besides, his parents had made huge sacrifices to send him to school growing up, and now to college.

“When I was going to school hungry, my parents were even hungry,” Papa says. “They made many sacrifices to send me to school, hoping they would produce an educated son who could support them someday.” That night, Papa sadly wondered how he could even consider abandoning them now.

Heading back to his room after the session, he wrestled the matter out in prayer. Finally, he gave in. “Lord, if I’m supposed to offer my life up for your work, you must take care of my family. If you promise to do that, I’ll obey your call.” As soon as he settled this matter with God, he felt deep inner peace settle over him like a soft blanket. Without a doubt, he knew right then God’s desire for him was to spend the rest of his life here on this earth, bringing the Good News of God’s love and plan for everlasting life to his own countrymen. Now, if only his dad would see it the same way...

Returning home during the next college break, he nervously approached his father with the big news, praying God would help his dad be open to the idea. As he explained the situation, his dad’s eyes filled with tears. Appachan remembered his promise to God years ago, even before his son was born. “My son, I had great ambitions in my heart that you would support the family. I had so many hopes and plans for you. But if God has called for you, you have my permission and my blessing to go and do His work.”

That obstacle removed, now all that was left to do was to finish preparing. The remainder of his days in Bible College was more about the “school of faith” than anything else. With no money of his own, and the fact that he didn’t want to rely on his parents who had sacrificed so much already, he relied solely on God’s provision for all of his expenses for school, personal items, and transportation to and from home.

*And God always provided.*

### **Shaped by Heroes of the Faith**

One of the most joyous learning experiences of Papa’s life occurred during Bible College when he discovered Christian biographies.

“When I was in Bible College, I was not a very good student and my English was poor,” Papa says. “But one thing I could understand easily was biographies. I read every biography in our college library, whether printed in English or Malayalam.” Some of Papa’s favorite biographies included people such as George Mueller, C.T. Stud, Hudson Taylor, William Carey, David Livingstone, D.L. Moody, and Adoniram Judson.

### **Papa says...**

These were all my heroes in the faith, and they helped me a lot, both then as I was preparing for the mission field, and later as I encountered many obstacles in ministry.

Reading D.L. Moody's biography, I learned about how he made up his mind that he would share the Gospel with one person every day, or at least give them a Gospel tract. So one cold winter night in Chicago, it was snowing outside and he had just gone to bed when remembered that he didn't go to share the Gospel that day. He thought to himself, "Well, tomorrow I will share the Gospel with two people."

He pulled up the blanket to go to sleep when he heard the Lord say, "Moody, you did not say that if you miss one day, you would do two the second day." So he got up, put on his overcoat and boots, and took some tracts.

Lo and behold, he saw a young man walking. So he went to the man and asked, "Good evening, sir. Where are you going?"

"Why do you care where I'm going at 11:30 at night?" The man lashed out at him in anger.

But Moody walked with him for one mile until the man was no longer angry, and then he shared the Gospel. With tears, the man prayed right there, putting his faith in Christ. Then he said to Moody, "Sir, I was going to end my life tonight. That is why I got angry with you and didn't want to answer."

When I read about that, I said to myself, "I am not going to worry about Calvinism, predestination, or any of those things. If Moody was going to share the Gospel no matter what happened to him, I will do it, too. Every day I will go out for distribution."

The next day, I took a bundle of tracts—at least 1,000 or more—and I went to a junction near our Bible College. I stood there and distributed every one of them. One young man took it from me, and stood there reading.

After I finished my distribution, I asked him, "Do you want to know more?" And he said, "Sure." So I brought him back to the Bible College. At this time, I had no idea how to do personal evangelism. Also, he spoke a different language of Tamil, and we both only knew a very few words in each other's language, not enough to communicate. Even so, I told him my testimony, and he understood!

Then I brought out a Tamil Bible. I only knew one verse about salvation in Tamil that my uncle taught me as a child. I looked up John 1:12 and asked the man to read it. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

I asked him to read it again, so he did. This happened several times and I finally asked him if he understood it and he said, “Yes.”

“What does it mean?” I asked the man.

“If I will accept Christ, I can become a son of God.”

“Would you like to do it now?”

“Oh, yes!” He was very excited. Then we both knelt down and I asked him to pray to ask Christ to come into his life. When we got off our knees, I asked him, “Do you know what happened?”

“Oh yes, sir. I became a child of God.”

Man what a great joy came into my heart. I was shouting, screaming, and yelling, “Halleluiah! Praise the Lord!” And that was one of the happiest occasions of my life.

So you see, though I am a shy person, I always found great joy in doing personal evangelism and giving out the Gospel. That is the reason that, ever since then, I keep Gospel tracts with me everywhere I go.

**Julie writes...**

While Papa attended Bible College, he was not very interested in Bible doctrine. Even though he had to take theology classes for all three years at Hindustan Bible Institute, and he even had the highest grade in the class, he admits now that he didn't even know what theology was.

“I was purely an evangelist,” Papa says. “When I was invited by people to preach, I always preached the Gospel, never doctrine. At that time, I thought theology meant something super-spiritual and mysterious. I was sure you'd have to be a philosopher or a serious theologian to study it. Then when I came to Kota, I purchased a systematic theology book and learned that theology means only, ‘Study of God.’ Man, I never knew this for three years of Bible school. Nobody told me.”

Following this epiphany, Papa became very interested in learning Biblical theology. After several years of study, he even wrote a layman's guide to systematic theology for his Bible students. Some of his favorite topics of study and research were eschatology (end times), Satanism (for dealing with the many possessed and oppressed people in his country), and in recent years his favorite topics of study became faith, prayer, and healing.

“Once a certain topic comes into my mind, it is my nature to read any book I can find about it in any library, written by any person. I will be completely sold out, never satisfied for studying about the topic halfway. And I will be satisfied only if the teaching matches up with what the Bible says.

“The Bible is not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives. Through obedience, we will experience its blessings, even to a thousand generations (Ex 20:6). It is given that we may meditate on it day and night, so that in everything we may prosper (Psalm 1:2-3).”

Papa says that anybody can learn the scriptures. “Even Satan knew more scripture than any Christian. He never took a Bible with him when he went to tempt Jesus Christ, yet he quoted all the beautiful scriptures from his memory. But that is a problem, because he is very good at using his knowledge of the Bible to lead people astray by twisting the correct interpretation. He knows when a person does not know the Bible because they have not applied themselves to studying and understanding the truth.”

One such lighthearted theology lesson Papa gave me was on the topic of “heaven.”

#### **Papa’s discusses his take on “heaven”...**

Many people believe we are going to “heaven.” But God didn’t say that He’s going to take you to heaven. I believe Heaven is God’s place. God’s plan for men was to give them the earth.

When I was young, I was taught that if we were good, we’d go to heaven and receive big mansions. As a child, the best houses I could imagine were made with tile roofs, while ordinary houses were made of coconut leaves. Good Christians said they would go to heaven and have houses with tile roofs and maybe twenty or thirty rooms.

And then I heard there would be some Christian in heaven that would have small huts. That is a common teaching on heaven. Suppose I didn’t do much for God, I will have a small house, and there will not be enough coconut leaves to finish the house. Suppose I do enough work to buy twenty coconut leaves, but that isn’t enough to finish, so all the rain and dust will come into that house in heaven.

Of course I don’t think heaven is like that, because then people would compare themselves and some would not be so happy. Can you imagine going to heaven and your next-door neighbor is sitting around crying all night because he does not have enough coconut leaves

to finish his house...and that's how it is forever? Oh, I could not do it. I don't want to be in a heaven like that.

When I am living on the new earth, I am not waiting for a reward there. I will be with Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. I will be sitting with Him and enjoying Him. You tell me what else I could possibly want. Do you think I want one more crown? Why should I say, "Look at me, I have more crowns than Julie. I have more coconut leaves than Sam." Man who cares about that? That would mean I wanted to be more glorified than Christ. That would be an abomination.

Someday, heaven is coming to earth. God will be here with His people. We will be ruling with Him for the ages. I don't think I need one more leaf or one more crown. When I become like Jesus Christ, what a joy it will be. I'm not looking for any reward but Him.

**Julie writes...**

These days, theology is one of Papa's greatest passions in life—studying and applying himself to understand the truth of the Scriptures. Whenever he has a spare moment away from the demands of others or his other passion of handing out Gospel tracts, you will find him either reading and studying his Bible, praying, or preparing a message for his students. He says his faithful commitment to these things is the secret to knowing and doing the will of God.

"I know many good Christians—including preachers—who want to discern the unknown will of God, and who want to preach, teach, and write books on how to find this mysterious will. But do they spend themselves on the *known* will of God by obeying the Scriptures?"

"When I was a Bible College student, I looked for a book in our whole library on how to find the will of God, and now I praise God because I did not find one. I realized that I would be missing the most important thing of doing the simple will of God through surrendered obedience.

"In Romans 12:1-2, it says that we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is only a reasonable service, the perfect will of God. When it is clearly written what is the perfect will of God, why are people still searching for it instead of doing it? James said, 'Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, so deceiving yourselves' (1:22). Many people study the Bible and listen to the Bible, only to deceive themselves and others. They are like the person who sees their face in the mirror and goes away with out wiping the dirt from their face.

“What is God’s will? ‘Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).’ But when I began to do the will of God, *people began to hate me.*”

### **The School of Faith**

For Papa’s first year of Bible College, there were no fees—even food was provided for free. As the school year came to an end, he didn’t have \$1.50 for the train fare to go home and he didn’t want to burden his parents, so he went to the school administrator, pleading with him for a job for the summer. “I offered to do every job for the three-month break—cleaning the yard, white washing, painting—whatever needed to be done I would do in exchange for food and shelter,” Papa says. But unfortunately, the school could not do it, so he decided to walk home.

During the school year, Papa had met two other young men who became his prayer partners—K.C. John and Philip Abraham. “We shared all we had together—like one bar of soap and one towel,” Papa says. These two young men were from the same area as Papa, 500 miles away, and they agreed to accompany him on the trip, thinking that it would give them the opportunity to preach the Gospel on the way. With no idea about where they were going to get their next meal, the threesome also thought this was an excellent opportunity to learn to trust the Lord completely for all their provisions.

Before starting the journey, they packed one extra pair of clothes, some Gospel tracts, and then they prepared some Scriptures verses for the trip in the three languages they might encounter—English, Tamil, and Malayalam. They also decided to “wear” verses in large print on billboards hanging over their bodies as a conversation starter for those they encountered. Finally, they prayed together, dedicating their trip to the Lord, and set out. What a sight they were, carrying a bundle of tracts, preaching the Gospel as they worked their way to Kerala.

### **Papa recounts his journey...**

After walking sixteen miles on the first day, we met two young men on bicycles. When we told the young men our story, they gave us two rupees and asked us if we might like to stay with them for the night. As soon as we reached their home, they arranged a meeting for us so that we could share the Gospel. At that meeting, eight people put their faith in Jesus, and many others were blessed by our testimonies.

The next day when we prepared to leave, the young men gave us an address for a next stopping place of “Mr. James.” As soon as we arrived unannounced at Mr. James’ home, he told

us that he'd had a vision that three messengers of the Lord were coming to him. After asking God for the meaning of his vision, he soon saw us, embraced us, and arranged a meeting for us that night.

One day along the way we were caught in a rainstorm and had no place to sleep. We came to a tin shed with concrete floor that felt quite warm, so we spread out our only bed sheet for the three of us and we slept until seven-thirty the next morning. Then next morning, people nearby were amazed that we'd slept there, explaining that it was a cremation shed and had just been used to cremate a dead person. We praised God that He saved us from the rains by giving us a warm place to lie down and sleep.

Walking 500 miles over fifty-seven days from Madras to Kerala turned out to be a very good journey in the school of answered prayer for me. Along the way, we did not have one person expecting us, and there was not even one meeting arranged ahead of time for sharing the Gospel. We had to depend only on God. We set out praying earnestly, and every single day God provided a place for us to stay. Only one night we stayed outside a home in a cattle market. The other fifty-six days were spent in homes (and the warm shed) that the Lord provided each day. Some of the homes were rich, but in all of them we were fed nicely, and almost every night we had a meeting for sharing the Gospel.

What can prayer do? After walking for fifty-seven days to get home, at least fifty-six people had put their faith in Christ for everlasting life, I had gained four pounds, and I held thirty-two rupees in my pocket for my return journey to school.

**About Papa's Disappointing Return to School, Julie writes...**

When Papa came for his second year of school, there was a troubling notice written *three times* on the announcement board: "Each student must now pay thirty-five rupees per year (seven dollars in those days). Students who do not pay must leave the compound."

"I was one of Dr. Gupta's favorite boys and I could have asked him for help," Papa says. "I could have asked my cousin. I could even ask my father for money, but I didn't want to. Why not? Because God had called me for His work. If my going to school for a second year was His will, I believed He would provide for me to stay without me having to ask for help from others. I figured that this must be His doing, and that it was time for me to leave and discover what He wanted me to do next."

Papa decided to leave the school that night when everyone was asleep, so as not to have to explain himself to anyone or to sound like he was asking for help. He told no one of his plans, but packed a few essentials in his shoulder bag: his extra pair of clothes, his Bible, and some Gospels to hand out along the way. The rest of his supplies he would leave for the other students.

Getting into his bed to wait for everyone to go to sleep, he used the time to pray. “Lord I don’t know where I will go, but I will go. I don’t want to stay here and hear somebody say, ‘Get out from here; you have no money.’”

Within a half hour, before he had a chance to leave, he suddenly came down with a very high temperature and began vomiting continuously throughout the night. The next morning, Dr. Gupta took him to a government hospital where he remained extremely ill for four days. Even after he began improving, he was not able to walk out of the hospital without the assistance of two classmates who came to help him back to the Bible College.

He arrived back at school to a big surprise. “I had a letter waiting for me from some people I had met at a youth camp and who worked at a mission hospital in Madhya Pradesh. The letter informed that they were sending me fifty rupees! I was so thrilled with joy at how the Lord had prevented me from leaving the College. As soon as the money came, I went right away to pay my tuition, gave my tithe of five rupees, and I still had ten rupees safe in my hand. Man, I was so extremely happy. When I told the testimony to Dr. Gupta, he said, ‘You should have told me, Thomas, instead of running away.’”

### **A Little Matchmaking Between Friends**

While Papa was still in Bible College, Philip Abraham decided to do a little matchmaking. There was a young woman in the College whom Philip thought would be an excellent mate for Papa. All he had to do was to convince Papa. Here’s Papa’s version:

*It’s a miracle that Ammini’s parents let her marry me. You see, her parents were well to do people. Her mother was the headmaster of a primary school, and her father was an herbal medicine doctor. She never, ever had to carry her books to school even once, because she had maids to carry them for her. She always had fresh hot lunches brought to school by her maids. And she never knew hunger.*

*Her parents wanted her to be a medical doctor and she was selected by the government to go to medical school. But while she was there, she said, “I want to serve the Lord. I don’t want to be a medical doctor.” And so her parents let her go to Bible College.*

*One day, Philip said to me, “Thomas, suppose God makes an arrangement for you to marry Ammini, would you be happy about that?”*

*“If my father agrees, and my cousin agrees, and it is God’s will, I will marry her.”*

*He was a shrewd man, and so he said, “Suppose your cousin doesn’t agree, but your father agrees, and God agrees. Will you still marry her?”*

*I said, “Definitely.”*

*“Suppose your cousin does not agree, and your father also does not agree, but you know it is God’s will. Will you marry her?”*

*“Sure enough. I will.” It is true that I am a determined person.*

*When it came time for summer vacation, Philip came to my father with the request that he let me marry Ammini. He said, “If it is from God, I have no objections.” Then he wrote to her sisters, and we went to meet her family. While we were there, one of my teachers just so happened to be there from the Church of South India, and she said, “Oh, yes. I know this boy, he is a very nice boy.” I don’t know why she was there, or why she said that.*

*My family also visited Ammini, and then the following week, her family came to see my family, because that is the custom. At the time of their visit, we were working a paddy field and it was the harvest season. When they came, there were two huge rice piles stacked over the tops of coconut trees, and the storehouse was full of rice. They said, “Worst case scenario, our sister will not be starving.” So that is how Ammini and I got married.*

### **New Direction for the Future**

God continued to provide so that Papa could finish Bible College, as indeed it was His will. Even today, he tears up when he talks about all that God did to make a way for him to finish school, especially in making his dad supportive. “I praise God for my Dad’s decision that day. He made no mistake! He has never regretted his decision nor suffered from it. In fact, he has been abundantly rewarded—far above anything he could imagine—because he gave his first-born to the Lord’s work.”

Six months before his graduation, God directed Papa through fasting and prayer that he and Ammini should go to Rajasthan, a state in northwest India. Papa learned that only recently had the state removed the penalty of death for anyone professing Christ, but the stigma remained, and it still bore a very hostile environment for anyone promoting Christianity. This is where Papa set his sights as he pursued the next step in his call to missions.

## **Faith of Abraham**

## Chapter 4: Sojourner

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents... Hebrews 11:9 (NKJV)*

### **Papa tells About Moving to Rajasthan...**

When I was preparing to graduate from Bible College and the Lord had called me to go to the mission field, He put a burden in my heart to go to Rajasthan, a state in India bordering Pakistan. I'd never even heard of this state, but then again, I'm not a good student of geography or history. The meaning of Raja means *king*, and this region was ruled by 126 kings. Until 1950, it was against the law in most of the king's territories to be a Christian or to allow missionaries to come in, and the penalty was capital punishment.

And then in 1950, Rajasthan became a republic with one ruler and a constitution that was written very clearly, "Freedom of religion for everyone." Anyone could now promote his or her religion through preaching, printing, and publishing. All of this came out in the newspaper, and that's when the Lord began to put the burden in my heart to go to Rajasthan, specifically Kota, to preach the Gospel and start a church.

Dr. Gupta got out the atlas and gave the Bible students information about Rajasthan. He told us there were twenty-six districts (thirty-three today), and out of that, only nine districts had established small Catholic or Presbyterian churches in the ten years since 1950. While it was estimated that there was only about one Christian for every one thousand people in most of northern India in those days, in Rajasthan there were practically none.

The more I studied it, the more I felt compelled to go. When I told my wife, she readily agreed to join me. Then my friends said they'd go, too. Philip Abraham, along with his wife Chinamma, son Jonson (7 years old), daughter Mary (5 years old), and youngest son Steven (53 days old) would go. Also joining us were K. C. John and Paul Kant.

### **Delicious Temptations**

Soon after I'd made the commitment to go to Rajasthan, I got accepted to go to Columbia Bible College (now Columbia University) for further studies in the U.S. My father had worked hard on getting my acceptance, and when it came through, he was so happy. This was a greatly sought after opportunity for young people back then, and an unheard of chance for someone like

me who grew up in such poverty conditions. But now I had to tell my father no to this great temptation. He thought I was mentally unstable or even hysterical. I reminded him that one of India's great revivalists, whom my father had worked with, had been greatly used of God yet he never went to America to study. I told him, "I don't need to go to America to study in order for God to use me." My Dad didn't appreciate that.

As preparations for Rajasthan continued, I reminded our group that we didn't have train tickets and that nobody had given money to help us buy them. A train ticket from Madras (Chennai) to Kota in those days was only forty rupees, or about eight dollars. Even in the last month before the graduation, not even one person gave to help us, and there was nobody to send us or to receive us in the mission field. Finally, with only about two weeks until departure, I told my wife, "Honey, we don't have any money, so we are going to walk. But if God could meet the needs for 500 miles, He can meet the needs for 1,200 miles."

Ammini was happy to walk with me, but she was three months pregnant at the time and her sisters wrote and told her she should come home to have her baby, according to Indian custom. The first two deliveries should be done in the girl's family home; it is their moral obligation. Her sisters said, "You come home, and after the delivery, you can go. We'll send you when the others have become settled there."

Ammini said, "No, I will not do that. I don't want to be sitting at home and get the news that one of the missionaries died on the way, or that somebody killed them. I want to go with them. And if they die, I'll die with them. If somebody comes to kill them, I want to be the first martyr." And that was a great thing about Ammini; how I praise God for her.

After we decided to walk, the other students came and asked, "Thomas, Philip's baby is only fifty-three days old. What if he gets sick, or what if somebody dies along the way? What will you do?"

"We will bury that person, and then we will continue on," we all told them with a single voice. "If only one person reaches the soil of Kota, Rajasthan, and gives out one Gospel tract or Bible, and if only one person should come into a personal relationship with Jesus, that is all that is in us and nothing else. Our mission will have been a great success. But perhaps God will yet provide the money before we leave so we won't have to walk."

It was only after I made the commitment go to Kota on faith that Dr. Bill Bright came to Hindustan Bible Institute on March 20, 1960, three days before our departure. He said to me,

“Thomas, I want you to join us. I want you to take over and run Campus Crusade Ministry here in India. It is a good job at a nice facility. You’ll get a motorcycle, a house, health insurance, and everything else you need—it will all be paid for.”

For the second time, the devil dangled that beautiful delicious fruit in front of my eyes. But I told Mr. Bright, “Sir, I am so grateful for the offer—a young graduate like me could never even dream of such an offer. But I have to say no. God called me to Rajasthan before you came here, and I told Him yes. I made up my mind already to obey His call. If you had asked me before that, I would have definitely come to work for you. But I have promised my Lord that I will go to north India to pioneer a mission and to establish a church. Just because God didn’t give me train fare, I’m not going to change my promise to Him. I know I don’t have a place to stay in Kota, and I may have to start a church under a tree, but I will go.”

Until the day before departure, we still did not have any money for the trip. Some of the students had been fasting and praying for the money to come in, so it was exciting news around the Bible College when “letters from heaven” containing money began to come in that very day. One of our fellow seniors heard that we planned to walk, so he went to his relatives and friends and collected money to help send to us. Dr. Bright also contributed money and we ended up with just enough the last day before leaving to buy train tickets to Kota.

On the day after the graduation, just as we were leaving for the railway station where about 200 well-wishers waited to give us a send off, Dr. Bright called me. “Thomas, you can’t take this young pregnant lady to sleep under a tree. I will give twenty-five dollars per month so you can rent a place to do the ministry.” After that, Dr. Bright gave faithfully for three years.

### **Julie writes about the group’s arrival...**

Moving to Kota in those days was not like settling down with your family in “Mayberry.” Alcatraz might give a better picture. When government employees were punished, they were sent to Kota. If someone was in trouble with the authorities, off to Kota they went. Going to Kota on purpose was like checking yourself into exile.

Not only was it spiritually dark, but also the summer climate conditions were intolerable, with temperatures reaching a hundred and twenty degrees. Very few, if any, had air-conditioning in those days. Often during the three-month heat wave, strong winds blew sheets of pelting sand and dirt, making outside ventures hazardous. When the monsoons finally arrived mid-summer,

the region would be thrown into opposite extremes—flooding with increased disease risks, such as cholera and malaria.

Papa says, “Our team arrived in Kota on March 23, 1960. For eighteen rupees a day (about fifty cents today) we rented a room for two married couples, three children, and two bachelors. Our only potential income was the materials we brought along to sell, including Gospels, New Testaments, and Bibles. All of these were received on subsidized rates through All Indian Prayer Fellowship. When I say, ‘sell,’ we sold them comparatively for pennies because they were more desirable to the people if we attached value to them. If they had to make a small investment, they were more likely to value them and to read them.”

The first night, the tired group cozied up in their one-room apartment. Thanks to Bill Bright’s generosity, this was a much better option than living under a tree. “I have had Americans ask me, ‘What kind of privacy did you have?’” Papa says. “I always answer, ‘We had more privacy in that room with four walls and windows than we would have had living under the tree.’”

Modern comforts of this one room included a sheet-covered stone floor for a bed, and no plumbing. Because of the religious beliefs of neighbors, they had to make peace with the gluttonous rats that swarmed by night...or face serious consequences.

After a good first night’s rest—at least for the rats—there was no time to waste. The very next day, the men began street evangelism, handing out tracts printed in the local language of Hindi, of which none of them spoke a stitch, save the strategic sales pitch they memorized beforehand. No matter what question was asked by curious passers-by, they always answered with the only Hindi words they knew, “Five cents for one Gospel; twenty cents for four Gospels!”

It was Papa’s dream to see that every literate Indian citizen receive a Gospel tract. As a life practice, he gave out at least fifteen a day, a habit he has maintained throughout his life, even while traveling to other parts of the world. In later years, the ministry has passed out at least one million free tracts annually.

“The first day was so blessed,” Papa says. “We sold 253 Gospels, earning a total of sixteen rupees with which we purchased rice, vegetables, and other necessities.”

Adapting to a basically new culture was admittedly awkward for the young married couple, and it seemed everywhere they went, others gawked at their south India attire. The food

was so foreign to them; they were apprehensive about eating. But finally Ammini pointed out, “No one seems to be dropping dead, let’s try it!”

After maintaining the same schedule of handing out tracts every day, Papa says, “On the fourteenth day, we were having our early morning family worship time of singing, reading the Bible, and praying together like usual. Before we had a chance to start our prayer, a group of about twenty-five anti-Christians came inside and took all the Gospel New Testaments, tracts, Bibles, and our only hymnbook. They made a heap in front of our house, burned them, beat us, and demanded we leave the place or face death.”

Beatings, burned Bibles and churches, continuous threats, expensive legal cases, financial penalties, and sometimes death have been some of the forms of mistreatment for practically all committed Christians in this and some other parts of India. These kinds of early trials continued into five decades of unending persecution against Papa’s ministry by radical anti-Christians, still happening to this day. How did they make it through those early days? “God gave us the grace to stay. As the news of our persecution spread all over India, God’s people prayed for us and even sent us support money that helped us to buy two bicycles. He always used our trials for good.”

If Papa’s dedication to God’s call on his life and his willingness to suffer at any cost was unusually inspiring, his devout wife, Ammini, displayed the same tenacity. When other group members soon thereafter left Kota out of fear of the persecution, Ammini unwaveringly declared to her husband, “Don’t worry. We will stand in the place where God brought us and, if needed, we will face death for the cause of our Lord, who gave His life for us.”

If there was one thing that dampened Papa’s spirit in those early days of ministry, it was the fact that, when it came down to the real tests of faith under fire, his team did not share the courage of Ammini. As the heat of persecution turned up, he watched his team dissolve in search of more favorable locations.

“I couldn’t believe it when the others all left within six months! I cried so much, especially when Philip Abraham prepared to leave with his wife and three children. It didn’t shake my faith, but it did shake my heart. I still remember sitting on our porch, sobbing out loud until late at night and feeling so alone. I couldn’t hold back my tears. Then Philip said to me one night, ‘Thomas, why are you crying like a dog?’ That just made me cry harder.”

## **The Vision Expands**

Papa's call from God had been to bring the Gospel to northwest India. After only a month in Kota, his group baptized eight new believers, and the first worship center in Kota was born. As more and more believers were added to the fellowship, Papa's dream began to grow, especially after a visit in 1969 by Dr. T. W. Terral, a pastor from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Papa recalls:

*At that time, our church had about sixty-five believers. After church one Sunday, Dr. Terral asked me, "Thomas, what have you done for church planting?"*

*I told him, "Sir, I never heard about church planting and never even thought about it. I am going out, distributing gospels, and conducting house meetings in a hundred mile radius."*

*Again Dr. Terral asked the question, "Why do you not go for church planting?"*

*"I had no idea about church planting, and even if I did, we have no money to support a pastor."*

*"How much will it cost to support a pastor?"*

*"\$35 per month."*

*"Lanier Baptist church of Baton Rouge will send that now, beginning next month."*

*Sure enough, by the next month the money came. At about the same time, one of the members of the Kota church who worked in the Indian Railways, came to me. He did not know about the money coming but he said, "I want to leave my job from the Railways and want to go for the Lord's ministry." He became the first person to start the church-planting ministry in a city called Tonk (Rajasthan) by starting a church and school.*

*By 1978, ten more churches were planted from that challenge which Dr. T. W. Terral had given to me.*

Church planting meant that Papa needed to establish a Bible College to train up workers as missionaries and pastors to help him in this calling. As word spread, young people began to come from great distances to study under Papa, and some of them worried about passing his entrance exam.

One graduate, Ullas, recalls how intensely he studied for the exam for weeks, fretting about being sent home before he had a chance to get started. He read theology books and made copious notes, his head reeling with doctrine and information when he arrived for his appointment with Papa. Entering the room, he nervously sat down, pencil and paper ready for

Papa's extensive theology grilling. Papa smiled warmly at him and began the entrance exam as follows:

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. If you don't get the food or accommodations you're used to, or if you should be beaten for your faith, will you run away from the assignment God has given you?

Papa believes that God does not always call the most qualified, educated people to the mission field. He calls those who are willing and available.

"Dad never comes across like he thinks he's a spiritual giant, or like he knows more about the Bible than others. He will never try to make anyone feel intimidated when it comes to the Word of God. He will bring it to the "cookie level" on the lowest shelf. Never in all my life have I seen him try to use the Word of God to make himself look better or to make himself appear to be a great student of the Bible. He studies the Word of God just to simply obey, which has been a great example to me." —Samuel Thomas

Once the students have been accepted into the program, Papa takes the task of preparing his ministry students very seriously. In a country that's often hostile toward Jesus and His followers, he knows that he's preparing his young people for a dangerous calling. They must be ready to face anything. In addition to their regular studies, Papa works through several questions with them as part of his Bible training and spiritual accountability:

- Are you reading through the Bible every year?
- Are you fasting and praying?
- Are you sharing the Gospel with others?
- Will you stay in the mission and not run away?
- Are you willing to be faithful unto death for the cause of Christ?

Papa says, "Many people asked me, 'Thomas, why are you graduating and ordaining people with such short training and sending them as missionaries?'

"That is an easy question. Look at the people whom the apostles ordained. 'Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task' (Acts 6:3). It wasn't people with theological degrees. It was people of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. These seven men who were ordained by the apostles never had any Bible training, but they came with a good report of anointing, wisdom, and faith.

“These men became powerful preachers and missionaries (Acts 6-8). On the day of Pentecost, three thousand people from nineteen different countries and languages were saved, baptized, and taught by the disciples. Empowered by the Spirit of God, each went back to different places to establish churches in different parts of the world.

“When Stephen was martyred, there were about 70,000 disciples in Jerusalem. As the persecution increased, these 70,000 disciples scattered all over the world, and wherever they went, they preached the Word of God and established churches. This is what God is looking for in these last days also. God promised to pour His spirit upon such young people and to empower them to go and preach the Gospel to every nation (Joel 2:28, Acts 1:8). My aim and prayer is that we would graduate thousands of these kinds of young people. To this day, I am so proud and happy that many of the young people whom we have graduated and sent are serving the Lord in a great manner.”

Eventually, Papa’s ministry training turned into three Bible Colleges and many Bible Institutes (smaller learning facilities), located throughout India to this day.

### **Papa Describes Ammini...**

Our marriage was hard work, because Ammini was a woman, I am a man. We are not angels. But all in all, Ammini was a very good and brave companion.

Once I was badly beaten here in Kota by anti-Christians and taken to the police station. Ammini was at home alone with the kids and many people warned her not to stay there. But she insisted on staying home because she wasn’t afraid. The children, however, went under the bed to sleep.

In 1993, I was in America when a big case broke out against our ministry, claiming that I tore the holy book of the Hindu Monkey God called, “Hanuman Chalisa.” They alleged that after I tore it, I put it on the road in front of two hundred of our orphans and urinated on it. Then I supposedly walked on it and said, “This god has no power; only Jesus Christ has power.” After that, they claimed that I asked Sam to do it, and then I asked the children to do it. The report said that some of them did it, but one boy didn’t do it and he supposedly came and made a complaint against us. I never quite figured out how I was able to urinate from America all the way across the oceans onto a single book in India, but that is what they said.

As soon as this charge was made, a crowd of about two hundred people came to our house. Ammini was standing outside, and Sam who was only a boy at the time, was inside. They all shouted at her, “Bring Sam out here and open the gate, we want to kill him.”

“If you wanted to go inside and touch my son, there is only one way,” Ammini said. “You must walk across my dead body, otherwise you will not enter my gate.” Then she stood there and not even one person was with her. After about twenty minutes of shouting at her, they all finally left.

The day after our 36<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, on June 19, 1995, Ammini fasted and prayed throughout the day for our daughter Elizabeth’s second son who had typhoid fever. After we had supper together, I had to go out for a while. When I came back, she was in bad shape. She had been very sick for many years. Her cholesterol was up to 800, she had major kidney problems, acute diabetes, and high blood pressure. That night, she asked me to pray for her, so I did. An hour later, she asked me to pray for her again, so I did. And then she asked for a nurse to come and give her an injection for sleeping. When the nurse came, she asked, “Ammini, are you afraid to die?”

“What are you talking about?” Ammini said. “I am my God’s so precious child. I am not at all afraid!”

The nurse and I helped Ammini to a private clinic that night. I knew in my heart it was time for her to die, because her eyes were strangely red. I asked a nurse for oxygen, but as she went to get it, I remembered a conversation I’d had with Ammini earlier that day when we took a nap together. She said, “If I have a heart attack, don’t take me to a hospital. I don’t want to die hooked up to tubes.” And so, before the nurse could get the oxygen prepared, before a tube went into her nose, Ammini took her last breath and died in my arms.

And God gave me perfect peace. Every blessing Ammini could have seen, she saw. She saw all her children married; she saw our good church and the orphans—so many things. I was so happy that she was finally able to stop suffering. Our doctor constantly reminded us that she could have a major stroke any time.

“Can you imagine?” Papa said to me as he told me the story. “Ammini was a heavy person—not like you and me. What if she was paralyzed and I had to sit with her all the time, lifting her up. I cannot bring a crane into the house to help me (Papa laughed heartily). But God was merciful. Without any problem, the Lord took her just like that. It is true that I cried many

times—that is my nature. But in my heart I was not at all grieved or broken, not even one day. I realized that if I wished I could have her back, it would only be for selfish reasons. *Who will cook that delicious fish curry, and who will do this, and who will do that for me?* But I should not wish to bring her back. She is in a much better place.”

After she died, many people said, “Thomas, why don’t you marry?”

I would say jokingly, “I had one wife, that was enough problems.”

Ammini was a great spiritual companion and asset for me in the ministry. When all my brothers left Kota, she stood with me and did not want to leave, even though at that time we were living in a military garage with no toilet, no electricity, and no running water. When I went for meetings, Ammini was there alone, but she managed it.

But after she died, I have been able to give my full time and attention to the Lord, just like Paul said, “It is better not to marry.” Though Ammini was the best woman in my knowledge, she was still a woman and she needed my attention. Sometimes even now, I’ll think, “Man it is 1:00 p.m., Ammini is going to be angry with me if I miss the lunch time—I better hurry.” But then I remember that if I want to sit here until 3:00, nobody will ask. And so, I have total blessings. I miss her as my wife, but I am fully blessed and satisfied with the job the Lord has given me. Now I am able to do much more work.

### **An Impossible Dream?**

Papa’s vision to win India for Christ grew with each passing year. He learned that in India there were at least 700,000 cities and villages, and most of them, perhaps as many as 600,000, had never even heard the name of Jesus. It became his dream to train up as many workers as possible to reach all of these places with the light of the Gospel.

As these trained native workers went out to set up community worship centers—multi-purpose centers for church and outreach projects—each center would, in time, build Christian schools and medical facilities. This led to more worship centers being built in neighboring communities, and provided more students interested in attending Bible College to go to even more villages and cities.

It was a brilliant plan, but there was one huge obstacle. It was a painstakingly slow process, finding enough young men and women who were ready and willing to devote their lives to full-time Christian service in this capacity. Of the new believers trickling into the fold from Papa’s evangelizing efforts, many had spouses, families, or other earthly ties that held them back from

becoming a part of his colossal dream, not to mention many were deterred by the threat of persecution. It all seemed impossible.

Papa knew that following this God-dream was going to have a cost, but he was sold out because he wanted desperately to make a difference, and to leave a positive impact on India. His heart was broken for all the lost, hurting, and empty people, and how else could he see the reality of Romans 10:13-14 for his people? “‘Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?”

When he first arrived in Kota, Papa’s vision to reach all the cities and villages in India was only an impossible dream. But God slowly began working through his efforts to make his dream a reality. Little did he know then just how big that dream would get, or how God would begin answering it with...forsaken children.

## Chapter 5: Loving Father

*Then the Lord told Abraham, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. All the families of [India] will be blessed through you. (Paraphrased from Genesis 12:1-3).*

### **Julie writes...**

More than fifteen years later, in the late 1970s, Papa realized more than ever that there were not enough of the “willing and available” for the God-sized dream that had been put on his heart. At the very same time, he began asking God what could be done about all the orphaned, abandoned, and desperate children he saw every day scrounging on the streets of India, or even “selling” themselves just to acquire the basic necessities of life.

In India, orphans are considered cursed, only worthy of scorn and abuse because it is believed that these children were wicked in a previous life. People do not like associating with them and they don’t think twice about knocking down such a toddler begging on the street corner. Mothers even hide their children from the sight of orphans for fear that an “evil eye” will be cast upon their own little ones (transmitting an evil spirit).

Unlike thriving children in sturdy, nurturing families, Papa felt that these neglected, misjudged children were like branches that had broken and fallen from a tree. Dry, brittle sticks with nothing to offer; these children were thought to be as worthless and overlooked as the trash that collects profusely on India’s streets. Their sadness became his sadness as he imagined a life with no love or educational opportunities to escape the hopeless prison they were born into.

Especially tugging at his heart were the kids growing up in leprosy-affected colonies, because, even more than most, they have a lesser chance for a successful future. It’s hard to estimate how many leprosy-affected live in India—the highest of any country—but it’s in the millions. Similar to the plight of orphans, because of pervasive religious superstitions in their culture, leprosy-affected people are also thought of as being punished for being evil in a previous life. No one wants to touch them or show them kindness because it’s believed they “deserve this lot in life.” Any person showing them kindness or helping them in any way “comes under a curse.” Leprosy-affected people and their children are considered the lowest of the low, and they are completely rejected by practically all of society.

Papa thought about the senselessness of their suffering. It was an ocean of a problem, one that could not be impacted at the adult level, since the effects of leprosy are visible and irreversible. However, leprosy usually takes years to be transmitted from parent to child. Papa realized that to help these people, he would have to help their children break out of this cycle by removing them from the colony before it was too late. The children could be loved, nurtured, educated, and most importantly, given hope and life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

When they grew up and became confident, healthy citizens and educated leaders, they could spread the love of God wherever they lived and worked by demonstrating the power of the Gospel through their redeemed lives. When they visited home, their parents would see their meaningful and successful lives and be drawn to their same hope in Christ. In this perpetuating way, a true difference could be made for this large group of people.

Spurred on by the faith-based work of George Muller, a nineteenth century visionary who provided for 2,100 orphans daily by relying solely on God's provision through prayer, Papa decided to open up his own home as an orphanage.

"Lord," he prayed, "if I had as many orphans and destitute children as Mr. Mueller, what a multitude they would be for Jesus Christ!" Papa would be able to spiritually train all the children who came to him, and to potentially acquire even more students someday for Bible college—students who could have the opportunity to prepare to go to the villages who had never heard about Jesus as pastors, doctors, nurses, and teachers—all messengers of the Good News. In fact, the more he thought about it, the more he imagined that the individual redeeming work of Christ in these precious lives would be the beginning of a mighty movement...one that would someday bring many thousands of souls into the Kingdom of God. It surely seemed to be the answer to Papa's nagging life question of where to get enough workers to send to the villages.

Papa says, "People have asked, 'Thomas, where can you get this many laborers?' This was a question in my heart, too. But I did only one thing; I said, 'Lord, you send the laborers.' And then the Lord showed me the field of orphans as a wellspring of potential laborers.

"I started the first orphanage in 1978 with seven children. At that time there were at least 40 million orphans in the world and perhaps as many as 145 million street children. On the whole, orphans have made great contributions to this world. When you look at the Bible, great leaders like Moses, Joseph, and Esther were either orphans or castaways. The Lord said,

“Thomas, these are the laborers. Take them, share the Gospel with them, train them to be laborers, and send them to the mission field.”

### **Starting a Civil War at Home**

Turning his home into an orphanage wasn't an easy move for Papa for many reasons. “I wondered how I could take in children when I didn't have the money,” Papa says. “When I took in seven children, Inter-Mission helped me with those seven. Next I took in twenty-six from the leper colony, and that started a big civil war in my home and ministry. My wife, my children, the neighbors, and the church—everyone was against me. People thought I must be crazy even to think of such a contemptible idea. But I pressed on and started a home for them. To the dismay of many people, I even conceived of a school for these ‘blemishes on society.’

“So, what could I do but put on a good smile and sit there until the war was over and the rain was clear? Then I said, ‘Don't worry. See I have a certificate from the government doctor saying that none of these children have leprosy.’ You see, everyone was afraid I was going to infect them with leprosy. Not one person was on my side, but I brought them home anyway, and God met the need.”

Eventually Papa began taking in any orphaned, abandoned, or helpless children he could fit in his care. He sees each of these empty, unnoticed vessels as potential vessels for God.

“In the eastern culture, water pots made of stone are kept outside every home for washing feet before entering,” Papa says. “Nobody values them or keeps them locked up inside the house. No protection is given to them from sun, heat, rain, cold, ice, and storms. No one appreciates or even notices a water pot. But they are a necessary item for a family.

“Who are the water pots waiting to be filled and used? Don't you think that these are the people in our communities, the street children, and all those who do not know Christ? India alone has perhaps 86 million street children—empty vessels—whom the Lord wants to fill with Living Water. The Lord uses the most neglected, unimportant water pots for the most important work.

“I was a water pot in a poor village, and no one noticed me. I was useful for the people, but not at all important in the sight of anyone. But Jesus selected me to be used for His important work. He filled me with Living Water that I may be a blessing for the people who are in need, and that I may be used to wash away the dirt from filthy lives.

“The Lord asked me to fill the many water pots surviving on the streets of India and the world at large. They could be used for important work, but no one will ever look at them. But

when we gather and fill these unwanted, unused, and neglected water pots with the Living Water of Jesus Christ, they shall become good, refreshing, and useful vessels in the hands of the Savior.”

### **Outstanding Children**

Today, after almost a quarter of a century, Papa’s orphanages (Hope Homes) have imparted life-saving education to thousands of such once unwanted children through high quality schools. Teachers faithfully work towards making each school a place where these students are given a chance for holistic development. Aside from top-notch education, engaging in morning prayers, memorizing verses, and singing worship songs are encouraged for spiritual development; exercise, sports, and games are undertaken for physical development; singing of the national anthem and a briefing of daily news are given to the students to instill patriotism and to keep abreast of the daily events; cultural activities and extra-curricular programs are arranged to help them develop emotionally and socially.

In addition, children are encouraged to set aside daily time to study and prepare their lessons, and they are regularly tested to check their progress. The schools are English speaking zones where the children are encouraged to converse only in English to enhance their future opportunities and to keep up with the global trend.

Occasionally during times of fiscal shortages, Papa gets criticism from overseas visitors as to how some of the practical needs of his Hope Home children are being overlooked.

“I remember a couple came and brought a big complaint to me that the children didn’t have underpants,” Papa says. “I said, ‘Beloved, I feel sorry. I can cry but that is all I can do because I am giving everything I have to feed them. Sure, I could sell some of my furniture, but even if I sell my chair, I can’t get more than ten or twenty underpants. But what will that accomplish when the needs are so great? I know that is a very good suggestion you have, and I appreciate it, but it’s not going to help me. I’m not making any excuses, but I live every day the best I can. That’s all.’

“I would have been very happy if that couple had said, ‘Thomas, I went and saw that the children didn’t have underwear, so I went to the shop and purchased what they needed and gave to them.’

“When it comes to taking care of the children, we are to do it. That’s all. Is God blessing us for it? Yes. Is the work going? Yes? Are they fed? Yes. Do they get education? Yes—a very

good one. But for these other things? When I am able, I will do it. God will help us do it in His time. It may happen slowly, but it will happen.”

When asked about his children and their progress in life, Papa beams. “Recently, the boys’ soccer team performed outstandingly in the state competition, winning the tournament. Four of our boys were so outstanding in the tournament that they were selected to play on the national team. All this has become possible because God loves these children and He allowed them to be rescued from a poverty-stricken life.”

The children who have happened into Papa’s loving arms all have a story to tell...a beautiful story of second chances and remade lives. However, their second chances at purposeful and redeemed futures will not be so amazing unless you first understand how hopelessly broken they were beforehand. Their impact on the world will not be so miraculous unless you understand what incredible odds had to be overcome for them to soar. For every broken branch in this world, there is a unique set of circumstances in how they came to be that way. Here are some real life snapshots from the backgrounds of “Papa’s kids:”

### **Orphaned**

K.H. (17)—Manipur, India (as told by Papa): One night, terrorist called Kukis and Nagas came to K.H.’s village. Shouting and carrying big torches, they ambushed the bamboo-leaf church, chasing the men of the church into the nearby forest. The angry mob went after them and killed every one of them, cutting them into pieces. Not even one man was left.

The women and children were screaming and crying back in the church, wondering what happened to their husbands and fathers. In the early morning, they hurried into the forest to look for their men and found only pieces of mutilated, broken bodies. The Red Cross and the police came and buried what was left of them all together in one big pit.

K.H.’s mother was alone, and at a loss for her future. In fear, she moved herself and her son to another village where she heard about an Emmanuel Orphanage, and she brought him there. Now in high school, he’s so happy in the Lord and growing in the grace of God. He’s born again, baptized, and studying in the Bible Institute. He’s one of our best athletes and a very good leader on the soccer team, and he wants to use his leadership to serve the Lord.

Tulsi (10)—Rajasthan, India: My father worked in a factory making army supplies and my mom stayed home with us three kids. We had a very happy home full of love, which made our neighbors jealous because they were always fighting. One day they gave my dad some

poisoned food and killed him. Because of the shock my mother became mentally unbalanced. Then the same neighbors who killed my dad forced her into a mental hospital. My mom was so upset that she killed herself, too, by jumping into a well.

We were thrown out of our house by the neighbors and had to go live with relatives who treated us very badly—worse than slaves. They made us do all the work in the home and hardly fed us. If they felt we were too lazy or slow, they beat us. Sometimes when we were hungry, we would sneak out into the street to beg for food.

One of our uncles visited us and felt badly about the way we were being treated, so he took us to an Emmanuel Hope Home. Here I have started going to school and my favorite subject is Science. I want to become a doctor.

Brijmohan (15)—Northern India: I was born into a poor but very close and loving family in a village. My dad supported us as a driver (taxi) until he had a serious accident that made him unable to work. After that my brother and I had to beg on the streets to feed our family, often going home with nothing.

A local pastor heard about our situation and offered to take my brother and me to an Emmanuel children's home where we would be well taken care of. Our parents reluctantly let us go, hoping to improve the outlook for our future.

A year later, the news came that my mom had died. I became very discouraged because I loved her so much, and I wondered who in the world could love me like my mom? Not long after that, I got the news that my dad suddenly died, too. I was so grieved, I couldn't eat for three days, and I cried all the time thinking, *Now who do I have in life? Why me? Why not someone else?*

But then God began to speak to me during many sleepless nights. "You are not alone. You have many brothers and sisters here, and I have given you a new mother and father who love you very much. Most of all, I love you deeply. Even though your mom and dad have died, and your friends may leave you, I will not leave you."

God has comforted me and given me so many blessings. If I hadn't come to this home, I wouldn't know about God or be able to go to school. He has fulfilled the promise He gave to me in Psalm 27:10, "Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close." I want to be a pastor and I currently get the opportunity to practice by sharing many Bible messages with the other children during our worship times.

## **Abandoned**

B.D. (15)—Manipur, India: I am one of seven children from a Christian family. Our small village was torn apart by tribal wars—homes were raided, buildings and crops burned, and many were left orphaned, widowed, and homeless. Because of all the distrust and chaos, anyone found walking around at night was instantly shot by the military or tribal people, no questions asked.

One night, my dad was out late at night when he met up with some men with guns. They just so happened to be from our own village, but he didn't know that and he ran in fear. Because he ran away, they shot and killed him.

The heavy burden of providing for six kids fell on my mother. Even though she worked hard labor all day, she couldn't earn enough to feed us properly. One morning she went to work as usual, but never returned, leaving my siblings and me all alone, cold and starving.

We were so happy when a man who seemed like an angel came and brought us to the children's home where we are now attending school. I want to become an army officer someday, but first, I want to try to find my mother.

Rohit (10)—India: My parents both left me on the streets when I was just a little kid and I never knew love from anyone. I slept on a footpath at night, and in the morning I begged for food. Many days I was so hungry, I was forced to steal food from shops or to pick out rotten food from the garbage bins. People often abused me or took advantage of me, and I got into a lot of trouble fighting and stealing, but that's how I survived.

Once a local pastor saw me near the bus station where I was begging. He asked me where I lived and was shocked to hear that I lived on the footpath by myself. He brought me to the Hope Home where I now go to school and get good meals to eat. I'm happy to find a home at last, and I love playing cricket. Someday I want to be a doctor.

Liza (15)—Bengal, India: I came from a very loving Christian family. Dad was a contractor; so we were financially well off in a big house with plenty of food, pretty clothes, and toys. I was not interested in studying, so I dropped out of school. I didn't understand why I needed to study when my dad was around to take care of me.

When I was eight, my dad died of a sudden heart attack. This left our family numbed and in deep shock. We lost everything because dad left many uncompleted work projects and also people who owed him money refused to pay their debts.

We moved in with an uncle in a small village and mom took a teaching job at the school. Her grief and new responsibility of raising two kids alone became too much for her and one day she left us without a word. Later we found out she married a man from our village, but after her wedding she told us she didn't want us to come and live in her new home because of the complications and burdens step-children place on a new marriage.

Our uncle allowed us to stay in his home for another year, until it became obvious my mother was not coming back for us. Then a pastor told my uncle about the Emmanuel Children's Home and he brought us here.

I was miserable at first, but as I made new friends, I began to love it here. Science was my father's favorite subject, but I love dancing classes more than anything. However, when I grow up, I want to work only for God, because I know only He loves me more than even my parents.

### **Despised**

Kariyamma (15)—Karnataka, India: Growing up with my three siblings in a brothel (a house of prostitution), I never had the chance to go to school. I was ashamed of my mom, even though her family forced her into prostitution for money. I had to work every day as a Cooli (a laborer), carrying heavy luggage from the railway station to taxis. Although we had enough food to eat, we only had two sets of clothes and had to sleep on floors with no blankets, even in the cold of winter.

Mom always acted like I was a bother and it seemed like she hated me. Sometimes the men coming to her room at all hours tried to take advantage of me, too. When I refused, my mom and the other kids beat me instead of standing up for me.

I was so thankful when a pastor told some of my relatives about the children's home and I was brought here. I want to stay here where I am kept safe, have shelter, food, and have the motherly care I never experienced. I am grateful for my present life, which is like heaven compared to my past life.

Martha (9)—Rajasthan, India: I wanted so much to be like other kids who had friends to play with. But kids were all scared of me because my parents have the skin disease of leprosy. In my country, if anyone in your family has leprosy, nobody wants to touch you or even talk to you. Even though my parents took medicine and their leprosy wasn't contagious anymore, still nobody wanted us around.

When I turned five, my parents made me start going out by myself to beg for food. They did this because I did not have leprosy so people would be more willing to get near me if I wasn't with them. I was terrified, but it was the only way we could survive.

People were so mean to us, sometimes they would send vicious dogs after us, or throw rocks at us. I was so ashamed of my parents and every night when I went to sleep, I wished I wouldn't wake up.

The day a pastor came into our leper colony for a visit was the day my life changed. He offered to take me to a children's home where I could receive an education, three meals a day, shelter, and clothing. My parents were happy to let me go because they could see that I was going to have a bright future. I am happier here than I have ever been.

### **Loved**

Avinash (12)—Rajasthan, India: My father was a Christian pastor in a poor village and my mom was a homemaker. We had lots of love in our family of six, but not much food or money. Dad tried very hard to take care of us, but sometimes the church couldn't pay him for many months. My mom never complained about any of our problems to anyone, but instead she prayed and kept a happy attitude. She told us kids to keep our trust in the Lord at all times.

Things got so desperate that many of our friends advised dad to send us kids away to a children's home, but he wasn't willing because he loved us too much to let us go. When we started going for days without food, he finally sat us down and asked us if we would be willing to leave home to go to a better place with plenty of good food and a proper education. I know my dad was disturbed in his heart when he asked us to go to the home, but when we all agreed with my dear daddy, I saw his eyes shine with peace.

I am happy that God brought me here. He answered our tears, and I am glad to stay here. I know the One who brought me here will lead me to a better future. I like school, especially English, and Proverbs 1:7 is my favorite verse: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

I like to see the postman bringing letters every day on his bicycle. Someday I want to become a postman.

Ruth (18) –Tamil Nadu, India (as told by Papa): Ruth's mother abandoned her as a newborn. When she was brought to us at a week old, she was sick with a high fever, and she

wasn't taking any milk, so she was very weak. We then discovered that she had major heart problems and could not survive surgery.

I knew a pediatrician, Dr. Joshi. When I explained the situation to him, he said, "Thomas, bring the child to me." I took Ruth to the government hospital where he worked and he gave her special attention. But after a month of feeding her through an I.V. and keeping her on a ventilator, he called me at home and said, "Thomas, let me draw you a picture. There is no wall in her heart. The child cannot survive. We can't give an operation in all of India because there is no surgery for it. Even if we could, the child is very weak. If you take her off oxygen, she may not even live for a day. So you ought to be satisfied that God gave you this child for a couple month and let her go." I told him thanks and brought her home.

We brought Ruth to the church and I prayed, "Lord, I didn't ask for this child. You brought her to us from Gujarat, and I want that she should serve you. I don't want her to die before I die." It was a simple prayer, and then my daughter Elizabeth took the baby to Raipura, our main Hope Home. As soon as she arrived, the baby drank a full bottle of milk. Then she drank again in the evening, and then in the morning. The next day we took her to Dr. Joshi. He stood there crying and said, "Man, it is a miracle!"

Today, Ruth is doing so well, living with my daughter in Tenkasi. She passed high school and is a very healthy and beautiful girl. The boys are always chasing her. There are many incidents like that of our children being healed, so God is still doing the work.

### **Fathers of the Fatherless**

It's easy to see why all of these children have captured Papa's heart. Papa says, "I love all these children God has given to me. I don't consider them a burden; *I love them*. It is true that I loved my wife and I love my children. But I especially love poor people."

"Dad has this 'wounded syndrome.' He will take anyone who is weak or wounded. They gravitate to him and take a lot of his time. The ones who are not wounded don't get to know him or to be mentored by him as much, because the one who is wounded gets all the attention. There is no limit to his compassion, especially for those who are weak or full of despair." —Samuel Thomas

In recent years, Papa has had the opportunity to expand the orphan ministry to Africa and Haiti. In both cases, he was asked to extend the love, mercy, and provision of his ministry to these poverty and disease-ravaged countries. Even though this opportunity was in keeping with his desire for planting churches as well as rescuing children, the timing wasn't great for the

ministry financially, and he came under heavy criticism from others. But still, he wondered if expanding his dream to other countries might be part of God's plan for him. Like everything else, he took the matter to prayer.

While waiting on God's wisdom and direction in this matter, he came across Matthew 6:26. "Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are."

*God, that is a wonderful thought, Papa mused. You are feeding every bird—millions of them. Not even one will go hungry. If you are feeding all of the birds, what about the orphans? You call yourself the Father of the fatherless, so that means the orphans are your immediate family members. If you will feed your own family members as you feed the birds, we can accept as many orphans as you send to us.*

### **TNT Put to the Dream**

Usually when God is in the process of unfolding a plan in our lives, it gradually illuminates, like a dark landscape at sunrise. That's why it's crucial that we maintain our dependence on His daily guidance. Anyone can receive a promise or a vision and get busy working towards it on his or her own, but without the *continuous* guidance of the Holy Spirit, grand plans taken into our own hands fall flat, or worse, lead us into trouble. It's the faithful years of relationship with God, one day—one prayer—at a time, where great, world-changing work is accomplished.

In 1997, after nineteen years of faithful, daily dependence on God, sometimes including as many as six hours of focused prayer in a given day, Papa reflected on God's leading in his life. By then he'd raised his sought after multitude of 2,000 children in the many Hope Homes now located across India, and he had personally trained many of them in his Bible college for full-time ministry. It was then that the Holy Spirit directed him to the verse that put the TNT to his dream, becoming his guiding light in ministry for the rest of his days on earth.

## Chapter 6: God-Sized Vision

*When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Abraham believed him. God had also said, “Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars,” even though such a promise seemed utterly impossible! And Abraham’s faith did not weaken... Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised. And because of Abraham’s faith, God declared him to be righteous. Romans 4:18-22 (NLT, selected)*

### **Julie writes...**

By the late 90s, Papa had rescued many children over the previous twenty years, but it saddened him that there were many millions more, desperately scrounging and clawing their way through gutters, trying unsuccessfully to find a life worth living on the streets, in train stations, in brothels, and in leprosy-affected colonies.

“I was praying for God to enable me to take care of maybe 5,000 or 10,000 orphans. Then I was reading Psalm 127:3-4, where it says that children are a like a gift and a heritage from the Lord—they are like arrows. I noticed it didn’t say ‘my child,’ or ‘your child.’ It said ‘children,’ and that word struck me. I said, ‘Lord, if children are your heritage for mankind, why are so many of them as broken and unwanted as dead branches? How could so many throw-aways of society become arrows of blessing to anyone? What do you want me to do?’”

And then a vision flooded in as brightly as a light squeezing its way in through a cracked door. There was indeed a way that Papa could see his own lifelong dream fulfilled of establishing a church in *all of the cities and villages throughout India that had never heard about Jesus*, while at the same time helping so many children become God’s great gift and reward to this earth.

One million arrows for God.

As the picture waxed crystal clear, the sadness Papa felt was replaced by great joy! Gather one million broken branches—the native-born, orphaned, and abandoned children—sharpen them with education, faith, and a heart for The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), and launch them like arrows back into all the regions of India that have never heard about Jesus. Yes, he had practically been working toward such a vision already, but for the first time, the Arrow Vision, as it has been named since, came to him perfectly and vividly. In fact, why limit a

vision like this to India? Papa realized this model could work anywhere. There were many such broken branches worldwide that could do the same in their own native countries!

In the modern world, where western missionaries are being denied access into many countries and regions, who better appointed to bring the Gospel to transform villages, cities, and even countries with the love of Christ than the locals—those who already speak the language and know the culture as their own? The more he thought about it, the more Papa imagined that the redeeming work of God in these precious children’s lives could be the beginning of a mighty movement, one that would someday bring a great multitude of souls into the Kingdom of God worldwide. And after twenty years, this great vision was well on its way to becoming a reality.

Besides the benefits for each child—a redeemed past, a purposeful present, and a restored future with Jesus—these children also brought great potential to fulfilling the vision because of their extreme devotion, lack of earthly ties, and gratitude toward Christ.

These are exactly the kinds of kids that you and I can invest in as we partner with Papa’s dream for one million arrows for God. Each and every child has a very special story of redemption and restoration. Here is a sampling of young people I’ve met personally who have greatly benefitted from Papa’s care and influence.

### **Napoleon**

There are so many miraculous testimonies that display Papa’s successful model in action, but one of my favorite pictures of the complete redemption potential is that of nineteen-year-old Napoleon who is sort of a modern-day Joseph.

Napoleon lived a comfortable lifestyle with his family of five in a large South India city. But one day, when he was six years old, the police came and arrested his entire family, falsely accusing them of being Naxalites, or anti-government terrorists. Even though the charges were soon cleared for lack of proof and they were released, the social pressures and superstitions present in India made them a threat to their friends and family. Overnight, they lost everything and everyone that mattered.

Packing few belongings, the family boarded a train. Later, when they stopped at a station, Napoleon watched his dad give his older brother and sister some money and send them off, he assumed for food. But the train left without them, and Napoleon never saw them again. Then, after the train got up to full speed, he watched in disbelief as his parents jumped from the train to

their deaths. The train conductor told six-year-old Napoleon that, by law, he had to debark at the next station to claim the bodies and arrange their removal from the station.

He spent the next year living on trains, cleaning floors and shining shoes to try to make enough money to eat. Once he rode the train farther than usual and ended up in a state where he couldn't speak the language, as India has many languages and dialects. A seemingly caring woman spotted him and led him to a home, where she served him a plate of food. Ravenous, he ate every bite. Only after the meal did he realize it was a set up—the woman turned him in to the police for stealing.

Napoleon spent the next ten years in a youth corrections facility, along with other kids who were mostly hardened criminals. During that time, a man came to visit him regularly and eventually led him to Christ, and then helped him get into one of Papa's Hope Homes where his faith blossomed.

"I'm so thankful to God for rescuing me," Napoleon, now a first-year student in Papa's main Bible College, says. "If He hadn't brought me here, I'd be an atheist by now, but God chose me and brought me here at the right moment so that I could know Him. My biggest desire is to become a state government official so that I can help the poor, underprivileged, and minority people."

Even with all the bad stuff that's happened to him, Napoleon's not bitter. "If God hadn't allowed me to get put into the juvenile corrections facility, I'd still be on the train, begging and shining shoes to survive. God used that experience to bring me to this place today so that I could help others."

It's no wonder that kids like Napoleon are willing to devote their lives to carry on Papa's legacy. Their gratitude for being rescued from the pit of death and despair is immense.

## **Lily**

A thousand miles away, in a remote tribal village of northeastern India, Lily is another young woman making her mark on the world. When she was thirteen, children in her village began showing up at her house during her visits home on school breaks, asking her to teach them. Boarding at an orphanage in a village some distance away from her home, just so she could attend school, Lily became the most educated person in her whole village and one of the few who could read. It was her dream to someday return to her village and open a school.

Now Lily is twenty-one, and her dream is becoming a reality. With high school and Bible College behind her, she has moved back to her family's village where fifty-seven kids come to her every day for schooling. The village families are so excited about this; they have begun looking for some land where they can build a school for her to teach their children.

"The parents of the children believe in me and trust me to teach their children," says Lily. "They have been so encouraging." Sadly, this contrasts the opinions of her family and friends, who think Lily is too quiet and fragile to run a school by herself. "They don't know who I am on the inside," Lily confides. "I may seem unable, small, and weak on the outside, but I'm a very strong person on the inside."i

Lily is most excited about how she will impact her village with the love of Christ. The first subject she teaches every day is biblical studies, and after school she offers a devotional time with singing and more Bible teaching. She says her students are enthusiastic in learning about God and the Bible. Eventually she hopes to start more schools in other, nearby villages.

### **Ashish**

When Papa told me the story of Ashish, his eyes filled with tears. He said that this story always tugs at his heart in a profound way. Papa's recounts:

Ashish's family were street dwellers, living in a small tent. One day in a street fight, somebody came and stabbed his father to death. After a few months, they came and killed his mother, too. Ashish was only five years old at that time. He never knew about Christianity, but his mother had a Christian name, so someone asked some nearby Christians to give her a funeral. A couple churches came together and gave her a proper burial.

Towards evening, when everyone was leaving the burial grounds, the boy stood on the dirt mound over her grave and screamed and cried, "Now where can I go?" All the police officers, the pastors, and the spectators saw the child screaming and crying, but not even one person asked, "What can I do for the boy?"

Then one of our pastors, John Matthew, heard about the boy from someone who attended the funeral and went and got him from his mother's grave and brought him to our children's home.

Ashish is one of our smartest kids and a very good singer who composes his own songs. He sings in our church choir and also sings solos. He finished school and Bible College, and now he is serving the Lord, working in our office. So I praise God for Ashish.

## **Jennie**

Jennie knows nothing about her South India parents except that, as a newborn, they threw her away and left her for dead in a city dumpster. Some college boys happened by and heard her crying, so they picked her up out of the garbage and took her to a nearby Emmanuel orphanage.

Jennie was so bright that she graduated from Bible College at sixteen. Her instructors noticed how mature and responsible she was at such a young age and how she had a heart for helping children, so they sent her to help out at an orphanage for younger children for one year of on-the-job training. When the main caregiver at that orphanage was called to another location to help out during a time of need, seventeen-year-old Jennie took over. For the past two years, she's been taking care of an entire orphanage of eight younger children with the help of an assistant, Mary, who's now sixteen and also an orphan.

This position is a good fit for Jennie, who loves kids and feels privileged to serve them. "You don't have to give up everything you love to make a difference," she says. "It starts by thinking about others, then showing them the love that God has shown you. In this way He will use you to transform lives."

God is definitely using Jennie's love, experiences, and training to do just that for the little ones under her care. "When the children get sad and start crying for their parents, I can understand their pain and comfort them better than anyone else because I've been in their shoes. I'm able to give the love and care that they want and need, just like my caretakers showed me God's love when I was a child. I feel like a mother to them now."

Understandably, Jennie gets tired and discouraged with so much responsibility on her young shoulders. Some of the kids are mischievous, and sometimes food for the home is in short supply during periods of financial hardship or persecution on the ministry. At those times, she wonders if she's doing the right thing. But then she remembers that, when she came to work at the orphanage, she committed herself to serving the orphans with her best efforts. So instead of fretting, Jennie says she prays, asking God to give her strength to continue taking care of them. She relies on Him to be her protector and provider, her Father and Mother—her everything.

Her faith has grown immensely as a result of relying on God's provision and care. Once, when her cupboards were bare, God miraculously supplied food from neighbors. Another time, when one of the children missed the school bus, a friend stopped by unexpectedly to see if she needed anything, so he was able to take the girl to school.

Once an orphan, now taking care of orphans, does Jennie have any regrets? “If I didn’t know Jesus, I wouldn’t be serving these children now. I’d be out living on the streets—if I was even alive.” She believes that she will raise these kids to grow up and take care of others in the same way.

### **Vikram**

Vikram comes from a very poor family in a small village in the northern state of Bihar, where his large family often went hungry and slept on the cold dirt floor of their one-room mud hut. When he was eight years old, Vikram got the unprecedented opportunity to move to a distant Emmanuel Children’s home so that he could receive an education. Shortly thereafter, he was hospitalized for two weeks with a serious unknown illness. His friends came from the orphanage to pray for him, and he miraculously recovered. It was then he realized there was a God who cared about him, and he began a personal relationship with Christ.

When he was fifteen, he had the opportunity to return to his village to see his family for the first time in seven years. He was so excited to go and share the Gospel with them, but sadly they all opposed him and told him if he continued in his Christian faith, he had no place in the family.

Undeterred, Vikram returned to Kota to enter Bible College in the fall of 2005. Shortly into his second semester, major persecution broke out against the ministry. Sixteen-year-old Vikram found himself thrown into jail and under constant interrogation. “*How did you get to this orphanage? Who brought you? How did you become a Christian? Why did you become a Christian?*” None of his honest answers satisfied his interrogators.

“You are only sixteen,” they told him. “You are not mature enough to make decisions, so you cannot choose a religion.”

“I have not done this for my parents, or for anyone else, or out of any pressure. I know this is for my own soul and that’s why I have done it.”

“How do you know about your soul? You are only sixteen. You cannot think of something like a soul on your own or choose how you are going to save yourself.”

“Why can’t I think about my soul? I know what’s good for me.”

And so the questions continued. Permitting him no sleep, the police interrogated him every hour around the clock, and threw out tempting offers. “If you give up your faith, we will help you.” Vikram remained strong and did not give in to their offers, but a few days later, they

made him fill out a paper with his name, his address, and how he came to faith. Then they made him sign it. He didn't know that underneath was a carbon paper providing a copy of his signature on a blank paper. They proceeded to fill in the paper with false information so they could use it to accuse him of false charges.

Vikram's worst experience in jail came when they put him into solitary confinement for seven days. Leading him through five locked gates, they handed him a light bulb and forced him into a small dark room.

Others from the ministry were also in jail but he did not see them or talk to them, and they were all told that he had been released. Since he had nothing to do, Vikram decided to fast and pray. He also sang hymns. The police would come and ask why he was always singing hymns.

"I don't have anything else to do."

"Why don't you sing something else?" they asked.

"I know only Christ and that's why I sing His hymns."

During the day, policemen brought Vikram out of the cell to take him for walks around the compound. They asked him, "Why don't you give up your faith?" This gave him the opportunity to share the Gospel with them. He told them, "If you will believe, there will be a crown of life for you." And every night, a man came to Vikram's cell and badgered him, "Why don't you give up Christianity?" But each night, Vikram refused. He says, "They were trying to wear down my faith, but instead, my resolution to remain strong in my faith increased every day."

On one of these trips outside his cell, Vikram asked to be taken to the jail library. He remembered that pastors from the ministry sometimes visited people in jail and left Bibles. Sure enough, he found one and took it back to his cell. He opened to the Acts of the Apostles so that he might be encouraged by the testimonies of Paul and Peter when they were beaten, persecuted, and imprisoned for their faith. While he read, God revealed to him that he had been given a *privilege* to suffer for his faith so that he could bear witness to Jesus Christ in this jail.

After seven days, they brought Vikram out, joining him with the others in jail from Emmanuel Ministry, and he was so happy. Immediately the group began to sing and pray together."

One day, Vikram remembers being taken to a solitary confinement cell and instructed to carry the belongings of the person who was being moved out. When they opened the door to a dark, hot, rat infested cell, Vikram was surprised to see Dr. Sam emerge—Papa’s son! Sam had been in this dungeon for three long days, hungry rats chewing at his body except when he had the strength to hold himself up by some bars in the small window well, or to cover himself with a hot blanket in the already sweltering room.

As soon as Sam was brought into the cell with the others, they all praised and thanked God that they were together. Sam wrote heartfelt worship songs for the group, and they sang to the beat of the instruments they made out of plates and utensils. The orphanages and Bible Colleges still sing these songs to this day.

Vikram remembers being encouraged by Sam. “You have been given a privilege to suffer at this young age. Now when you grow up, you will not be afraid to face any sort of persecution, and God will raise you to higher positions.” Vikram was in jail a total of seventy-five days, longer than any of the adults, before his case was finally dismissed from the high court.

Today, twenty-year-old Vikram says, “My experience in jail has completely transformed my life. I have become fearless about sharing the Gospel,” Vikram refers to the times he has been harassed while sharing the Gospel in his community. As for his future? “I want to serve the Lord and humanity as much as I can. My village has no educational opportunities and they live in fear and bondage to many superstitions. I want to return to my village where I can open a school and an orphanage and bring about positive change through education and the light of the Gospel.

### **Mary Rose**

Mary Rose came to an Emmanuel Hope Home in 1995 at the age of seven. After her father died, her mother remarried and the new stepfather didn’t want Mary Rose around, so her mom agreed to let her go to the home. After Mary Rose finished high school and Bible College, she worked at a Hope Home in Kerala for two years, and then relocated to the Hope Home in Delhi, supervising and teaching the children.

About that time, Papa’s son, Sam, was at the Home and expressed the need for a cook at the Bishop House. This is the home where Papa and Sam live, and where they accommodate many out of town guests who come to either see or serve the ministry. When Mary Rose overheard, she quickly volunteered, “I will come and cook.”

Sam asked, “Do you know how to cook?”

“Oh, yes! And if not, I will learn.”

So she came to Kota to cook, but there was one small problem. She didn’t know how. So who was put in charge as her teacher? Someone in the Bishop House had a hidden talent! *Papa!* He taught her how to cook all kinds of Indian delicacies—fried chicken, chicken curry, pickles, Dahl, banana pancakes, and many other tasty dishes.

“I cook just like a hen flies,” Papa admits. “I will only fly when there is no way to escape, and only for a short time. I can cook anything, but just don’t ask me for the recipe, because I don’t have one.” How did Papa learn culinary skills? “In Kerala, no boys cook or clean, that is all the mom’s job. My father never knew how to make even a cup of coffee because that is our custom. But the time my wife had to go help my daughter with her first baby for a couple months, it was either learn how to cook or starve.”

Now Mary Rose manages the goings-on at the busy Bishop House, feeding residents and frequent guests alike. In fact, she and her three house helpers can feed about any size crowd. She loves her job, especially interacting with visitors. And she especially loves working for Papa. Last time I was there visiting and Papa was away on business, she looked a little down and I asked her why.

“I miss Papa. The house is always too quiet and no fun when Papa’s not here.”

There are many of Papa’s children who work at varying jobs around the Bishop House. Papa says, “None of these young people who work in the Bishop House had a father or mother or any respect. I love them, appreciate them, and respect them as my own children. I am so happy that they treat me kindly and work hard to take care of the household, and it gives me joy that we are able to pay them well. The money they receive will help them get started in their future.”

“Dad is the same with me that he is with all of his children. I never had jealousy because we were all treated the same. The only thing is, Dad wants you to share what he gives to you, and I had a problem with that when I was a kid. For example, he would buy me three pairs of pants and want me to give two away to my friends. They were all my size, bought to fit me, but if he saw another in need then he would pay to have the clothing altered to fit them. He always taught me that it was better to give than to receive, even if I didn’t want to learn it.”

—Samuel Thomas

## **Increasing Passion and Vision**

In a world where it's so much easier to focus on one's self and to seek instant gratification, it is Papa's personal suffering and his love for mankind that has kept him moving toward his vision with patience and perseverance.

"I will tell you why I started orphanages. It was because of my own hunger pain—my starvation. To this day, anytime I see a poor man, I know he's in trouble. I always keep change in my hand when I go for travel. Somebody comes to me, and if they ask, I give. I know many people criticize me, even those who travel with me. They say, 'Why do you do it? Don't you know these people are corrupted people?'"

"My response is always the same. 'I don't know if they are corrupt or not, that's none of my business. They came to ask me, so I give.'"

"Sometimes people get angry with me for giving, as if I'm using their own father's money," Papa laughs. "I'm using *my money*, but they get angry about it. They don't understand that *God created this in me*. When I took in the first eight children, I did it because of this God-given sympathy. And it was only after I took the children in because of this compassion that God put a burden in my heart for His vision."

"Look at some of the great men of the Bible, like Daniel, and his three friends. They were all in their teens when they were taken captive and they didn't know if their parents had been killed or what. Also think about Esther, who had no father or mother. All of these young people God used miraculously."

"In the same way, I'm praying for one million scraps of raw material. I will take the time to shape them into arrows. That is why we bring them here. Many people said, 'Don't do it.' But the Bible says it is the children that are the arrows, and we must shape them and send them."

And that's exactly what Papa is doing—gathering and shaping many world-changers who being launched to become the answer to his question: *How do I find enough messengers to bring the love of Jesus to every people, tribe, nation, and language, according to Revelation 7:9?*

Papa, an earthly father of the fatherless, has more children today than ever—children redeemed from empty lives and restored to the quiver of God's blessing to this earth because of his faithfulness. More than 16,000 broken children's lives have been gathered and restored through his love and hard work, with at least two-thirds of those devoting their lives to full-time ministry as pastors, evangelists, teachers, and medical professionals. Most of the others have

become educated professionals and leaders with a variety of respectable jobs, who also use their life vocations as a means to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ in their work places and communities. It is conservatively estimated that 95 percent of the grown Hope Home children are personally serving the Lord to this day, whether vocationally or not.

The children coming out of Hope Homes who wish to continue in ministry have ample opportunity. There are four Bible Colleges offering a three-year course in Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Nepal. And there are many smaller Bible Institutes that offer a one-year course located throughout India. Students are given intensive ministry training, and within a one-year period, they will be well prepared for the field. To date, over 21,000 students from all walks of life have graduated from Papa's ministry training.

And that's not all. In addition to all the children who have been rescued since the late 1970s, there are offshoots of this ministry operating under the name of Hopegivers International, reaching into many lives throughout India, including thousands of community worship centers in cities and villages; for-profit Christian schools (they help fund the orphanages); a major hospital; medical clinics; leprosy and prostitute (called "Commercial Sex Workers" or CSW's) outreaches; tsunami ministries; and more than seventy Hope Homes.

People often ask Papa the question, "Thomas did you ever think that when you were planning to walk to Rajasthan, that this is what God was going to do?"

Papa says, "I tell them I could have never thought this up in my wildest dreams. You can't dream bigger than what you can think. I could not think this big. So we must only praise God for what He is doing." The results of one man's unshackled faith in a limitless God are nothing short of Divine.

"Dad has no hidden agenda and he doesn't try to take credit. Nothing Dad does is about promoting himself. One of the many things I learned from him is that whatever I do, do it for the right reason." —Samuel Thomas

"Before we came to Kota, when there was no money coming in for our journey, we held a four-day fasting prayer," Papa says. "During that time, the Lord gave me a word from Psalm 2:8: 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession.' That was the promise I claimed then, and I still claim it today. And I am seeing God's faithful answer to that promise."

I love the testimony of one onlooker, a man who had the opportunity to visit a graduation ceremony for the Bible College at Kota in 2005. Bobby Capps saw first-hand how God has indeed been faithful to His promises to Papa and ultimately, to His forgotten children. He recalls:

*I was kind of twice orphaned. My Dad died when I was five and then I got a stepdad who left our family when I was a teenager. I grew up with the real deep sense of what it means to be an orphan. As an adult, I went into ministry and ended up meeting Sam and M.A. Thomas. They invited me to India on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bible College where they were graduating 10,000 kids. I was on the stage in a robe, feeling a bit weird, facing this huge group of people. The first thing they did was to bring the 2,000 orphans from the Kota orphanage and seat them on the ground. Then all the children who used to be the orphans and are now graduating were seated right behind them. Then out in the wings were all of the pastors who used to be the students, who used to be the orphans.*

*Suddenly, as this whole thing was happening, God's Spirit said to me, "Bobby, I take care of orphans. I am the Father of the fatherless, look at my handiwork." I began to weep, and I just couldn't stop.*

*Lying in bed that night, I was completely overwhelmed by the picture that had transpired in front of me. I began to think, "You know, Lord, I have five kids, and my entire life I've always had great dreams for them. I've always wondered if You wanted them to be doctors or lawyers...always wondered if they were going to be schoolteachers or mathematicians.*

*But when M.A. Thomas lies in his bed at night and thinks about his kids, he doesn't think anything except that they're going to be missionaries. And I wondered why I never had that thought before. I wonder why I didn't dream the highest hopes and expectations for my children—that instead of being a doctor or a lawyer, that they would literally change the world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

### **Only The Best Will Do**

With all that work behind him, you'd think an aged man who has shepherded thousands of orphans and pastors would be ready to retire on a sunny beach with a stack of good reading material. How many of us would be thinking: *Isn't it time for someone else to take over and give me a break? I've done my time. And now, after almost fifty years of trials, persecutions, and intense labor, my momentum is waning. I'm ready to move on with my retirement!*

Like any devoted parent who never stops investing in his kids and grandkids, nothing could be further from reality for Papa. Retirement isn't in his vocabulary because he knows that earth is *the work*, and heaven is *the rest*. If anything, his vision just keeps expanding. First it was

only rescuing orphaned children, then it became training them up as disciples and evangelists, today it has gone even a step further.

In 1977, my vision was to take orphans from the street of India, feed them, clothe them, shelter them, give them education, encourage them to stand on their own feet, and challenge them to work for the Lord. Now, the Lord had challenged me to take another step in the orphanage ministry. My vision now is to take these street children, give them the *best care*, the *best education*, and send them to many vocations to bring about change in India from the inside out. We can send them to work in government—even in the highest posts—like Daniel, Joseph, and Mordecai. We can send them as lawyers, doctors, businessmen, secretaries, and managers. Above all, we can send them as missionaries. So, I continually challenged every Hope Home leader to give the very best care for the orphans, and to take even more children and to start more new Homes.

### **Does Papa's Model Work?**

Bobby Capps, the man with an orphan past who was deeply impacted by seeing one of Papa's graduation services, describes how he first met Papa and then began bringing the successful Hope Home and Bible College model to other orphan ministries in Africa and Central America:

*One day my friend Jonathan Byrd called me and said, "Do you want to meet the greatest guy in the world?"*

*"What do you mean 'the greatest guy' in the world?"*

*He said, "I'm talking about thee greatest living Christian...do you want to meet him?" And that is how I met M.A. Thomas, who had come into town to meet with Jonathan.*

*What do I think of him? He is on a pedestal. There's nobody that I've ever met in my life who is like him, and I've met a lot of people, including many names you'd immediately recognize. The closest might have been Bill Bright.*

*As I learned about his vision for orphans, it sunk deeply into my heart. It's so important and it is so easily transferable. There is not an orphanage director in the world who wants to see his sixteen-year-old kids leave and go back to the streets, but they don't know what to do next. So now I cast M.A. Thomas' vision everywhere I go.*

*As an example, our ministry was involved with this orphanage in Kampala, Uganda, with 500 kids. I sat with the orphanage director, and I said, "Chris, I have a vision for you. What if these 500*

*kids were the next missionaries to Africa? What if you trained them and released them back into Africa to change it?"*

*Chris said, "My brother, tell me more, tell me more."*

*So I told him about Dr. Thomas' vision. But he said, "Bobby, no one can do it. It's so hard to have an orphanage and to get a school accredited."*

*"What about faith? M.A. did it. Sam is doing it."*

*"But we have to have all these things..."*

*"Do you believe in this vision?"*

*"Yeah."*

*"Then God will help you accredit a school."*

*At the time, it just so happened that the Anglican Church of Africa was having a bishop's council in the same town. While we toured the Anglican Center, we happened to see this bishop's council in progress. One guy wasn't wearing bishop's garb, so I decided to ask him what was going on. Then I told him who I was and what I was doing in town, and asked him the same. He said, "I'm the Secretary of Education for the country of Uganda."*

*"Would you mind meeting with me, I need to talk to you about accrediting an orphanage."*

*So that's how I set up a meeting between the Secretary of Education of Uganda and Chris Lubega. The Secretary came to the orphanage and the story is continuing from there. Now Hopegiver's vision is being realized in Uganda through another orphan ministry, and all we did was pray.*

*God so wants to take care of orphans, and if we'll have the faith, He'll put the connections together. I "accidentally" shook hands with the Secretary of Education of Uganda, you know? Tell me God doesn't care of orphans.*

*"When you take care of the orphans, God takes care of you." —M.A. Thomas*

## **One Million Strong**

Papa's greatest desire is that you and I will recognize our part in his vision. "So many people don't believe that children are made to be God's arrows. I see so many children on the street, and I think, *they are broken branches, but we can all take and prepare them as arrows.*" We must ask what we can do to help God's children become arrows. There are many Napoleons, Lilys, Vikrams, and Jennies who need faithful partners who will help shape them to bring Christ back to their own people.

"You see, arrows are not born; they are prepared. Don't think that when God gives you a child, that it comes sharpened as an arrow. You have to make it into one. My father made an

arrow from me by removing so much of the rust from me. And that is what we must do with all His children to prepare them for His work.

“Many people don’t like that I teach discipline to the children, but without discipline and without a little discomfort, you can never make an arrow. Arrows are not born or found on the road—they are *made*. It is a long, tedious, hard job. They must be put through fire, pounded, cut, shaped, and polished in order to be made worthy for the Master.

“Awhile back I had to sharpen seven of my arrows in Kerala who I had sent for a one-year course in Ayurvedic Medicine. This is a great privilege for them because I had to commit to pay 60,000 rupees (\$1,500) for their education.

“I discovered that the children wanted to become boss after reaching there. When they called me, I had to sharpen them. One boy told me on the phone, ‘I don’t like to eat so much rice. I need apples and grapes.’

“I said, ‘Boys, if you don’t like so much rice, some of our girls would be very happy there. Why don’t you pack up your belongings and go back to your villages. But you must stay there because I will not receive you here in Kota.’

“They said, ‘Oh sir, we are sorry. Please forgive us. We’ll never complain anymore and we will obey.’ They obeyed and they became such beautiful arrows!”

“If you mess up and come and admit it to Dad, he is most forgiving, kind, and compassionate. But if you try to fool him, he is your worst enemy.” —Samuel Thomas

Just like He is using Papa, God wants to use you and me to make a difference in this world by investing in His children. We have been commissioned by God to raise young people who will be a spiritual blessing to this earth, and that can and should include our own children as well as other children who will become part of our own spiritual legacy in this world. Papa says:

“The Bible says happy and blessed is the man whose quiver is full of arrows to give to the Mighty Man. How wonderful it is to give our very own children into the hands of this Mighty Warrior and King of all kings. He will use every single arrow placed into His hands for conquering the world with His love.

“My parents, poor as they were, gave me into God’s hands as His arrow to India, and they were blessed. I gave my own three children and 16,000 orphaned or abandoned children to the Lord, fully sharpened. I am also a blessed man. Will you receive the blessing by giving your

children into the hands of the Mighty King so they may truly help change the world with their gifts? Will you help support other children of the world that they may be launched as arrows to reach all who have not heard with the message of God's love?

“Friends, my aim is *one million laborers*. Will you pray with me for the same? Will you become a part by placing an unloved child into God's quiver? Let us rise up and walk. This year is given to us not to sleep but to work for the Lord. Let us possess the world with the promise, reaching the world with the Good News through His arrows.”

Through Hopegivers, we can join Papa's vision for gathering, sharpening, and launching arrows. Together they can become one million strong!

## Chapter 7: Extraordinary Faith

*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Romans 4:18 NIV*

### **Papa shares about corruption in ministry...**

In my village from the early days, I have seen my own friends in ministry buying property and land for themselves with money from the ministry. In India, we don't have social security, and we don't have job security. *We don't have any security.* In India, we don't know what will become of our children if we die or lose our job. So a common practice of people in ministry is to put a little money aside here and there, thinking they will buy a couple acres of land in Kerala. And then if they die or the church ends their job, at least their son will have that land for an inheritance. That is why they do it.

I knew about this kind of thing even when I was growing up. When I got into ministry, I had already seen the Lord provide for me throughout Bible College, so I said, "If God could take care of me when He paid my college tuition, and when I walked five hundred miles, and when I was willing to walk 1,200 miles, then He can surely take care of my son. So I will not go for hiding money." I never gave into the temptation to act out of desperation. I have never owned my own home and I don't want to. I don't need a house. I'm happy even if my son never has his own home.

Just last month, a relative gave me 100,000 rupees, but I never had the desire to keep even twenty of them for myself. I gave 100 percent of them for the Lord's work. If people don't want to keep me around anymore, let them send me away and I'll stay under the tree and only eat the fruit on it. I can sleep anywhere. Even now I am ready for anything. But the love of money has not come into my heart, and I will never let it corrupt my spirit or take me out of the race. My faith will never be in how much money I can get, but I will keep faith in my God.

### **Taking Away the Stone of Unbelief**

If there was one hobby I had growing up, it was fishing. Anywhere there was water with fish in it; I could catch them—even with my bare hands. Anytime I could go fishing, it was God's gift to me. I believe Jesus selected fisherman because they are the bravest people. They cannot be afraid of death because there is no guarantee that they will come back in the morning. They are hardworking and have a simple but deep faith—deeper than a farmer or anyone. They

have to throw the net. Can you imagine Peter and his friends throwing the net the whole night without catching one fish? Man, they were of strong faith. And that is why I believe Jesus selected fisherman.

“Faith is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith and hope go together. Without faith, there is no hope. And without hope, there is no faith—the two must always be connected. If you are not hoping for anything, you need not have any faith. But your hope must always be based on God’s Word.

I have seen one thing. Early on when God gave me the vision for the children, I felt tension about how it could happen. This stress was partly because I didn’t have the money in my hand first. I often wondered, “How will it come? Can I go and ask somebody to help me? Where can I go? Whom can I ask?” But through the years, I could see God providing it all in His time.

In all the history of this ministry, I have never waited until we received the provision in order to start the work. Many people told me, “Don’t go and don’t do the work until you have the money.” I never listened to them. I did not do even one work based on what resources I had in my hand. If God was leading me in a certain direction, I acted before I saw with my eyes. I just did it. All our buildings and schools were established that way—God always provided.

“I’m a man of little faith in a great God.” —M.A. Thomas

Faith always starts with small beginnings. Living faith, though it is the size of a tiny mustard seed, can remove mountains. It was that way coming to Rajasthan. Can you imagine taking one pregnant lady and one lady with three children—including a baby—to go live under a tree? That was the simple faith I had. Philip, John, and I decided we would work as laborers and whatever money we earned, we’d use it to eat. And that is all. The first day we arrived, we went to the market to find somebody to give the Gospel, and God provided for us to eat.

When we had the vision for the church here in Kota, we had no money. Dr. Gupta from Hindustan Bible Institute came here and he said, “Come with me. We’ll go and stand on the grounds where you want to build, and we’ll pray.” After we prayed, he said, “Thomas, you start the work, God will provide.” So that’s just what I did.

After that I met a man who never believed God or went to any church. I went to his house and shared the Gospel, and he accepted the Lord. Afterward, he offered to loan us the money to buy all the same land for the future church and the school, and I only had to pay him thirty rupees a month for interest. Sure enough, I started it and the Lord provided. I cried out to the

Lord several times in the process, “Lord if you help me complete this, I won’t trouble you anymore.”

I can say that every project happened that way, even when I began taking in the orphans. I wondered how it could happen for me to take in children when I didn’t have the money, but the Lord always provided, because I acted in faith. This is the faith of all the great warriors throughout the Bible. You tell me one of them who pleased God because of their ability, smartness, or wealth. All these great saints of God pleased Him through faith and faith alone. Their faith was their honor. Their faith helped them to do great things of good report.

Now we have all these orphans and pastors and students. And we have Bible schools in several places with many more students. How can we feed them? I can sit here and think, *how can I do it...where will I get money?* But slowly, God does it. If I dwell on tomorrow, I will get a load of mental tension, heart attack, high blood pressure, and nervous breakdown. But if I say, “Did they have food today? Yes. Praise God!”

“In one sentence, Dad is a man who takes God at His word and challenges Him to fulfill it. He believes God to do what he said He will do, and then he doesn’t question Him, but just believes.” —Samuel Thomas

I never calculate what our bank account holds and then make decisions based on that calculation. I don’t do it. If I did that, I’d have to close down at least 80-90% of the ministry and everything we are doing.

Jesus did not demand anything from His disciples. He did not scold them when they slept in the garden, or when they denied Him, betrayed Him, or even when they didn’t understand His teachings. But He did scold them because of their unbelief.

Do you know why we don’t do all these works—fasting and praying, crying with a loud voice and tears, walking to villages and churches for preaching, feeding the hungry, and healing the sick—all because we do not continuously believe Him. The simple reason we are not doing the work that Christ did, or the greater works that He promised, is because we don’t believe.

Jesus told those at Lazarus’ tomb to take away the stone from the grave, believing in Him, and then they would see the glory of God (John 11:39-40). Many times God’s people don’t see the glory of God because they are not willing to believe and follow the Lord through simple obedience of taking away the stone. I have seen how many of God’s servants start ministries believing God, but later [when the obstacles grow larger] it becomes very hard for them to trust the same God they trusted at first.

When I was asked to go to the mission field in Rajasthan, I was ready to take my pregnant wife to walk 1,200 miles to an unknown land and language without a single penny in my hand. I believed Christ and His words then. But many times since, in the face of impossible circumstances, I've had to asked myself the question, "Do I believe the same God now? Do I have a same great faith now as I had in 1960?"

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). We believed God in the face of no sound human reasoning, and we have seen the glory of God, both then and now.

Now I have perfect peace that if I die today, God has allowed me to keep up with all my debts. I'm not deceiving or cheating one person under heaven. Maybe we owe a little money in the market for food, but I know that will all be paid.

### **The Greater Work: But God**

In 1976, I went to Hindustan Bible Institute to be one of the speakers for the graduation service. While I was there, God greatly increased my faith through one of the other speakers. I always read my Bible, but in Bible College I was taught that the Old Testament is not for us today through a teaching called "dispensationalism." Back then I was told, "You can read it, but don't develop your faith on it."

Because of this, I always had questions. *Man, if it is not for us, then why should I study it? Why should I read it?* But these were only silent question marks in my heart. I never asked anybody, because I couldn't find anyone who had another view. As far as I knew, God is also a dispensationalist, so no one will disagree.

At the graduation ceremony, a Dr. Hash got up to speak and said, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*" (2 Timothy 3:16). From Genesis to Malachi, and Matthew to Revelation, all Scripture is given to us." And when this man preached that, I simply had to shout, "Praise the Lord! Halleluiah!" For the first time, I had understanding and newfound belief in my heart.

Dr. Hash went on to say that if you read fifteen minutes a day, or four chapters, you would be able to finish reading through the Bible in one year. I said, "I will do it!" I was about forty-one years old then, and I don't know any year since that I have not gone through the Bible. That is one of the secrets of maintaining my faith.

I don't think I'm a man of great faith. I'm a man of little faith in a great God. That's all. I trust God for things. I still remember the first time I read D.L. Moody's biography. For five years Moody prayed, "Lord increase my faith, increase my faith." And then he came to Romans 10:17 and read that faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. From that point on, he began to read the Bible and his faith increased.

See, I cannot use yesterday's faith for today—it is used up on yesterday. I cannot keep today's faith for tomorrow. I must gather up only what I need for today because that is all that is available to me to face the problems of today. I am not a man of strong faith, so I get the faith I need each day. If I don't read my Bible, even in one or two days you will see my faith disappear "like that." I do pray and ask the Lord to increase my faith, but it is through His daily Word that He has answered my prayer.

My life and ministry have always had hardships, but God has met every need. Even today. We don't even have enough sponsors for 500 children, but right now we are taking care of more than 5,000 children. God is meeting our needs, and not even one child is hungry.

Many well-to-do people come and say, "Oh, we give this kind of food to our children and we keep them up so beautiful and nice." I say to them in response, "Man, you bring any of your children—the best of your children—and come compare them to our children."

Even now after all the persecution, we still have more than 7,000 pastors with us who need to be sponsored. You see, BUT GOD. I pray for them earnestly, and He meets the need. Even if enough people aren't giving, God provides for them somehow. And I am so happy. You look at all my children—how well dressed, how happy, how healthy they are. Our orphan children are champions in Rajasthan in football, volleyball, basketball, softball, and cricket. *And with what training?* We don't even have one coach for them.

Sometimes when problems come and stay for a long time, then I get a little discouraged and ask, "God, why? Why isn't my prayer being answered?"

While I was in hiding from people who wanted to kill me, I kept hearing that things were going to get resolved with the police. But two months passed, three months passed, and then the question came, "Lord, how long?" God showed me that Habakkuk asked the same question, "Lord how long should I cry? And how long will you not listen?" But now I see He always had a good plan He was working out for the ministry, and He has never let us down. But it was all in His perfect timing.

Friends, my great desire and prayer is this: that I should do the work which Jesus did, and even greater work. Let us keep on believing Him and trusting in Him. Let us labor together for greater work than what Jesus did for building the Kingdom of God. Whatever things you desire when you pray according to God's will, believe that you have received them already and you shall have them (Mark 11:24). This is a great secret for receiving whatever things we pray for. Nothing shall be impossible when we ask, believe, and then act.

## **Dreams of Joseph**

## Chapter 8: To Save a Nation

*“Here comes that dreamer! Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into a deep pit. We can tell our father that a wild animal has eaten him. Then we’ll see what becomes of all his dreams” (Genesis 37:19–20)!*

### **Papa says...**

In 1978, I met with Dr. Hugo Culpepper in Memphis, who was a Southern Baptist missionary to China and one of the contributors to the Chinese Bible. I asked him, “Dr. Culpepper, can you give me a suggestion? I am a young man, but I have a dream for India. I want to win India for Christ, so what all can I do?”

“Do you believe Jeremiah 33:3?” Dr. Culpepper asked me. “‘Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’ If you believe it, that’s enough. There’s nothing more you need.”

He didn’t say even one more word than that. Till this day, that is one of my favorite verses.

### **Pursue God-Dreams**

No one can kill your dreams. Joseph had a God-given dream that his entire family would bow down before him. His father scolded him, and his brothers were furious. They hated him and left him for dead, but they didn’t keep him away from his dream, which resulted in the saving of a whole nation.

Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream!” He was killed pursuing that dream, but no one could kill his dream for civil rights in America.

Mahatma Gandhi dreamed about a free India. His enemies killed him but could not kill his dream, and he became the father of a newly free nation.

Abraham Lincoln had a dream to stop slavery in America. His enemies killed him, but they did not stop his dream.

Jesus Christ had a dream to establish God’s Kingdom among every people, tribe, nation, and language of this world (Revelation 7:9). His enemies killed him but they could never kill or destroy His dream.

Your enemies, your “friends,” and sometimes even your family may be willing to leave you for dead in a ditch somewhere, but they cannot kill the dream you are willing to live and die for.

There’s one more dream I must mention. When I came to Kota in 1960, it was the first time I heard that there are 700,000 villages in India and out of that, 600,000 don’t even have one Christian. I had a dream to start a church in every village and also to bring them education. How to start it, and when and where to do it, I didn’t know. When I tried to get started, I was completely discouraged by several people and they never permitted me to do it. But the dream stayed in my heart. I even wrote a book about it, *Uplifting the Untouchables (Dalits)*.

When you think about India, approximately 87% of the population lives in villages where India’s rich heritage and culture can be seen in full splendor. But the people there live in a constant state of poverty and it is hard for many villagers to eat even two meals in a day. You go to thousands and thousands of villages and they don’t have even a cow or a goat, or any resource to provide the children with milk to drink. The poor mothers, they don’t have any good food at all to give to their children. So the children are living and that’s all. Because of malnutrition, disease, poor hygiene, and insufficient clean water, the death rate for children is so high in the villages.

Recently, one of the best English newspapers in India, *The Hindu*, reported that about 47% of the Indian population’s average income is \$1.25 per day. Often, that is what sustains the whole family. This is why they forget to pay attention to their children’s education, clothes, medical care, and emotional needs. Many thousands or maybe even hundreds of thousands of villages don’t even have one person who is literate. They have no aim, no purpose, and nobody cares about them. These people live just because they were born, and nothing more than that.

It is sad that while the world can go to the moon and it has an abundance of modern technology, millions upon millions are thirsty for clean water, dying of starvation, and illiterate. Their life expectancy is no more than 30-35 years, and a person at that age is considered old because they have no medicine, no proper diet, and they are so hard working. For many, their only hope is in that of superstition. Living under the fear and practices of witch doctors, they offer animals sacrifices to please the evil spirits.

So my answer is to send our Bible students, either girls or boys, two-by-two into the villages where there is no Gospel witness. If you send two workers to each of the 600,000

villages, it would equal 1.2 million workers. So that is how I came to the idea of one million arrows.

Our pastors-in-training are graduated orphans or others who come to attend from outside the ministry. The minimum education requirement for our pastors is eighth grade. That is because where they are going in the villages, the people are not educated and there is no one to teach them. They don't have anyone in the village even past 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade level, and many are illiterate. If you can read and write, then you can be a teacher.

Many who come to our Bible College are new Christians, so I also require that they have at least two years walking faithfully with the Lord. The main thing I want to know is whether they can read the Bible and if they *will* read the Bible, that's all. They don't even have to know how to preach to start out. My theology books are all very, very simple and they can use them for preaching while they are learning how to do it.

In each village, these young people can set up a simple building for a school and a community center where community members—including orphans, widows, and anyone who wants to—can come to worship and learn about the abundant life that Jesus came to offer them. A church will be formed, and within six months children will be singing all the Christian songs. Then the children will bring their parents, and many tribals who are animists and have no god will come and hear the Gospel story so they can discover the living God.

When I was reading what David said, I was so blessed. “I will not enter my house or get into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob” (Psalms 132:3-5). After building a beautiful palace for himself, David decided he would not rest until he found a house for the God of Jacob. What a decision. What a commitment!

My heart's desire is to provide a house for the God of Jacob in every place in India. I have seen houses for every god and goddess—human gods, monkey gods, serpent gods, lion gods, and elephant gods—but there is no house for the God of Jacob in many places.

My beloved friend, some of us have most beautiful houses—even better than David's house. When you sleep in your house, do you have the same feeling that David had?

When I received my inheritance from my father, I could have built a nice home. Instead, I used the money to make a house for the God of Jacob in my village. Since then, we have built many of these houses. Like David, I have seen these blessings in every place where we

established a house of God. You also have the opportunity to help us make a house for the God of Jacob. Even better yet, you can help us establish “temples of God”—children for His service—so that they might bring God’s presence everywhere they go in India and other parts of the world.

Together, we can bring hope to the hopeless by educating the village children and illiterates. Parents can be asked to give twenty or thirty rupees (50-75 cents) for their child to study in our schools. A child can learn any language, so we will teach them English. Then one day you will visit these remote villages and they will be speaking to you in English—maybe a little Indian English, but it will be English.

We will send our students with basic medical supplies for free medical care, but we’ll also teach them to pray for the sick, especially among the tribals where there is no medicine and no doctor. In those areas, the Lord will be their main resource for healing and for everything. And the villages will welcome them because they bring hope of a better life. They can help reduce poverty by teaching villagers how to farm crops, fruit trees, cattle, goats, poultry, and set up bee keeping. They can keep a cow for themselves and ask the parents to buy some milk for the children and to use in tea and coffee. They can ask the government to help establish one or two wells so they will have water to drink. They can make small dams on the brook in the rainy season to keep sufficient irrigation water for two or three months. They can even teach them how to preserve rainwater and how to use solar heating. There are so many possibilities!

The whole thing is this: as they bring change to the villages, they shall be well-respected leaders wherever they go because there will be no one higher. Maybe they’ll preside over five or six villages at a time. They shall be the doctors, the teachers, the political leaders...*and they shall be the heroes.*

After our young people go and start the work, I send them at least one letter of encouragement every month, including one message for them to use, translated into all the main languages. We also invite them back to Kota once or twice a year to encourage them for a few days.

If the students wish to stay there permanently, within a ten-year period there will be a dramatic change. Within fifteen to twenty years, we can make a new generation of educated, healthy, God-fearing people throughout India—it will make India a paradise on earth. We can

take this model to other countries and then we will see a new world! I believe our dedicated orphan army will reach the furthest corners of the world.

This year (2008) is the first time I actually believe it will happen. This year, I am sending at least 25–30 teams of two, and it will be the beginning of a new era of my life. My greatest dream is to see one million of our own orphans and street children become these ambassadors of the Kingdom to go to all of these villages. God said that all children—not only my children—are arrows in the hand of a Mighty Man. I have never seen a mightier man than Jesus Christ, the one who has received all the power. I’ve not seen a better person who can handle the children who are made as arrows. All we have to do in order to evangelize the whole world is to take the arrows and place them into Jesus’ hand.

I pray for one million arrows, but my dream really doesn’t stop there. If I take India’s 600,000 villages alone, I need 1.2 million. But what about Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, and Bangladesh? What about China, Russia, Pakistan and many more surrounding countries? And what about the other countries of Haiti and Malawi where our ministry has arrows being shaped? In all these places I believe God will open doors for many more arrows, even in America. Like David, I believe “we will see the goodness of the Lord while we are in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13).

Seeing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living is called *revival*. God’s people have to believe in the goodness of the Lord, not just in heaven, but also on earth. We don’t need God’s goodness or His revival when we reach our everlasting home—then we will only share in His goodness. We do not wait to look for God’s goodness after our resurrection, but by His mercy we obtain His goodness here on earth.

Many of God’s people are fainthearted because they don’t see the goodness of God in their lives now, nor ask for it. A fainthearted person needs revival and new life. Unless we ask and until we believe for God’s intervention, we cannot have revival in the world.

People ask the question, “Thomas, you are praying to see a church in each of the 600,000 villages of India where there is no church, and you are praying for one million orphans to be raised as arrows for Jesus Christ, and you are praying for the salvation of 4.5 million lepers? How is it going to happen?”

If I do not believe for the fulfillment of all these prayers, I will become fainthearted. *But I do believe*. That is why I am not losing heart even today, when I am seventy-three years old,

suffering with many sicknesses. I say the only reason I am hopeful and still full of fervor is this: *I believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of living.*

Like many others before me, I too suffer because I have a dream. Some people appreciate it, but many criticize it saying, “This man is doesn’t have a brain.” Others have said, “He is just doing that to get more money for himself.” Others want to kill me for it, and there’s a chance that will happen, but nothing they do to me will stop this God-given dream. They cannot kill it. *It is already happening.*

### **Julie shares Sam’s perspective...**

What happens when a person tries to step in the way of Papa’s dream? Sam says, “The thing about Dad is that you can push him and hurt him, but when he realizes he is backed into a corner, then he becomes as hard as rock.

“For example, there might be a board telling him, ‘We don’t want you to start an orphanage because we don’t have the money.’ Dad will quietly listen to them because it is a reasonable objection when there is no money for such an undertaking. The board will feel like they have achieved their goal of convincing him that the answer is no. But then Dad will still go out preaching and promoting the orphanage because he knows it is *always* God’s will and desire to do ministry among the orphans, widows, lepers, and prostitutes, and God has given him the vision to do it. He will not openly fight against the board, but he will keep pursuing his dream, trusting in the Lord to provide. Every time he has been told no, he has always carried on as if they said yes, and in the end always wins.

“Now if someone were to still stand against the project, even when they see he has the vision and he has the funds, then you will see a different side of Dad come out. He will make sure they are no longer in a decision-making role. He can be coerced into changing, but only if you have beaten him a hundred times. But by that time you will not have a hand left. People have seen that when dad says God has told him to do something, unless God closes the door, there will be consequences if they don’t get out of God’s way. They will no longer have a membership at that club.”

### **Papa says...**

“The desire of every believer should be this: to see our relatives, neighbors, countrymen, and everyone we can think of enter into a saving relationship with Jesus. When we see that our

dear ones are led to the Lord and that our children are impacting the world, what a great joy comes into our hearts.

“The world is waiting for the Esthers, Josephs, and Moseses to rescue them out of their enslavement to sin, spiritual sickness, ignorance, fear, demonic oppression, hatred, and death. Future great leaders like these sit abandoned in the death wells of poverty in cities and villages worldwide, waiting to be rescued so they can become God’s great saviors of nations.

“Beloved, I pray that you will become a Hopegiver and help me see this dream through. Will you take part in sending one million orphans and street children to be gathered, sharpened, and launched as Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God? Will you place arrows—those who have no earthly parents—into God’s quiver to be used as saviors of nations?

“Let us not fall asleep on this God-dream until the last child who is willing has been shaped and sent.”

## **Restored Health of Hezekiah**

## Chapter 9: The Writing on the Wall

*Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.'" Isaiah 38:2-6 NKJV*

### **Julie writes about Papa's cancer discovery...**

It was a fluke that Papa discovered he was in advanced stages of lymphoma. Papa says, "In 1997, my faith was to be tested. My health was going 'down to the hill' (Papa's cute way of saying 'downhill'). I had been sick for a long time, even for a few years, with no improvement. Everybody noticed, even Dr. Jerry Falwell. When he came to India in 1994, he thought it was my last days.

"When I came to the states for a visit, Sam called Dr. Bill Noah from Murfreesboro, and asked him to give me a medical checkup. Everyone else thought my main problem was diabetes, which I'd had since the late 70s, so we were all surprised after my blood was drawn when the doctor asked, 'Are you taking blood thinning medicine?'

"I told him no, and then after asking a few more questions he said, 'You don't have any blood in your veins, only colored water. Come tomorrow with an empty stomach for more tests.' So I went for a CAT scan and they found a tumor next to my liver weighing nine pounds! The tumor was so large because it was eating up all of my blood."

The doctors made another shocking discovery with the results of Papa's blood test. He was HIV positive. No one had any idea how he contracted this dreaded disease, but it's not hard to imagine, living in India and working in such close contact throughout his life with AIDS victims from many walks of life.

"As soon as Dad was told about his cancer, he said, 'I accept whatever the Lord has for me.' And then he knelt down and prayed with Wayne Belt and his wife, Barbara, who were with him at the time. God heard their prayers, and next day when they tested him again, there was no sign of HIV. A meaningful part of the story for dad was that, even when Wayne's family found out about the HIV, they welcomed him into their home and did not push him out." —Samuel Thomas

It turns out that Papa had cancer of the lymph system. Even with surgery and treatment, his chances for survival this late in the game were basically none. But at age sixty-three, Papa believed his work on earth was not yet finished. There was much to be done toward his vision.

When I asked Papa if the “C” word scared him initially, he said, “I used to be afraid of death when I saw my friend die in college. At that time, the question came to me, ‘If I die today, where will I go?’ Then after I received Christ, I’ve known where I’m going, so why should I worry about it?”

Even though he suffered loneliness and sorrow after burying Ammini only two years before, Papa went ahead and scheduled surgery. Walking out of the doctor’s office that day, he turned to a friend. “Praise God, I have cancer. Now let’s go preach.” His friend wondered how he could possibly have such an attitude and Papa replied, “Either God will let cancer kill me and I will be with Jesus, or He will cure me of it and I can tell of His miraculous power to save. With either outcome, I am eventually a dead man. Now let’s preach until we die.”

The week before his surgery, Papa was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for a speaking engagement in the home of T.W. Terral, his good friend and pastor who had challenged him to begin church planting in 1969. After his evening prayer time, he drifted off to sleep.

“I was sound asleep in an upstairs room,” Papa says. “In the middle of the night, I woke up and saw writing on the wall in big plain letters above the nightlight, ‘I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord’ (Psalm 118:17, RSV). I was *so* happy when I saw that. I went back to sleep and then I woke up again and saw the same writing on the wall, and someone was standing there. Once again, I felt so comforted and I fell back asleep. And a third time, I woke up and saw the same—somebody standing there and the writing on the wall. After that, I didn’t sleep again. I turned on the light and took my Bible so I could study that passage, and then remained in prayer the rest of the night.”

After that experience, Papa had complete peace and reassurance that he would be healed, and so he continued his work wholeheartedly. When asked about his determination to live and work in light of all his ailments, he replied, “In one way, I’m happy to go to Heaven, which would be my first choice, but God has a special purpose for me here, and that’s why He’s healing me.”

Papa went ahead with the surgery and chemo treatment following, and at one point, he nearly died. In fact, the doctors summoned Sam to come from India, ushering him into Papa’s

room as soon as he arrived, telling him to say his last words to his father. But it is no surprise that Papa, hanging onto the promises of God, pulled through. And it is equally no surprise that all of his follow up tests revealed that both his cancer and his HIV miraculously disappeared, never to resurface again.

Since Papa's cancer, he's had several more close brushes with death. Or should we say, *he's continued to have more lives than a cat—perhaps a cat who likes banana flowers?*

"It is true that I have joy and times of fun, but I also have many sorrows, pain, and sickness. For forty years, I had an ulcer that gave me acute pain. I even vomited blood many times. I also suffer with chronic diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart trouble. Before God miraculously healed me from terminal lymphoma and AIDS, I had prostate cancer, and Hepatitis. You name every sickness—I've had almost everything. Am I discouraged? No. Because I know it's a fact that, "Blessed are the poor, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are they that suffer, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

When I asked Papa how Sam, his best friend and ministry partner, has coped with "the nine lives of Papa," he just laughed. "For eleven years now, I've been saying my last words to my son, and now he's tired of listening."

Now many years after his cancer, but still dealing with so many health challenges as well as persecutions and challenges in the ministry, many people wonder what keeps Papa going. The fact is, Papa loves his work, and he loves working hard.

"Dad taught me to always be honest, to be bold, and to work hard. He is so focused on his mission that he does not know how to relax. He can be a workaholic, something I learned from him. When he is with his grandkids he will pray with them, give them some gifts, eat with them, and then he's done because he's got work to do. He feels that if they need time with him, they can come talk to him, but he is not going to sit and play with them or watch TV." —Samuel Thomas

### **Papa says he's not ready for his vacation...**

I believe in hard work and choosing a hard job. I like that word, very much: *hard job*.

One of my friends and classmates from Bible College now lives a very well-to-do life as a pastor in San Francisco. He came here and told my children, "Don't do hard work like your father—it will kill you." By the grace of God, not even one of my children listened to him.

I never wanted an easy life. When I came back from my cancer, everybody—my board members in America and in India, my Dad, and especially Sam—told me, "We want you to stay

with us longer, so we don't want you to work. It is enough that you are here with us, so don't do such hard work. Take more rest."

To that I say, *why did God heal me? Why did He send me back to Kota?* To eat maybe ten more bags of rice? Or maybe a hundred more chickens? Or maybe a few steaks? No, He spared me to do the work. That is the only reason. He didn't spare me to sleep for twenty more years.

Friends, if God wanted me to take rest, do you know which is the best place for that? Do you think it's Kota? Or America? If God wanted me to take rest, He would have called me home and said, "Thomas, come home. We'll have fun. Your work is over, now you can come and take rest."

Working hard is a joy for me. And even now, many people see that I work hard. From 4:30 in the morning until 10:30 or 11:00 at night, I am working. Even when I am sick, I find joy in my work.

"Dad is a people person. The only way to kill him is to keep him away from people and from his work. He is so relational; he will freely make time for anyone. If you write him a letter, he will take the time to write you a personal letter back, not in generalities, but in detail." —Samuel Thomas

One night in February 2008, I awakened critically ill with an intestinal bug. I got so weak that night that I couldn't even get to the bathroom without help. At 5:00 a.m., my attendant, Paul, checked my blood pressure and it was only 50/30, and my blood sugar count was 296 (normal is below 100). Paul could only find a pulse on my forehead, so he called the hospital immediately. By the time hospital staff came, my blood pressure was down to 50/20.

Even though I was too sick to get out of bed for several days, and I hadn't been able to eat in almost a week, I didn't want to miss out on a scheduled trip to Kerala to attend Gospel for Asia's Annual State Convention, where I was invited to speak to thousands of pastors. I especially didn't want to miss this event, because it would be my first public appearance since coming out of hiding from severe persecution in prior months. I wanted to personally thank everyone for their faithful love and prayers as they wept, fasted, and prayed regularly for our ministry. So, six days after my close call with death, I began a difficult journey requiring travel by both train and plane.

Once in Kerala, God sustained me through three services where I was able to give a message and testimony, challenging at least 5,000 pastors and laymen. I could feel the

overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit and I realized that Kerala is much more mature spiritually now than in my youth. I was so encouraged by the faith I saw in Kerala. We saw that many revivals and conventions are going on with young people dedicating their lives for God's service, and parents are dedicating their children for the Lord's work.

As soon as I returned home, I had a heart attack and was too weak to get up for a long time. But I praised God for the miracle of allowing me to go to Kerala.

**Julie writes...**

Even though Sam is shouldering much of the work and responsibility these days, Papa feels the dream growing more vivid and reachable by the day, not less. His critical job of fathering a multitude for Christ is far from done, and he still wants to see the dream of *one million arrows for God* reached before he takes his dying breath.

"Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled for twenty-nine years," Papa quotes. "Here's what the Bible says about him: 'He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him.' What a statement! Hezekiah became the greatest among all the kings of Judah.

"Now I am in my 73<sup>rd</sup> year, but I began ministry just out of college as a mere youth. I am happy to look back and see that there has been no limitation for me because of age at any time—not then, not now. I am willing to be what God wants me to be so He can use me to do great things at any age. The Lord is preparing me and using me more now than ever before. I feel the closest presence and fellowship with Him, and I have more vision, and more burden, and more commitment than before I was sick.

"What is your age? It is not important to worry about how many years you are going to live. Right now, you can be among the greatest of all the people of the whole world. You can finish your work in the limited time given to you. Don't think that you are too old or too young. God can make you great or use you greatly at any moment of life. God has greater things in store for us—things that we do not yet know about.

"Beloved, let us pray and work for such things. Though I am almost seventy-three years old, I want to go down in history like King Hezekiah."

## **Enemies of David**

## Chapter 10: The Valley of the Shadow

*He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me. Psalm 18:17-19*

### **Papa writes in his journals...**

A certain question has been asked of me hundreds of times. “If you are sincerely serving God, why do you suffer so much and endure repeated persecution?”

Is there a lasting resolution in this world for the persecution, reviling, abusing, and false accusations? No! Jesus said we *shall* have tribulation and persecution. He prayed to the One who could have made a permanent end to His problems, “Father, if possible, remove this cup and make a permanent solution. However, not my will, but Thy will be done.”

David also had so many problems, but he trusted in the Lord. I am like David.

...I am troubled in my heart; my eyes are consumed with grief.

...My life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing.

...I became a reproach because of all my enemies.

...I became an object of fear and dread to my friends; they turned their faces from me.

...I became as a dead man in many minds, like a broken vessel.

...I heard the slander of many; terror was on every side. They conspired to take away my life.<sup>ii</sup>

Every one of these things happened unto me in 2006. These are the same things that happened to Jesus, and maybe you’ve experience these things as well. Beloved, be of good courage. Hope in God, and He shall strengthen your heart. When troubled times come, we must find our strength in the same truths that strengthened David.

...Our times are in His hands.

...His face shines upon His servants and He saves them in loving-kindness.

...His goodness is stored up for those who fear Him and trust Him.

...He hides His people in secret from conspiracies and strife.

...He preserves the faithful but pays back the proud.

Do you know why Satan and his people hate you? *Because you set their slaves free.* That is why Pharaoh hated Moses. This is why people hated Mahatma Gandhi, and Abraham Lincoln.

This is why Jesus was killed, and why many people throughout history have been killed—because they wanted to set the captives free. Remember, they are not raging against you, but they are coming against the God of Heaven. If you have been anointed by God to set His captives free, you can be sure that you will have many who rage and conspire against you.

Ever since I came to Kota as an anointed servant of God, the heathens have raged against me and the ministry. They rage even today, but they have never been able to destroy the work. On the contrary, the work has grown beyond our imagination. The secret is this: the Lord has made promises. He has said, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:8, KJV).

From the start of our ministry in 1960, we did only one thing when the heathens came against us. We came together and prayed earnestly for them to become our inheritance. Within the last forty-eight years, the Lord has answered our prayers by giving us thousands of heathens and thousands of churches as our inheritance, and He has given us the uttermost parts of the earth as our possession. This is happening for us, just as He has promised.

“Dad does not have any intention to hurt anyone. He is gentle and polite, and he doesn’t even want to hurt his enemies.” —Samuel Thomas

Dear friends, this is the time for us to come together and pray for the heathens as our inheritance. Our prayers should not be out of a spirit of bitterness or condemnation, but out of love and a desire to see them come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Let us not pray against our enemies. But let us pray that our enemies will be won for the Kingdom of God. Let us pray that we may inherit land in every part of India and the rest of the world for the Kingdom of God.

### **Safe, Sealed, Delivered**

*Julie comments: Most of the opposition and persecution against Papa and the ministry is the day-to-day kind, where he is cursed or rejected by men. But there have also been seasons of harrowing attacks where he wasn’t sure he’d come out alive. Though his enemies historically have been many and much more powerful, God has always safely delivered him. Here are a few of Papa’s favorite accounts of God’s faithful deliverance:*

**Early 1970s:** Once when we baptized sixteen people in the early 1970s, it caused a big uproar. The anti-Christians heard about it and said they were going to demolish our school building, burn our bus, and burn the Christians. When the news came, I said, “Don’t worry. If they burn the bus, God will give us a new one. If they destroy the school, God will give us a new

building. And if they kill some of the Christians, they will be in a better place than Kota. At least they won't have mosquito bites.

**1986:** In Kota we baptized sixteen new believers, including a pagan priest. This brought about great threats and persecution. In April, our dry season, many anti-Christians assembled a great tent meeting where they incited crowds and college students against us. After the meeting they once again planned to burn our school bus, bombard the school building, kill the poor people who had become Christians, and burn their houses. Terror was spread all over the city.

I called the students and orphanages together, and we kept two days of fasting prayers. I didn't go and meet any politician or any person for help, only to God.

On the day of the tent meeting, they built a big fire to please their "fire god." While the fire was building, a great wind suddenly came up and brought in heavy rain. It blew their tent away, and everyone ran away for their lives. *Everybody*. Remember that in Rajasthan, we never get rain in April. After that, they did not come back to cause any trouble for two years. What happened to bring about the wind and the rain? We had only fasted and prayed!

**2001:** On June 6, about 2,500 militants came and surrounded our orphanage in Kota to try to stop the work and to kill the leaders—including Samuel—but an army of Rajasthan Police protected us. A few days later, about 600 militants surrounded our office and church, demanding the closing of Emmanuel Ministries and planning to kill us. Then they held a statewide demonstration, demanding the same thing. Over 150,000 people marched all over Rajasthan demanding the arrest of my son and me, or to at least give them our dead bodies. During this time I was in the U.S., and I had a hard time getting back into India. Finally I reached Kerala in August for a reception where I was to receive the Padma Shri Award from the President of India.

While in Kerala, I stayed at the guesthouse of K.P. Yohannan, the founder of Gospel for Asia. I had heaviness in my heart because of our financial problems from all the persecution. Even my sleep was disturbed. At about 2:00 a.m., a tall man stood at the side of my bed and said to me, "Sit at my right hand until I make all your enemies a footstool under your feet" (Psalm 110:1). I felt a very strong peace, and I knew it was the Lord speaking to me.

I got up and worshipped God and then went back to sleep. The same man came again with the same message about a half hour later. So I got up, put the light on and took out my Bible to study this Bible chapter. I felt so happy, but also I had to practice sitting at His right hand in patience. What's the use of getting excited but not obeying what He said?

A couple weeks after that, the Kota collector called Samuel and said, “In three days, 10,000 national leaders are coming to Kota, including all seven of the high priests of India. You and your dad could be killed, your institution shall be destroyed, and because of you, many Christians from all over India will be killed.”

We immediately declared three days of fasting and prayer throughout the ministry. Then the day before the event was supposed to happen, there was a heavy rain in Kota for three days, and the place where the demonstration was to take place was flooded three feet deep. Roads were closed for days, and all the planned programs were ceased.

So even today, when my enemies come, I remember. I practice obeying that promise—sitting at His right hand until He brings all my enemies under my feet. This became my main prayer every day, and I still use it to this day. So that is one of God’s great promises to me, and ever since I have not run away from His right hand.

**2006:** In February, Sam and I were on our way back from the U.S. to our graduation ceremony in Kota, when we got word that there was going to be another major attack against the ministry. I told Sam, “Don’t worry. They’ve been threatening for every graduation since 1960, and this is just another rumor.”

As soon as we got to Mumbai, our Pastor Matthew and friends met us at the airport, informing us that the condition was very bad. People in Kota were being arrested and many of our things were being confiscated. We went to a hotel and turned on the TV. You know who was on there? Father and son Thomas. *Most wanted fellows*. My photo and identification was placed on the buses, trains, trucks, and in many public places, with a reward for my head of 1.2 million rupees (\$30,000), and twice that for Sam. Can you imagine the temptation throughout India where 87% people live in poverty? Anybody who can use his head would say, “If I can kill him, I can get so much money. Even after I pay the lawyer, my family can end up with a million rupees and I can have so many things.”

Early in the morning, we left to go to South India. Sam went to Kerala to avoid police, and I went to Andhra Pradesh for our graduation on Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup>. By Sunday morning, the police had reached there so I fled to Bangalore City to the home of Sajan George. I was staying in a house only two hundred feet from Sajan’s house when about two hundred police and militants—all from Kota—showed up there to kill me. When they entered Sajan’s house, they saw my picture with him on the wall.

“Where is Dr. Thomas? He is a most wanted criminal.”

“He is not here,” Sajjan and his family told the angry crowd. The crowd pressed, trying to intimidate him, but he did not tell them anything. They continued to search his home, questioning his family until 2:30 a.m.

Sajjan’s wife secretly called to tell me to escape, because the police were going to be searching every home in the neighborhood, so I called a friend to come and get me. In complete darkness, I put all my things in one bag and slowly found my way down a stairway. I had to leave my cane and remove my beard so that I would not be easily identified, because those were in my pictures all over the news. Then I came out and got into the dark get-away car so quietly, and we drove for a ways through Bangalore City with no lights. After about ninety miles, my friend got an unknown caller on his cell phone.

“Where are you?” Without thinking, he thought it was a friend and told the caller where he was. Then they asked, “Where is Thomas?” He suddenly realized it was the police and so we had to drive the whole night until we got to a thick forest where we hid out for two days.

At the same time all this was happening, my son Samuel had been arrested and thrown into prison with three others from the ministry. With my son in jail and my not being able to be with the saints in Kota for prayer and fellowship, nobody could stop me from crying unto God day and night. I felt very alone, and my sleep was disturbed, but I found the best remedy for sleeplessness is to cry unto the Lord. Though I ran away from place to place for months, I could lay myself down and sleep well because I cried unto the Lord.

Then only this word came to me, “God saw everything he had made, and behold it was *very good*.” God told me, “Thomas, every thing I do is *very good*, not merely good.”

His Word continued to pour into my heart. “All things work together for good to those who love the Lord” (Roman 8:28), “...You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20), “...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalm 23:6). These words were hard for me to believe at the time. I was in hiding for more than seven months and couldn’t even go out. But when I chose belief, it all became very good in my life. Looking back, I could see very good peace and joy in the midst of all those trials and tribulations.

As I thought about God’s people—Job, Joseph, David, Daniel, Esther, and others—I wondered if I was to ask them today, “Friends, what do you think about what God did in your lives—was it for good or for *very good*?” What do you think they will say?

“Oh, it was *very good*, both for us and for the Kingdom of God.”

After we were able to come home, the authorities told me that I had escaped from their hands by the breadth of a hair. I said, “Yes sir, the Lord made my enemies ashamed. He shall make them ashamed in the future also, and all who strike against a servant of the Lord shall perish.”

After that, they told Sam that the biggest problem they had with me is that I kept handing out Gospel tracts, and that I needed to “be quiet” for at least one year. Our good friends and some city officials who love us told us to stop for a while. Sam told me, “Dad, don’t do it. We can do it later, don’t worry about it.”

I said, “Okay, son.” But you see, I am the troublemaker. Sometimes when he wasn’t here on the weekends, I would still go out and do the distribution.

“So you have a rebellious streak, then?” I asked Papa.

“Oh yes. The very first week I went and gave out many books. And then the second week, and the third week—all when Sam was gone. I am still doing it to this day. But people are coming to Sam repeatedly, “Tell your dad to stop.”

“Dad is a bit stubborn. For example, I’ll tell him, ‘Don’t let people disturb you when you’re sick.’ But he will do the opposite. I tell him not to keep his cell phone on while he is sleeping, but he hates to miss calls, so he does anyway. It will ring at 2:00 in the morning and someone will say, ‘Brother Thomas, I forgot what time it is in India and I just wanted to say hello.’ By this time, he can’t fall back to sleep, so he is tired all day in the office.”  
—Samuel Thomas

In that one year that I was supposed to “be quiet,” I went out with my Bible students and distributed 140,000 New Testaments—many of them at schools. As the kids came out of school in the hundreds, they would come stand in line to get a Bible and a tract from the World Missionary Press (WMP). And then one day WMP called and said, “Thomas, we are happy to say that Emmanuel Ministries gave out the most Gospel literature for the year by far, and we are giving you an award.”

After my running away period in 2006, I was in Murfreesboro for a radio interview on Moody Radio. After almost three hours on the air, the manager asked me, “Thomas, when you were hiding out for so long while on the run, did you have dull moments?”

“I never had a dull moment, not even one.”

“Why not?”

“I always had my Bible with me. I had my daily readings and so many things to study. During that time, God gave me many great promises and I was so happy. And then I wrote maybe three or four books while I was in hiding. Taking in all that Scripture spared my faith. Man, I was so blessed. As I studied about the Kingdom of God on earth, I said, ‘Man, to Jesus Christ belongs all the kingdoms, powers, principalities, seen, unseen—everything belongs to Him.’ So that is the reason.”

**2007:** When the powers of darkness came against me on April 29, I felt like an old man with the strength of a little child. Four of our pastors were imprisoned with false charges, and the homes of one church’s thirty-five families were totally destroyed and plundered. These families were forced to stay under trees and were all very frightened.

That night, I woke up at 3:00 a.m., unable to sleep, so I spent time in prayer. The Lord spoke this word to me, “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

“Thomas, little child, you have overcome them and you shall not be overcome. Remember the prince of this world always sends an army to attack God’s anointed. When Satan advances, he will always come with many attacks and many attackers. But even my little children have overcome every one of them.” When He spoke that to my heart, He showed me that, since 1960, I’ve had to wrestle and fight against the prince of this world and his army many times, but I have always overcome.

Now I see it is true! I have seen the goodness of God along with the mercy of God all the days of my life, especially during the whole year of 2006. I can say that today, many of my enemies who were much younger, stronger, and more influential than me have all perished. I cannot find them anywhere in the world. I can say that the people who were against us came to nothing before the justice and power of God.

Dear friend, if you love the Lord, the trials you face right now, God will use for *very good*. You are not ordinary people. You are overcomers (Revelation 12:11). Let us praise God and permit Him to do the very good things in our lives.

**2008 (March):** This world became so alive for me on March 23, 2008. It is Resurrection Sunday, on the completion of forty-eight years of services in Kota, to the day. I praise God for Romans 8:28, and I can say with complete assurance that all things have worked together for *very good* for us.

**2008 (November), from Papa’s journal:**

“Give me a man that we may fight together.” These are the words of Goliath, the nine-foot giant and one of the strongest men of his day (1 Sam. 17:10). He stood on a hill, challenging the children of Israel repeatedly for many days, shouting and defaming the name of the God of Israel. He also said, “Give me one man that I may kill him. Then you shall be free to live and serve us Philistines...you need not *all* die” (1 Sam. 17: 9, paraphrased).

What a challenge! This is the same challenge given by the anti-Christians to us in recent days. They say, “Give us your pastors that we may kill them. Then deny your Christ and come back and worship idols, then you can be our servants and you can live instead of being killed.”

Though enemies attack poor, innocent Christians and put them through severe persecutions, they will not be able to destroy them. The Lord says to His people, as they go through this furnace of affliction, “I am the Lord your God and I allow these things to become your teachers, so that you may profit. When you walk through this furnace in obedience, your peace will be like a river, and your righteousness will be like the waves of the sea, which never ends” (paraphrased from Isaiah 48:17-18). What a promise!

I will never forget what my son said to the Kota Collector on July 15, 2001. The Collector said, “Dr. Sam, I am about to arrest you in three days. At that time, the opposition will kill you, they will kill your Dad, and they will kill many thousands of innocent Christians, all in the name of civil war between the militants and the Christians. Only one thing can save you from all these problems. I want you to give me your word in writing that you will stop all Christian activities—close all the orphanages, churches, and Bible institutes.”

Then my son replied, “Sir, you’re saying you want to arrest me in three days? Why don’t you arrest me today? I will go with you in your car to the police station. You can drop me off there, and then you can go home.”

The man pressed Sam by saying that if he would just deny his God; he could live in this world awhile longer. And Sam replied, “You want me to deny my God so I can live in this world for few more days? Here is what I will do, sir. I choose to live for my God...and to die for Him.”

The man said, “Sam, you will suffer the consequences.”

When Sam told me all of this, I told him, “Son, I am so proud of you—more than ever before. I never prayed that God should save you from trouble. You can die for the sake of Christ on any day, any time, and I will never feel sorry about it. I will cry because of my nature, but I will not be sorry and I will never regret it. I will be happy.”

That day, I began complete fasting prayer and I called for everyone possible to fast and pray with me that they would not be able to carry out their plans. That was the time God sent the floods, and every road from Delhi and Bombay to Kota was blocked for two or three days. Of the thousands who wanted to kill Sam, nobody could come.

So you see, we all have our “Goliath.” Ever since Adam and Eve were created, a certain “Goliath” named Satan has challenged God’s men to come and fight against him that he may steal, kill, and destroy. He has stolen, killed and destroyed many millions of God’s people during the past 6,000 years of human history. He calls human beings to join with him, working to fight against God’s people.

It is true; God wants His people to accept this challenge to fight against Satan, pulling down strongholds in order to get the victory for the Kingdom of God. When Satan challenges, God also challenges with, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us to fight against this giant, to release the people for the Kingdom of God?” God is looking throughout the whole world, to strengthen those whose hearts are completely His (2 Chron. 16: 9). He is looking for those who will say, “Here am I. Send me, Lord.”

I know that I am an old and sick man. At present, I am disabled because of acute pain in my left arm. They are trying to find out the reason of the pain, but I say to the Lord as I have said since 1960, “Here am I, send me.” I will fast and pray. I will stand for God’s people. I will stand between God’s people and the giant.

## Chapter 11: Enduring Betrayal

*It is not an enemy who taunts me—I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me—I could have hidden from them. Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend. ...The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Psalm 55:12-13, 21*

### **Papa shares on learning his lesson about trust...**

Recently I was reading in Jeremiah 9 where God said, *don't believe your friends. Don't trust your friends.* Then he said further, *don't trust your own brother; they will deceive you.* I had read this so many times before, but I never believed it. I thought if I lived by *The Golden Rule*, my tension and problems with people would stay minimal.

I still remember when I was attending Hindustan Bible Institute, one of my instructors, Dr. Rathnam, said “Thomas, I am so happy that your friends are going with you to Rajasthan. You go on together, but remember, within six months or one year, you will separate. When that time comes, I want you to do one thing. Separate, but don't fight. Go your separate ways in love and in prayer.”

I argued and said, “Sir, you are mistaken. We are not like the others. We shall be friends forever and will never separate. We will have children and grandchildren together. We'll marry our grandchildren together and send them to different fields, but we will stay together in one joined family.” He didn't argue with me but sent us with a blessing and prayer.

“Dad loves people regardless of whatever their background or mistakes. He's a softhearted, gentle man of compassion, but discernment is not one of his spiritual gifts. In the twenty-four years I've been in the ministry with him, I've seen how he's constantly been burned. Even if he knows a guy is going to rip him off, he'll overlook it and let that person get close to him, hoping God will change him.” —Samuel Thomas

After reaching Kota in 1960, we were happy staying together in one room, all nine of us—two bachelors, two married couples, and three children. On the fourteenth day, we had our early morning family worship time together like usual. We sang, read the Bible, and then prayed together. This is the day when the anti-Christians came and burned all our materials, beat us, and demanded we leave the place or face death. As soon as that happened, one of my good friends became terrified and left that place even before completing one month. Because of my promise to Dr. Rathnam to part in love, we sent him off with one of our two bicycles.

And then I couldn't believe it when the others all left within six months! So that's how we separated. Did I learn about human nature from that experience? No. I thought it was one isolated situation. Surely I'd make more friends who would stay with me, especially among my Bible students.

When I started the Bible Institute, I poured my heart and my life into my students. I tried to be a good example for them of honesty, integrity, and loyalty. I never took any property or supplies for myself. I never even purchased a motorcycle in my name. To this day, I haven't accumulated things for myself. In this room where I live, not even this cot or sofa are mine. This body is mine, I think. That's all.

I tried to be a godly example, and I thought these men would follow my lead. These were all *my* Bible students and *my* own preacher boys, and I trusted them. But man, they all cheated and deceived me. And some of them even said, "This fellow says he's going to have one million orphans. *Impossible!* He's just an old man with a far out dream. Criticizing him won't do any good. We will simply sit here and be silent."

But then they began to speak out against me also. So I thought again, *I will change my friends and get new friends*. This time I imagined orphan children would make good friends. *Man, they will be my own children. And I will love them and care for them and show them exactly how to be trustworthy*. But after growing up under my love and care, even some of them have let me down in one way or another. Each time I trusted too much, I got discouraged, disappointed, and angry with myself.

"Dad's always looking for the best in everybody, and he gives everyone the benefit of the doubt. I have seen the same people openly cheat him again and again, yet Dad will take them back. Of all the people Dad has given a second chance (or many chances), only two out of one hundred people will prove themselves right. But he is still going at seventy-three, no matter that Sam has had different opinions." —Samuel Thomas

Only when I read Jeremiah recently did God convict my heart. *Don't trust your friends. Don't trust your brother. They will all deceive you. Trust in the Lord and don't despair. He is the only friend so true*. And as I finally let this truth sink into my trusting old heart, I found a great satisfaction. Just like the chorus I learned in HBI:

*[Papa sings out loud in a booming voice]:*  
*Trust in the Lord and don't despair; He is a friend so true.*  
*No matter what your troubles are; Jesus will see you through.*  
*Sing when the days bright; Sing through the darkest night.*  
*Every day, all the way; Let us sing, sing, sing.*

Now I look back and think about how much time I spent with friends—friends who weren't even there for me. Suppose I had spent that time with the Lord. Man, what a blessing it would have been. I would have done much more—*much more*—great work. My teacher was so right, and I was wrong. I wish I had listened to him so many years ago. But I praise God for making me understand.

And now when I am old, I have learned from my mistakes. But even in that, I try to love my enemies the way God loves us. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). When I was unlovable and wandered in my sin, then He loved me. When I was poor and a sinner and nobody wanted me, He loved me. That is the reason I can love my enemies, because God put that same love in my heart. When I am deceived and cheated, it makes no difference. Because of God's love, I can love people who are unlovable.

In India, I'm not a person loved by rich people, even big fellows. I have only a few people outside of the poor who love me. I know the orphan children love me sincerely when they are here. And I know the lepers love me. Once in the 90's when I was very sick, declining quickly, the doctors thought I was dying. Early one morning in the winter, twenty-five lepers came from the leper colony to see me. They all had flowers and said to me, “Let God bring your sickness on us. We will take your death, but you should live.”

There is a woman in America, Debbie Dray, who called me at this same time and said, “Thomas, for the last year, I never bowed down my head without praying for you, many times with tears.” And that is part of the story. Once I make a true friendship with a person, it is life long.

Because I am trusting and simple, many people think I am a fool and try to take advantage of me. But very few people truly love me. I can count them on my fingers. But does that stop me from loving? Never. I don't ever remember one person with whom I've held a grudge. They may come and fight with me, but I never hold onto anything that will leave regrets.

There is not one person in the whole world that I cannot break bread with, or that I can't sit and pray with.

One time a young man accused our ministry—and me specifically—of not showing him love. He wrote a four-page letter against me, all in small letters. His letter was harsh, accusing me falsely on many issues.

Later I heard he was in prison, and I called him the moment I heard. He was a little reluctant to speak to me, but I told him, “I heard that you are arrested, and I wanted to let you know we are praying for you at church.”

Just yesterday, he called me and he said, “Thank you for calling. Now I am out of prison on bail. Thank you for praying.”

That is how I do things. I will answer someone who accuses me falsely, and I will tell him, “Son, what you are doing is wrong,” but I never keep resentments because if I do that, I can't pray. That is the only place I can go with any problem—to the Lord.

My wife used to say, “Honey how can you pray after fighting without making reconciliation. How can you pray when we have a disagreement?”

I told her, “That is why I'm praying!”

Throughout our marriage, Ammini and I used to frequently “have words.” And finally, as the man in the house, I told her I am going to have the final word in any argument from now on, and then our disagreement will be over. She agreed to those terms when I told her my final word will be, “Yes ma'am!”

See, humor is the best medicine for any problem—*the best!* I have seen so many problems solved.

## **Spiritual Warfare of Jehoshaphat**

## Chapter 12: Proclaim a Fast

*Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea... Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 2 Chronicles 20:2-3*

### **Papa writes about fasting...**

I want to share one of the great blessings I have seen as a result from regular fasting and prayer. As I am writing this, it is September 24, 2007. The past few months, I had great fear in my heart. I wept whenever I saw anyone who loves us or when a loved one called me. We have been under the attack of the anti-Christian militants for about twenty months. The attack is not from a few individuals or groups; the political party ruling our state and several other states has organized it. Several major anti-Christian political and religious groups, along with thousands of young people, took an oath to destroy us. They have not given up; every day they make new plans.

Beginning July 10<sup>th</sup>, my son decided to fast and pray every evening because of these innumerable and never ending problems. And then one day he called me and said, "Dad, there are so many problems. I am really upset in my heart."

"Son, I do not know what to do. But one thing I can do; I will fast twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, even though it may be hard on my health."

"Dad has always led by example. If you tell him there is a problem, he will fast and pray. Not as a last resort, but as a first response. That has been his example as long as I have known him. He is very steady. Whatever he is doing today, he has been doing all my life. He is very faithful and I am proud of him." —Samuel Thomas

During this time I was blessed by reading the scriptures on fasting. I read about Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:1-19, and I could see so many of my problems in his story. During these twenty months of trials, I feared my enemies continuously. My enemies were not few, they were not poor or weak, rather they were innumerable. They were rich people who offered 1,100,000 rupees for my head and 2,500,000 rupees for my son's head. They were powerful, sending thousands of police against us to oppose us and hunt us down.

Jehoshaphat feared his enemies and set himself to seek the Lord. He prayed, "O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming

against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You.” Then he declared a fast throughout all of Judah. How did the Lord respond?

“...Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s. You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’” (2 Chron. 20: 15, 17). This is what I did, finally. I declared fast and requested all churches, Bible institutes, and orphanages to fast and pray. Since then, I have seen blessings and revival in every place and in every ministry.

I also found encouragement in Zechariah 8:18-23. “The word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying (Vs. 18), ‘All the fasts which God commanded you will become Joy, Gladness, and Cheerful Feasts.’” God’s people are commanded to take fasting as the joyous thing—an important matter for getting joy in the heart. Count fasting as a means for getting gladness in your personal life, in your family life, and in your job. Count fasting as a *cheerful feast*, not as a matter of showing your sorrowful, discouraged, and tired face.

Please remember these words I write are not my words, nor my opinions, nor my suggestions, nor the decision of a church committee or people group, but these are the direct words from our God. Every time, when God’s people all cried out to Him, He relented of His anger and sent blessings instead. So we must consider the commandment and the end result.

Ever since we began fasting together, we have seen blessings increasing day after day. Even my health has improved significantly, which is a miracle with my diabetes. Now I want to continue the evening fasting prayer as long as I am able.

What can fasting do? I found fasting prayer to be the best method for world evangelism. Zechariah 8 says when people of God fast and pray, counting fasting as a delight, God will send cities, nations, and people from different tongues to you, and they will notice that God is with you. Dr. Bill Bright of Campus Crusade said, “I believe the power of fasting is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and provide the pathway for revival and spiritual harvest.”

Throughout history, every missionary movement has depended more on fasting prayer than on any other power. Paul said, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down the strong holds” (2 Cor. 10:4).

Fasting prayer is so powerful. *So powerful!* I have seen hundreds of great miracles through fasting and prayer. I will request this of every reader: for the sake of evangelism in India and the world, and for your own personal healing with joy, gladness, and cheerfulness, participate in regular fasting and prayer. And please pray for Emmanuel Ministries and Hopegivers regularly in your fasting prayers. In our fasting prayers, let us each ask the Lord to make our own nation as a blessing for the whole world.

### **The Best Medicine for the Spirit**

1978 was the first year I preached on fasting. Many people, including pastors, said, “Don’t preach about that because people don’t want to hear it.” But then Bill Bright started advocating for it, so it became a little more popular.

In those days, some ladies said to me, “We never even heard about somebody preaching on fasting.” I told them to look at the Bible. The apostles fasted. Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. He said things like, “They *will* fast when I leave...when you fast...this kind of spirit will not depart without fasting and prayer.” All the great men of God I’ve known about fasted, and every great revival happened because of it.

There are some things that I must do—things that are worth doing—whether I like it or not. Say I am taking medicine. I don’t take it according to my feelings: “If I feel like it, I’ll take. Otherwise, I’ll not.” No, my body demands that I should take it if I am to get better. It is the same. My problems *demand* fasting of me, I cannot shortchange them. Fasting is not a choice; it is a commandment, so I know that we should fast whether we like it or not. Look at the Old Testament. You will have a hard time finding examples where people didn’t fast and pray when they were in trouble.

I teach the students and the orphans to fast as a part of their spiritual development. If there is an emergency—if there is any problem—we’ll usually have one day of fasting, or for dire occasions, three days of continuous fasting. When some of the people who came here saw even the small children fasting they said, “Thomas, that is going too far. Don’t do that.”

I told them, “I have no problem with it. The Lord said in Joel (chapters 1 and 3), ‘Let the suckling child and infants, bridegrooms, the young and old, let everyone fast.’ For three days they fasted and prayed.”

When we had our problems, I received a letter from one orphanage where the children wrote to me, “Papa, we shall keep fasting prayers until all these problems are solved. Each day

one of us will take turns fasting and praying.” When I read it, I had tears in my eyes. I am so happy that the children are ready to take fasting and pray for us.

When I’m fasting, I try to spend maximum time on prayer or study. I also give my students and workers in the ministry time to pray and study when they are fasting. If we didn’t do this, it would be nothing more than a hunger strike. The Lord said, “If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

What is the heart behind a true fast? According to Isaiah 58, it is about maintaining compassion—feeding the poor, clothing the naked, and taking care of your family. If your heart is in the right place when you fast, then God said He would do all these things. He will make your light break forth like the dawn. And when you call, the Lord will answer, and He will say, “Here I am.” He will be with you in trouble and you will become the rebuilders of walls and raise the foundations. Even your children will do all of this. All these blessings are given when God’s people are fasting.

In every case and with every problem, all I could do is fast and pray. In 1960, God provided train tickets just before our graduation as a result of fasting and prayer. Then the Lord brought Bill Bright of Campus Crusade who promised to pay our house rent for us for three years, all as a result of fasting prayer.

Dear friends, this is what the Lord wants from each one of us: to offer small and simple prayers, and to make our needs known to Him. When we do that, we will be able to see mighty things happen which we had never even thought about. We do not know how God will answer our simple prayers, but we know He will use us in wonderful ways to bring revival throughout India and throughout the world. With simple prayers, we will see impossible and great things happen.

When Sam was here and I was in America on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and I heard that 2,500 people were coming to kill him, I fasted and prayed in North Carolina all the way up to four or five in the morning, soaking two big bath towels with tears for my son.

When the militants came, they wanted to enter into our Kota orphanage compound to kill Sam. We didn’t have the wall around it, so they broke down the fence. But about 450 police were there with weapons and wouldn’t allow them to go in. So they began throwing stones at the

police, but the police beat them and arrested about one hundred of them. Because of fasting prayer, they were not able to get to Sam.

Another time, one of my relatives was working in one of our schools. When I found out he was stealing money, I couldn't believe it. When I asked him about it, he began shouting at me, "This is *my school*. You can't do anything about it. If you want to fight, I'm ready to fight. If you want to go to court, I'll go to court." He even called some of his friends who had guns to get ready to fight.

When I went to see him he was furious. So I told him, "Don't worry, you take the school. You can have it." Then I had to catch a morning train to go to Delhi for a meeting, but first I called all the Bible students and cancelled classes, requesting they fast and pray with me through the day for the situation. After I came home on the following day, that fellow did not come to bother me even one more day, and he told me to take the school back.

"Dad is full of encouragement, mercy, kindness, joy in the midst of trouble, exhortation, and he's a peacemaker. If he can solve a problem to bring peace, he will go anywhere. But if he can tell it is just to make someone look good over another person, he won't go there. He wants to bring peace to the people, especially to the workers in the ministry." —Samuel Thomas

The same day my wife died, she fasted and prayed for our grandson who had typhoid. My grandson healed immediately, and after her death he came here and gave a testimony. Ammini believed in fasting prayer even more than me. If she had any problem—physical needs or persecutions and attacks—she fasted and prayed. Now, that is my only and best way. I don't go to any politician or any person for help—even for the biggest problems. Many people urge me to go to the Chief Minister of India for help, but I am very happy to go fast and pray instead. It is the only way we are surviving, and there is so much blessing in it.

Once I was in need of 200,000 rupees, so I kept two days fasting here with the Bible students, orphans, and everyone. Then my wife and son came to me while I was fasting. "We have bad news for you and you are going to be upset."

"You tell me what it is, and then I'll decide if I'm upset or not."

Then they told me, "Your mother died." It was a shock to all of us, but I had a perfect peace. My beloved mother had seen the blessing of faith in her family through all of the children and grandchildren. So I said, "Why should I cry? If I do, it is only because of what she can no

longer do for me. *When I go to my parent's home, who will cook that food for me? Who will come to the road and wait for me?"*

Mom used to come to the road and wait for me, waving her hands. Five hundred yards away, I could see her standing there. But if I want her back, that is only my selfishness. So if I cry, I am not crying for my mother. She is in the most blessed place.

Just after my fast, I had to travel to my hometown in Kerala. While I was there, K.P. Yohannan (Gospel for Asia) heard about my mom, so he came to see me. I told him about how I was fasting and praying for the needed money when I got the call about my mom. So he went home, and wrote us a draft for 200,000 rupees.

One Hope Home had no money for the orphan children to go to school. They kept a full day of fasting prayer on Friday. The next morning, someone walked in and purchased books, uniforms, paid fees, and purchased food provisions for the whole orphanage.

#### **“We Never Fought a War - Only God Did”**

In September of 2007, I'd been grieving for two weeks with continuous fear and tension over the effects of the persecution on the ministry and the children. I was not even able to pray clearly, or to properly focus my heart at our prayer meetings. After intense fasting and prayer, I read Isaiah 41:9-16, and the Lord set me free from fear and tension. Once again, I had peace in my heart. I praised God with thanksgiving and slept well for the first time in weeks. Even when I woke up in the night, I was filled with thoughts of joy.

The Lord does not want that any of His servants should be afraid, dismayed, or troubled in their heart. One of the greatest weapons Satan uses against God's people is doubt and fear. He frightened me saying, “Everyone is going to leave you (supporters), and you are going to be alone.” This frightened me because there are no funds coming from anywhere, since our accounts have been frozen. I fretted about what would happen to the ministry and to the children. Then the Lord said, “Thomas, fear not! I am with you and I am your God, don't be dismayed. I will do many things for you.”

Beginning in February 2006 and continuing to this day, we've faced the greatest persecution against the ministry. Besides freezing our bank accounts so that we have no funding for our orphanages or other ministries, and our adversaries have cancelled the license for our societies (satellite ministries). Because of this, Samuel and I began fasting every evening meal indefinitely since August 2007. Also, at our small orphanage in Kerala, all orphans fasted and

prayed for three days, and when that was over they decided that they would take turns with one of the orphans fasting and praying at all times until our present crisis is over.

As the Lord permits, I have continued this practice. We have seen great blessings and have seen solutions to many of our legal problems. We want a great revival in India in these last days. Let us fast and pray to pull down the strong holds of the Satan as he works against God's people in India and around the world.

For the last three years of persecution, we never fought a war; only God did. The enemy did not leave any stones unturned in his attempt to stop the work, but he did not succeed. In September 2006, two government officials came to my office and said, "Thomas, the victory you received in court was not won by your lawyers or by any human being. Only your God did it for you."

As God's people, we have to have the courage to say, "Let us stand still and see the salvation of God. Our God will fight for us." I can say with very strong conviction that we only had to stand still and see how God fought for us and won the war.

Now I have made fasting prayer a practice in all our orphanages, Bible Institutes, and churches. I have also encouraged all pastors to organize a fasting service on the last Friday of each month, lasting through Sunday morning. I request that you, beloved people, whatever problem you may have, fast and pray. You will see miracles. But an answer to fasting prayer isn't always going to come immediately. Maybe it is coming later. The important thing about fasting is, don't give up. No matter how long we wait, our fasting won't be in vain.

Will you join with me in praying simple prayers for great and mighty things from God? Maybe God is going to answer your prayers for a great revival in these last days. One million arrows is a dream I have fasted to see for years. I am not giving up, *it will happen because it is a God-given dream.*

## **Sufferings of Paul**

## Chapter 13: In Chains for the Gospel

*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel. Philippians 1:12*

### **Papa shares about his life heroes...**

I have had many good teachers and heroes in my life who have impacted me spiritually. My father was my greatest hero when I was young. Also my first cousin, Chandapula, influenced me greatly. Then when I came to Bible College, Dr. Gupta became very special to me because I saw in him one great thing: He was single-minded in preaching the Gospel. For him, there was nothing else. He was so happy to talk to people about the love of Jesus. Though he was our theology teacher for at least one year, he never taught us any theology because he didn't know any. To him theology was giving practical advice from his own experiences. But those things always encouraged me. And he always went with us on the Gospel tour.

When we went on our tour the second year, he had an offer to stay in a nice Christian home, which would have been much more comfortable than staying outside with us. But he said, "No, thank you. I want to be with my boys." Then he spread out his bedroll on the ground and slept with us, and ate the same simple food we ate. The only special food he took was a few peanuts. He was heavily built, so he always lagged behind everyone else. I walked with him because he shared his peanuts.

In Bible College, I was also greatly impacted by the biographies of the great men of faith and I read any that I could get my hands on. George Mueller was my favorite, but I also liked C.T. Stud, Hudson Taylor, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and David Livingstone.

As an adult, there have been many men I greatly honor and respect, but the person I most like to follow is Paul the apostle. He's my hero. I've been through persecution and tribulation from the beginning of my Christian ministry, and every time, Paul's words were so comforting to me. I have always felt God speaking to me as I read them.

Paul has only one desire, and that is to share the Gospel. Anything that happened to Paul—a shipwreck, imprisonment, beatings, hunger, sickness—he recognized to be for the furtherance of the Gospel. That is how I try to see my life.

One time I went to Kerala to preach for at least a month. I didn't have even one penny in my hand when I got to Kerala, but people would give me money for preaching as a gift. But then

someone would come and say to me, “Sir, I have a problem and my wife is sick,” or, “My son is in hospital...” So there went all the money.

When I arrived home in Kota one evening, I didn't have any money left from all my preaching. It was *so quiet* when I got home, so I asked Ammini, “Where are the children?”

Ammini said, “They are sleeping because they had nothing to eat. So they are fasting.”

So I took Sam out at 8:30 p.m. on the bicycle with a handful of tracts and went to the train station. We sold the tracts, went to the store and purchased flour, onion, and kerosene, and came home to fix a meal, and we all ate together.

I always say, “God's Word does not come back void. I feed people with the Word, and they feed my family when they buy it.”

There are so many things Paul says that are my favorite, but here is one of them: “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish” (Romans 1:14 NASB). Nobody asked Paul to take such a great debt upon himself, yet he indebted himself to the whole world for preaching the Gospel. And people surely asked him the questions, “Who asked you to do it? Why do you want to do it? Don't you think God has His plan and that He will do it? Why should you worry about it?”

Today, people ask me the same questions. “Thomas, why should you worry about the 600,000 villages? Why should you worry about these 80 million street children in India? Why should you worry about the 4.5 million lepers? Don't you think there are other preachers?”

When these questions are demanded of me, Paul comes and stands in front of me and says, “I am a debtor. I'm ready to do as much as is in me. That's all.” And so that is what I do. When God called me to Kota with no money and no train ticket, I said to my wife, “As much as is in us, we will do. We will walk. Both of us have two strong legs.” We didn't have any person to depend on, and we didn't have any people promoting us. Even when all of my friends left Kota, I said, “I'll stay here. As much as is in me, I will do what I can.”

Every time we've had persecution, it has built up the ministry. When the persecution came, it not only strengthened our faith, but it did something else amazing for us. People all over India heard about us and they began to pray and send support. See, persecution was one of the ways that God made it possible to raise our support.

When a famous athlete in Madras heard about our persecution, he brought all his trophies to Dr. Gupta at Hindustan Bible Institute and asked him to sell them and give the money to “the

missionaries.” We received six hundred rupees from those trophies, which was a lot of money at that time. We were able to purchase two bicycles. After that I took my family—my wife, three children, and two Gospel bundles—for twenty miles a day to distribute. Anywhere we saw people, I’d stop and invite them to listen to me, giving them a Gospel and sharing Christ with them in person. I have continued the practice of distribution to this day.

Last year I received a post card from a stranger. He said, “Sir, I am a Brahmin young man (a member of the cultural or social elite), and ten years ago you gave me a Gospel packet and a New Testament early in the morning at New Delhi Railway Station. I read the Bible portion you gave me and heard your radio message. Now I am a child of God, and we have a church with 105 believers in our village. Before I became a Christian, there was no Christian in my village or my area.”

I praise God for such stories from handing out Bibles and New Testaments! In spite of all the opposition in Kota through 2007-2008, we distributed 237,000 New Testaments and two million tracts. Praise God we had three thousand baptisms in 2007 in spite of all the persecution, martyrdom, threatening, and imprisonment. But that is not enough. We want more literature and more people to distribute God’s word.

Just this past November 2008, our Gospel outreach program sent out thirty teams to thirty different destinations, spreading the Word of God across India. Our teams distributed one million booklets from the World Missionary Press, along with 100,000 New Testaments, and thousands of volumes of Christian books. The Bible Society of India also provided us with 800,000 booklets for free distribution. Each Gospel outreach team conducted cottage meetings, prayer sessions, fasting prayer meetings, track distribution, singing, and worship services.

One of our Hope Ambassadors, Barbara Vettel, wrote a question to me: *Dr. Thomas, How are you able to send the missionaries with a Bible, a bicycle, and with little money? When I was at the graduation of Kabir Das, a young graduate stood up and gave testimony, saying that he was going to Pune (Maharashtra), though he did not have money for monthly support and house rent. Now, I read that the Lord helped him to start six churches in new areas where there were no churches. How does this happen?*

Here was my reply to her: *Dear Barbara, there is the only one way. I have seen in the Bible when Jesus sent His disciples for world evangelism, He said, “Go to every nation, to every creature, and preach the Gospel. Heal the sick, cast out demons, and make disciples to establish*

churches.” He did not give them a Bible, a bicycle, or a one-way ticket. Instead, He said, “Don’t carry silver, gold, or brass with you. Even in the first century, the first generation Christians reached the world with the Gospel. Within one hundred years, fifty percent of the population of the world became Christians.

*Barbara, when I was coming to Rajasthan as a pioneer missionary in 1960 with my pregnant wife and three coworkers, my college did not have money to give bicycles, support, train tickets, or even a Bible (I borrowed my mother’s Bible). But God honored that simple obedience, met all our needs, and established a great ministry all over India and in several parts of the world.*

In those days, I remember reading in Joshua chapter one that it is God’s pattern to occupy land first and then the people. After that, I began to go to all districts, cities, towns, and villages with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I went to almost every district and major city that were reached by railways and buses, and I tread upon the land and walked on the streets. To my surprise and joy, almost every place I walked repeatedly now has a church, a school, and an orphanage. I only obeyed what He asked me to do, and it is true that I do not know how He did it.

Even today, this it is God’s pattern. But before the land can be occupied, God’s people have to walk and tread upon it. Why are we not occupying or possessing the land in India? Because we are not ready to tread upon the land and walk among the people of India. Out of 3,000 tribes, at least 2,000 have never heard about Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul said, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” God has already prepared it, but we do not yet know it. Friends, I know what God has done for us during the last forty-seven years, but it has not yet appeared what we shall be—what He shall do for us and through us. But everything that happens to me, and everything I do, I see that it is for the furtherance of the Gospel. And that is why Paul is my hero.

### **Three Questions**

In Romans 8, Paul asks three questions that have greatly encouraged me in the hard work of spreading the Gospel.

*If God is for us, who can be against us (vs. 31)?* It’s true! Hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of people have come against us all over India. On June 20, 2001, 150,000 people demonstrated against us to the government offices and police stations in every district in

Rajasthan, demanding the arrest of Sam and me or our dead bodies. But not even one of them could stand against us successfully, and I praise God for that. Since 1960 until today, nothing and no one has been able to stand against us.

*Who can bring a charge against us or condemn (vs. 33-34)?* Hundreds of people brought charges against us through the years. Even now, there are twenty-four false criminal cases against us. Our pastors were imprisoned for one year, some of them for two years with murder cases, but they could not prove any charge put on them. Even Satan and His angels cannot bring charges against those whom God has elected.

*Who can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ (vs. 35)?* Nothing and no one can ever separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. He loved us and gave Himself for us, purchased us and made us as His own. He is keeping us in His arms, keeping us on His shoulders, standing with us in tribulation, in fire, and in the flood waters. I praise God for these great and wonderful questions. It is encouraging verses like these that also make Paul my hero!

## Chapter 14: Poured Out as a Drink Offering

*“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:5-8, NKJV).*

### **Papa challenges us with the cross...**

Why do some Christians live the victorious, rejoicing life, and others live a defeated life? It is true that defeated Christians and victorious Christians face the same kinds of trials, persecutions, and troubles. The answer is not how much they read the Bible, or how often they go to church, but how intimately they experience the presence of the Lord.

Paul is a good example. He said, “I want to *know Christ* and the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). In order to do this, Paul said he gave up everything—friends, reputation, position, and freedom. Are we really willing to give up everything to know Christ and to know the power of His resurrection? Are we willing to give up our precious time for prayer and Bible study? Are we willing to give up hindering friendships, sinful relationships, and certain possessions or habits in order to make a place in our lives to know Christ a little more?

Every pastor, leader, and believer wants to experience Christ and His resurrection, but they stop short on what Paul said next. “I want to know...the fellowship of His sufferings.” They say, *“I don’t want those things!”* But all these things come in one package—you cannot separate them.

If you go to many churches, you can hear messages about the sufferings of Christ very clearly. Then ask them the question, “Do you too like to have fellowship with His sufferings?” The answer will be this: “No! No! He suffered for us, now we don’t need to suffer. The Church will not go through tribulation.”

But Paul said, “I *want* to have the fellowship of His suffering and be made conformable to His death.” Only then can he know Him and the power of His resurrection. Not only should a Christian suffer for Christ, but he must have the complete fellowship of His sufferings.

Several Christians say to me, “My cross is my wife...my husband...my mother-in-law...my cancer...” Dear friends, none of these things are your cross. They may be a thorn in

your flesh, but they cannot be a cross for you. Judas Iscariot was not a cross for Jesus Christ, neither were His own brothers. His cross was rugged wood. When He carried His cross, people cursed Him, they spat on His face, they pulled out His beard, they beat Him beyond recognition, and they despised and rejected Him. When He was born, He did not have place to be born, so He was laid in the hay in a cattle shed. When He lived He had no place to lay His head, so He slept in a boat or on the roadside. When He took up His cross to die, He hung between two thieves, between heaven and earth.

You and I are called to carry our cross, the symbol of shame and mockery. When my wife's family tried to make her come home for the delivery of our first child rather than to walk 1,200 miles to the mission field she said, "No, I will walk with my husband and the missionaries. If they have to face death on the way, I want to be the first one. If someone wants to kill them, I want to die with them." My wife was born into an affluent family, yet she chose to give up all those things and even to die a humble death, if necessary. She chose to give up the comforts and things of this world so that she might serve a higher purpose. This is all about taking up the cross.

Two weeks after we reached our mission destination of Kota, we were told we would face death if we didn't leave immediately. If we had to face death, we decided to carry the cross and follow Jesus Christ. This is all about taking up the cross.

My son, Samuel, was asked by the Collector of Kota to deny Jesus and live peacefully; otherwise he would have to face death. He stood firm, saying he would not deny his Savior, but face death willingly. This is all about taking up the cross.

I praise God for the eighteen people who became martyrs from Emmanuel Ministries. They carried the cross with them, willingly and happily giving up their own lives for the sake of Christ. Two of our young men who were martyred in Orissa said, "Why we should die as cowards? We will die for Jesus, we will die for our family, for Christian people, and for the freedom of religion in India."

Now, I want to ask you two simple questions:

**What do you want to do until that time of your death?** I do not know when I will die. Many times I have come very close to death. Until the day of my appointment, I want to do His work—preaching, writing, teaching, fasting, and praying. I don't want to waste a moment for any other thing. What about you—what will you do until that day arrives?

**What kind of death do you want to have?** If I have my choice, I do not want to die from an accident, major sickness, or old age in a hospital. I want to die as a martyr. I have only one son, and he is my best friend. If I have my choice for my son's death, I want him also to be a martyr.

The first martyr was Stephen and what an honor he received. Jesus Christ stood in heaven at the right hand of the Father to receive him. All the angels and the saints in heaven stood there to receive him. When he was martyred, 70,000 disciples in Jerusalem scattered into different parts of the world, and wherever they went, they preached the Gospel, healed the sick, cast out demons, and established local churches. If my death could do that for my country, I would be so happy.

When you are beaten, it is their purpose to shut you up. That is why they do it. I never felt like I should run away from anti-Christians or leave Kota when I was threatened. Never.

One time I was in a public market in midday on my bicycle when a man stopped me and insulted me with so much dirty language. Then he said, "I will kill you. I will cut you into pieces and throw you into that big river." As I stood there with my bike, at least 200-300 people came over to watch this fellow shouting and screaming. Not even one person spoke in favor or against me. They just stood there, watching.

I put my hands behind my back and said, "Man, you want to kill me? It's okay! Do it if you want to. I'm not asking you not to kill me."

"I'm going to kill you, cut you into pieces, and throw you in the river," he shouted back.

"Then why don't you do it?" I asked him calmly.

Sure, I had a little fear, but I didn't show it. I put a good smile on my face and said, "Man, do it! And since these people are standing here, I will not even take my hands from behind my back." After shouting another ten minutes, he finally went away. That man died awhile later. But just before he died, he asked me to come and pray for him.

People ask the question, "Thomas, why do you go through so much tribulation when others don't have it?"

I reply, "I am happy about it; I count it all joy, because the Lord counts me worthy for these blessings by going through all these trials."

## **Effective Doors with Many Adversaries**

*Julie comments: Some of Papa's most inspiring messages on the fellowship of sufferings with Christ have taken place at his popular Bible College graduation addresses. Here is one such address adapted from two ceremonies at Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh) in 2007 and 2008.*

Paul says that one of the signs for the opening of an effective door of ministry is that there are many adversaries waiting there (1 Corinthians 16:9). When I was preparing to graduate from Hindustan Bible Institute in 1960, God showed me that He was opening a door in India for the Gospel when our nation declared freedom of religion in 1950. From that moment on, I faced both adversaries and adversities. All my friends and even the churches became adversaries, telling me that I could never succeed.

The devil tried to close the doors for us to travel to the mission field, but at the last moment, God opened the door. When I came to Rajasthan, I saw the great door opened to me all over north India in villages, tribal colonies, slums, and cities. But ever since then, the adversaries have been pursuing us continually. Even now, I am preaching while on bail, and my adversaries are trying to destroy me in any and every way possible.

When the Lord opened the door for me to start a Christian mission school, I faced severe persecution. I was beaten very badly and then I was imprisoned. When the Lord opened a great door for me to work among the orphans and lepers, my adversaries increased in proportion to the number of our missionaries. I had to run away from police and from militants. My son and twenty others were sent into prison where some of them remained for two years. Eighteen martyrs have come from Emmanuel Ministries, and through many lives such as these, God has opened effective and great doors in India, more than ever before, bringing wonderful results for the Kingdom.

Friends, don't think because God has opened this door for you that your adversaries will not be there. Rather I tell you that *they will be there*. If Jesus, His apostles, and all the Church fathers and great missionaries had to face adversaries, we will also face them. Are you willing to go through this open door in spite of these adversaries?

My beloved pastors, coworkers, and graduating students, when I see you, my heart is overwhelmed; I am so happy that you are going through the open door with us. You are the reason I started the Bible Institute in 1972, with only five students. We must not allow adversaries to keep us from entering through this door. Let us not limit ourselves. Let God lead

us to occupy land where He has opened the door for us by graduating thousands of missionaries in the days to come.

Jesus said, “I have kept before you an open door that no man can shut, since you have kept my word and have not denied my name” (Rev 3:8). Beloved friends, I know for sure God has kept a door open for us in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and many other places. Many adversaries will try to close the door, but they will not be able to.

The Lord has opened a great and powerful door for believers in the last days—the door to preach in Russia, Romania, Korea, Hungary, China, Philippines, Africa, Bangladesh, Tibet, and Burma. The door is also going to be opened in all the Islamic nations and in Israel, despite the opposition. Satan will try to stop this work, but God’s plan for this world is greater than the plans of our adversary. He has asked us to enter the open door and to preach the Gospel. When He opens this door, no one will be able to shut it.

In the first and second centuries after Christ, 50% of the world population became Christians because of persecution and martyrdom of the saints. This is why the Church fathers said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

In 1949, when the communist party conquered China, there were only 2.5 million Christians in China. The communist party then killed one million Christians and Christian leaders. But by 1987 when the door of China was opened for the rest of the world, 86 million born again Christians were found in China. The same kind of thing happened in Russia, South Korea, Hungary, Romania, and many other places.

When India became independent, the first President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, “Please don’t disturb the Christians. If you persecute them, India will become a Christian nation. Leave them alone. They are nice people and they will pray for you and for your nation. They are good citizens, but if you persecute them, they will multiply.”

Sure enough, church growth started in India after the onset of persecution. Many people ask us, “Thomas, what is the secret of the fast growth of Emmanuel churches?” We strongly proclaim it is the blood of our eighteen martyrs.

I still remember the death of our first martyr, my beloved fellow Bible College graduate and missionary, U.M. Durairaj, who fell down and died as a martyr in Alwar (Rajasthan) on July 26, 1966. All the drops of Durairaj’s blood shed in our room that day in Patan Pole, Kota,

became the seed of the Christian Church in Rajasthan, where today we have churches in every district.

When he died, he had only a hand full of believers to his credit. But today, growing and thriving in the place where he died as a martyr, we have two churches, two schools, two Bible Institutes, and one orphanage. He was the only person who accepted Christ from his village, but today the whole village and his whole family of 235 members has accepted the Lord Jesus, and thirty-five members of his immediate family are serving the Lord in different parts of India.

Dearly beloved, some of us may have our departure call during this year. We may not be here in this crowd next year. But I assure you that when we do leave this place, if we have remained faithful to the last, we will receive our crown and spend forever with Him.

Martin Luther King once told a crowd at a civil rights rally in 1963, “No man is free if he fears death. But the minute you conquer the fear of death, at that moment you are free... I submit to you that if a man hasn’t discovered something that he will die for, he isn’t fit to live.”<sup>iii</sup>

Many of the saints and apostles died at God’s appointed time as martyrs, and when they reached heaven, there was a standing ovation. I pray that you will also want to have this kind of death. But while you live, live for the Lord. Live like an angel. Preach like a powerful servant of God. May God help you to live in power and to be faithful unto death, dying like a child in the hands of the Lord!

Jesus said, “Most assuredly I say unto you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain.” Dearly beloved, are you willing to lay down your life—your selfish desires, plans, and dreams—take up your own cross, and go to the place where Jesus wants you to go? If you are not willing to fall onto the ground, humble yourself, and die, you will not have any fruit. You will not have a thriving church or ministry, and then you will put the blame on other people for your ministry failure.

It would be the greatest privilege if God should count me worthy to die for Him. That is my prayer, that He would not take me home any other way. Jesus said very clearly, if you want to serve me and to be my disciples, you must be ready to give up your own life. He is not interested in the crowds who are willing to follow Him without paying a price. Jesus never knew that theology.

Are you too willing to offer your life as a living sacrifice, and to take up your cross to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, even unto death? If you are willing to do it, please stand on your

feet and say, “Lord Jesus, I want to be your disciple. I want to be a missionary under your control. If it is needed, I will be happy to lay my life for the cause of Jesus Christ.” If you are willing, please stand and recite “The Martyr’s Pledge” with me:

*I take a stand to honor the Lord Jesus Christ with my hands, to serve all mankind.*

*I take a stand to honor the Lord Jesus Christ with my feet,*

*To spread the Gospel to all the ends of the earth, no matter the cost.*

*I take a stand to honor the Lord Jesus Christ with my lips,*

*By proclaiming the Good News to all who hear, and by edifying the body of Christ.*

*I take a stand to honor Jesus Christ with my mind, as I meditate upon His Word.*

*I give my earthly treasures and all that I possess to follow the way of the cross.*

*I commit to love my family, orphans, widows, lepers, the wealthy and the poor,*

*The way that Christ loved the church.*

*I surrender my will and life to His will and life.*

*I commit to the service of the Lord by being a good steward of my time.*

*I surrender my body to the perfect will of Jesus and, should my blood be spilled,*

*May it bring forth a mighty harvest of souls.*

*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation,*

*And to everyone who believes.*

*As a soldier of the cross I stand with the Apostle Paul in stating that,*

*“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

*Lord Jesus, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*I love my country and my fellow citizens, and I claim my country for Christ.<sup>iv</sup>*

*After the service, Papa wrote: “I was so happy to see every graduating student out of 900 stand to their feet and take the martyr’s oath.”*

### **Julie writes...**

I don’t know whether Papa’s blood will be spilled or not, but I believe God has already answered his prayer. No matter how Papa leaves this earth, he has already lived and “died” a martyr. He has already suffered persecution, rejection, mocking, and beatings. He has already given up comforts, possessions, and popularity.

Yes, Papa has carried a rugged, splintered cross. He has willingly become an object of mockery and shame to his enemies while giving up his life for God and people, every single day for the past fifty years.

## **Ministry of Jesus**

## Chapter 15: Feeding the Sheep

*And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. Mark 6:34*

**Throughout this chapter, enjoy the many “Jesus Lessons” from Papa...**

### **Be a Good Samaritan**

In 1978 I was with Peter Wigs, standing in front of Bombay Train Station, when we noticed a middle-aged man lying in the drainage gutter without even a thread on his body. He had been robbed, stripped, and beaten, almost to death, and garbage collectors had laid him in the drainage.

For two days, he remained there in a coma just in front of the main train station and Railway Police Station. Hundreds, even thousands saw him, but all passed by on the other side. We pulled him from the drainage and washed him up, and then he opened his eyes and looked at us. We dressed him and took him to a Mother Teresa Home. We were too late because he died two days after we left him there, but he died a decent death and had a proper burial.

Another time, there were four children of the same family for two days and nights, deserted by both of their parents. Hundreds of people looked at them and passed by, but not even one person stopped to ask why they were crying or where their parents were. These children were finally brought to an Emmanuel Hope Home. Whenever the oldest boy, Trevor, gave his testimony about this story, I cried while listening. Now Trevor is grown and running an orphanage by himself.

Do you know that 30,000 children below the age of five die every day because they could not find a Good Samaritan? 190 million street children worldwide look for a Good Samaritan. One million girls of India look for a Good Samaritan before they are sold as sex slaves or killed. The Lord called me to be a Good Samaritan and now I take care of about 10,000 children, lepers, and widows daily through our ministry. What can you do to be a Good Samaritan?

### **Don't Fear Sudden Disaster**

Recently, I heard from a certain preacher through TV, radio, and other media, that God is angry at America because of the war in Iraq, and because of the homosexuals and lesbians. He went on to say that's why the economy of the U.S. is poor.

There was famine in the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, but it was not because of war or because of homosexuals. Look at God's answer to Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah. "If I could find ten righteous men in Sodom and Gomorrah, I will not destroy them" (Gen. 18: 32). I have been visiting the U.S. since 1978, and I have never seen even one town or city where there are less than one hundred righteous people. Let us not scare God's people by declaring His judgment upon the U.S. I am happy to say, especially to God's people, that the economy in America is higher than any country in the world today.

In 1978, when I was in Nashville, Tennessee, a famous preacher announced in his fund raising campaigns, "Beloved, Christ may come tonight. If He comes tonight, by tomorrow your bank balance, house, boat, and everything you own will be taken by the antichrist. So now, write your checks out before it is too late and give them to me."

After the meeting, I asked him a simple question, "If Christ comes tonight, why would you want the money?" He only laughed at my question.

Friends, let us not be discouraged or disheartened. Even if at some point God were to send His angels to punish or destroy America, let us then become an Abraham or a Moses, interceding for God's people. "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways, then I will forgive their sins and heal from their sickness" (2 Chronicles 7: 14).

### **The Difference Between Great and Greater**

The difference between great and greater is only a small difference. It may be the difference of one inch, one minute, or one second. Jesus *went forward a little* and fell on the ground and prayed (Mark 14:35). The difference between Jesus Christ and His disciples was only very little.

Look at Paul the apostle. He was the least among all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9), but he became the greatest among all the apostles. Out of sixty-six books of the Bible, Paul wrote thirteen of them. He established more churches than any other apostle. He suffered more than any of the others (2 Cor. 11:12). He preached the Gospel to the whole Gentile world (2 Tim. 6:17). He took upon himself the debt of sharing the Gospel to all the Greeks, Barbarians, to all the wise, and the unwise. He did not spare anyone. The reason all this happened is because he was willing to go a little further than the rest of the apostles. He said, "As much as is in me, I am

ready to preach the Gospel” (Romans 1:15-16). He was willing to become anything to anyone for the sake of Christ.

Dear friend, are you willing to take one move further than the others? Choosing to go a little forward makes you closer to the Lord, more powerful in Christ, and a better person. On the other hand, a little more sleep, a little foolishness, a little carelessness, a little false teaching or bad advice will bring you to weakness, brokenness, and perhaps failure.

Jesus went a little further. One more hour awake instead of sleeping helped Him to get over temptation and complete His work. What will you do to go a little more forward? Will you pray a little more? Spend a little more time in God’s Word? Spend a little more time serving others? If you go a little further, you will be greater and more usable for the Kingdom of God.

### **Do the Work Given to You**

Jesus said, “This man is born blind and sitting on the roadside waiting for me that I might do the work which is given to me.” Friends, do you know why God has given you eyesight, time, talents, money, positions, and possessions? That you may do the work given to you. Remember the day is coming when you will not be able to do any work for God. After your death, you will not be able to distribute one more Bible, you will not be able to give one more testimony, you will not be able to care for one more orphan, and you will not be able to give one more dollar for God’s work.

There is a great question asked among the theologians. “Can a woman preach the Gospel, especially to men?” The perfect answer is this: The greatest Good News of the New Testament is the resurrection story. Jesus asked a woman who once had seven evil spirits to share this great news with the apostles. The Lord also sent the sinful Samaritan woman to preach the Gospel to the Samaritans. My answer to a woman is this: if the Lord has given you a message, give that message to whomever He asks you to give it.

I still remember my own wife who went out on June 18, 1995. It was a Sunday afternoon, our 36<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, and she had visited ten families that day, praying with them and encouraging them. When she came back home she said, “I may not be able to do these things any more.” The next day she went to be with her beloved Lord. Now she cannot do the same things she did when she was alive.

## **You Feed Them**

We are living in the modern world where there is plenty of food and clean water. But there are more hungry people in the world than ever before. More people die of starvation and malnutrition than ever before. When Jesus saw the hungry multitude, He was moved with compassion. “You feed them!” Jesus said to His disciples.

What about you? Are you moved with compassion for those who are hungry? Feeding stomachs is equally important as harvesting souls. Even now Jesus commands His people to be the ones to feed the hungry. It is not the duty of the government or the unbelievers. It is squarely the duty of God’s people. Many people ask why the rich Indians do not feed their own poor. It is not their duty, and they will not do it. Jesus did not ask the rich rulers to feed the poor. He asked His poor disciples to feed the hungry multitudes.

## **Multiply Bread**

Next Jesus asked, “How much food do you have” (Mark 6:38)? This is where we generally don’t see what we have to offer. Most of us know *what we don’t have*, but we don’t know what we *do have* as children of the King. And if we are aware of what we have to offer, many of us don’t want to admit it, lest God ask us to bring it to Him (Matt. 14:18).

One of our greatest hindrances is that we look to ourselves and ask, “What can I do? What difference can I make? This task is impossible.” We forget that we are called on to do the impossible with the help of the God of possibilities. As long as Christ reigns in your heart, you will never be a failure. He never made a single failure of those He called and who abided in Him. You will be able to challenge every person and every power under heaven that stands in your way of fulfilling His Word.

All Jesus is asking is that we offer what we do have. When we give Him what we do have, small as it is, He does a miracle and feeds the multitudes. When I came to the Lord and gave Him my life, I did not have any bread or fish in my hand. But I began to distribute whatever He entrusted me with, and I watched Him multiply it for the hungry crowds. Since then, I have received many baskets full of blessings in return.

Instead of focusing on what you don’t have or can’t do, put all you do have into the hands of Jesus. Bring what you have to the Lord and trust Him to multiply it. Give thanks to God for the small things and use them for His kingdom. We have had many wonderful examples of this in our ministry through the years.

One elderly woman lived on a small fixed income of Social Security. For fifteen years, she sent a dollar—one dollar—every month. Another couple in a similar situation mowed two lawns on weekends for more than twenty years in order to support one orphan.

One of Sam's recent experiences took place in a poor village in India on a Sunday evening. He'd spent all day traveling to over a dozen village churches to encourage them. It was well after dark, and he was very tired after his last meeting when an elderly village woman approached him with her grandson, asking Sam to pray for the boy. After he prayed, the woman took his hand and placed seven rupees (about fifteen cents) in it. "This is all I have to give to you. Thank you for praying for my grandson."

The local pastor told Sam that the woman didn't even have enough to feed her family and she truly gave all she had. So moved with compassion by this woman's faith and generosity, Sam left her with enough rupees to buy food her family. Sam said, "That was a defining moment in my life, a great moment in all my years of ministry, that this lady would give so much."

George Muller is one of my very favorites! He was a man who knew what he had, and he was not afraid to offer it to Jesus to feed the multitudes. Though he was a very poor man by the world's standards, he fed, clothed, and educated over 2,000 orphans on faith and prayer alone. One morning he did not have any food for the children, so he had them set the table as usual, sit down as if to eat, and say a prayer of thanksgiving for the food they were about to eat. No sooner had they finished praying than there was a knock at the door and the local baker said that God had awakened him extra early in the morning and told him to bake enough bread to feed all the children.

As soon as he had finished delivering the freshly baked bread, there came another knock at the door. A young man told George that his milk cart had broken down, and he asked if George could use several large cans of free milk so that he could get his cart fixed. What a wonderful story!

### **Gather the Fragments**

When they were all filled, Jesus said to the disciples, "Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost" (John 6:12). This should be happening in our midst in every place. Gather up the fragments. But no person, no society, no church wants to gather the fragments. The fragments are the ones who are left out—the ones that no one else wants. In India, they are called the untouchables.

Jesus is a fragment collector. He went to the beach and collected fragments to be His disciples. He went to the Bethesda Pool to collect the fragment who was there for thirty-eight years. He went to Gennesaret to get the fragment who was possessed with an evil spirit in the graveyard. He went to Jericho to get the fragment who was a blind beggar. He went to Samaria to gather up the fragment by the well. That which nobody else wants, Jesus wants. No one is untouchable for Him. Lepers, beggars, blind, lame, sick, weak, sinners, aged—Jesus wants them all in His basket where He collects the broken pieces. In fact, we must all become as the fragments, admitting our weakness and our brokenness so that He can take us in and use us to feed the multitudes.

I was a fragment, rejected by friends and loved ones. When I became a broken piece in 1956 after the death of a good friend, Jesus took me in His basket. The most secure and safest basket in the world is the basket of Jesus.

Today, I am a fragment collector. My children and grandchildren are also fragment collectors. I go to leper colonies, streets, slums, and prostitutes camps looking for the fragments. Are you willing to be a fragment collector? Will you send one of your children as a fragment collector?

“Dad’s character is as white as snow. He’s a great man of character and integrity. All my life I have seen people try to question his integrity, but next to Jesus Christ, I do not see anyone with as much integrity as my Dad. In all my years that I have known him, I have never heard him lie once. His honesty has given him a boldness that can confound and shame his accusers. If somebody comes against him with an accusation that he has tried to murder somebody, or tried to hurt someone, you will hear him speak with boldness.

“For example, there is a pastor’s wife who was beaten. Dad took her in and gave her shelter. People accused him of all kinds of inappropriate behavior, and he had all the odds against him. But in the end, he helped that lady and everyone saw that dad had honorable intentions.

“After the husband got over his anger, he came to Dad. “Thank you for helping my wife and for helping our family.” The reason dad helped the woman is because he didn’t care about what people thought of it. He will always go above what people think to help any individual if they need it in any way.” —Samuel Thomas

### **Don’t Forget The Son**

Often when we celebrate a festival, we forget the sacrifice or the purpose behind it. I read a story about the birthday celebration of the firstborn in a lord’s family. Many people were invited. The child was laid in the cradle, which was placed in the living room. The first guest

who came hung his coat over the cradle, not noticing the child in the cradle. One after other came as the guest came they slung their coats over the cradle.

At the end of the party before leaving, they all brought out their gifts to present to the child. But when they looked, the child had died of suffocation. They held the big feast and celebration for the son's birth, but they forgot about the son.

Any day, at any time, your life can be over. Jesus told the world, "I did not come to receive appreciation from religious leaders, political leaders, or from the common public. I came to save sinners. I want you to be in the Kingdom of God, but the fearful, unbelievers, adulterers, murderers, idolaters and liars cannot enter God's Kingdom. You must be born again to be in the Kingdom of God."

None of us is good enough to live in God's Kingdom, but God loves us because we are created in His image. Therefore, He made plans to save us by sending His only Son, Jesus, who healed every kind of sickness, cast out demons, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, walked on the sea, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and gave hearing to the deaf. At the age of thirty-three, He died on a rugged cross as a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of all. He was buried and rose again on third day. Whenever someone comes to Him in repentance, he receives forgiveness, and he receives life through the Holy Spirit and victory over sin. Someday He will take every person who has confessed Him as Lord into His Kingdom to live with Him forever.

I was born and raised in a poor family but I tried to live a holy and sinless life so I could please God, but still I knew I was not good enough to get into His Kingdom. When I was twenty-one, one of my good friends died suddenly. Then death became a terror for me. I knew that if death came upon me, I would have to face judgment. That evening when I came back after burying my friend, I cried aloud unto Jesus for mercy and forgiveness. He forgave my sins and gave me peace in my heart. I knew right then that if I died, I would be with Jesus.

Dear friend, you can receive forgiveness for all your sins, and you can be free from all your sinful habits. You can experience peace in your mind and in your soul. All you have to do is repent of your sins, asking Jesus Christ to forgive you and to come in to your life as your Lord and Savior.

### **Everything by Prayer**

*Julie comments: Papa is simple in his approach to prayer. He keeps a list, and he prays over it at least a couple hours every day. Last time I saw his list, it contained 127 items. When*

*God answers one, he says, "Thank you, Lord," and crosses it off the list. No four-step plans or super-spiritual methods. On his list, he includes verses, many of them promises from God in regard to that specific request. Last year in 2008, Papa began healing prayer services on Fridays in his church. Following are his thoughts taken from one of our conversations.*

Prayer is a big part of my life. God asked me to do this: "You sit on my right hand until I bring all your enemies and all your debt under your feet." When I pray, I feel that I'm sitting at His right hand. My prayer is just like I am talking to you. It is a conversation. Most of the time I hear Him speaking to me when I am reading His Word each morning, but very seldom do I hear, "Thomas! Stand up! I am going to speak to you."

I have always prayed for the sick any time. But this is the first time I have started regular healing services. The Bible says everybody can pray for healing. Jesus said to all His disciples, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, and raise the dead" (Matthew 10:8). That is a commandment; it is not a choice. And it is not a special gift for "somebody else." We are all to exercise it. He has carried away all our sickness and by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53).

In our early days in Kota, we came home from distribution to find that Philip's three-month-old baby had a high fever and sat listlessly on his mother's lap. She was crying, so I took the child and prayed. Instantly, before we opened our eyes, the child was perfectly all right. Many times in our healing services, we see the Lord heal people of many things instantly.

Recently, a man and his wife moved from Delhi to Kota to be near family because he was diagnosed with terminal cancer and given only a month to live. When they got to Kota, they looked for a church and they found us. He came here for our Friday fasting prayer service, and he looked very sick. He could hardly kneel down, but I prayed for him. For maybe two or three weeks, he came regularly for prayer every Friday. A few weeks later, he stood up and gave testimony—in tears—that God had healed him. "I did not come to Kota to live," he told the church. "I came here only to die and to have a good funeral. Now God is helping me to live." That is a great miracle.

A Christian woman in the community had major heart trouble for two years. Many of her associates through work were from other religions and urged her to come to their healing services. The woman thought to herself, "These other religions have healing prayers—why don't we Christians? Where can I go for healing?"

It is true that we go for worship, but there is no place we can go to get prayer for the sick. That is why we started the Friday healing service. So the woman heard about our service and came for prayer, but she did not tell me about her problem, I just prayed for her. And then in a couple weeks, she went for surgery. They tested her once more before operating, and they came back and said, "You don't have any problem with your heart. There is no more sickness, no blockage, and every valve is clear." The woman shouted with joy, praising God all the way home.

So many people give testimony in our healing services. One of our orphan boys, who is a good singer, stood to give testimony. He had constant stomach pain and dysentery for about a year and a half. He went to doctors and even to the hospital, but nobody could help him. He went into depression and stopped coming to sing on worship team at the church. Then he came for prayer. He gave a report that the Lord healed him completely and that his depression was gone within a week. He said, "Now I am happy. I rejoice with the Lord." And for so many people, I can say, the Lord is doing miracles.

When it comes to sharing the Gospel or praying for healing, you can do it, I can do it, Billy Graham can do it, anybody can do it. Maybe only Billy Graham can *crusade*, but we can all share in this work, because Jesus is the one who is healing and Jesus is the one who is saving.

And so you see, *prayer is my life*. The only guilt feeling I have in my life is this: I get so caught up in work that I am not spending sufficient time in prayer. I know if I could pray more, much more work could be done.

Jesus said, "I must do the work of my Father who sent me as long as I am in the world." Jesus looked for opportunities to do His Father's work until He said from the cross, "All the work You gave to me; it is finished." May the Lord bless and help you finish the work God has given you to do before it is too late.

## **Expectation of Zacharias**

## Chapter 16: A Silent Blessing

*And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. ...And [Zacharias] asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Luke 1:21-22, 63-64*

### **Julie writes...**

In November of 2008, Papa came to the States to raise money for his orphans. This is always an exciting time for him when he gets to reconnect with old friends, speak at churches, and to cast his vision for one million arrows wherever he goes. There is always an air of wonder and anticipation when he sets foot in America, especially at Christmastime, where he knows he'll find many open hearts and wallets on behalf of "his children."

But soon after arriving, he came down with a bad cold that zapped his energy and seemed to get worse by the day. Finally, he was taken to the hospital. Here is his update letter sent out to family and friends from his hospital bed:

***December 3, 2008:** I praise God for the great and marvelous things that He has done. Thank you very much for your prayers. I am in hospital in Columbus, Georgia, with double pneumonia and with much breathing difficulty. My heart went out of rhythm and I felt like I was going to have heart attack. The doctors moved me to the CCU (critical care unit) and they worked on me for a few hours to get my rhythm back to normal. I narrowly escaped a congestive heart failure, according to what the doctor told me this morning. I feel much better but still have a long way to go. I am totally restless and cannot sleep, but I am completely exhausted. Please pray for my complete and speedy recovery.*

*Though I am sick in bed, I am praying for every one of you. I want that God's people should be bold enough to preach the Gospel. Even though I am in my sick bed, I cannot rest because of my concern for the orphan children and the great need. Will you send at least a \$5 gift for the orphans this Christmas? I love you, I am praying for you, and may God bless you all.*

Sandy Ellingson, a staff member at Hopegivers at that time, spent many days with Papa at the hospital, encouraging him and helping him in any way she could. Here is what Sandy shared about her daily experience with Papa in the hospital.

***Sandy writes:** "These have been the best and most special days of my life. I'm sorry Papa has to suffer, but I can't tell you what I have learned from him during this time. He is a man of single purpose*

*more than anyone I have ever met. I haven't seen even one minute of weakening in him since he began his battle for life. All he cares about are the orphans and the Gospel.*

*When we walk down the hall, he makes me carry tracts so he can give them out to everyone we meet. When the doctors come in, he asks them over his labored gasps how he can pray for them. The doctors don't know what to think. Here is a man dying in a hospital bed, 12,000 miles from home, and his only and every thought is for others and their relationship with Christ. If he is anxious about anything, it's only that he came to speak to raise money for his orphans, and he is unable to do that.*

After struggling for a couple weeks in the hospital with double parasitic pneumonia, his life hanging in the balance between life and death, Papa suffered a massive stroke in mid-December that left him paralyzed on his right side. Since then, he has not been able to speak, write, or walk. It was surely an unexpected and heart wrenching blow to everyone, friends and family alike. Would this be the end of Papa's ability to minister during his lifetime? Would he never teach or hold his beloved orphans again? These questions weighed heavily and sadly in everyone's mind.

A couple months later in February, I had the opportunity to spend ten days with Papa at a care facility in Columbus, where he was receiving care and therapy for his stroke. At that time, I had the distinct privilege of reading to him out of his handwritten prayer journal, and I found this entry from his birthday just a month before his illness began:

**October 14, 2008:** *This word came to me in the early morning at 4:30 a.m. on my 73rd birthday from Isaiah 41:9-14: "Fear not, Thomas, I am with you. Be not dismayed. Do not be shattered, broken, or terrified. Thomas, I have taken you from the end of the earth—a small village called Kuzhikala in South India. You are my servant. I have chosen you and shall not cast you away."*

*I was really encouraged and blessed by this word when I am 73 years old! I felt He was speaking to me directly. I felt that He was calling me by name and saying, "Fear not, Thomas!"*

*The devil repeatedly told me through the last two weeks, "You are entering into the 73<sup>rd</sup> year of your life soon, and you have little strength to stand against me." But when the Lord said, "I will strengthen you," I was so happy—I had tears in my eyes. I read the Word like this, "Fear not thou, Thomas, for I am with you. Fear not, I will help you. This is the same word the Lord spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15:1, to Isaac in Genesis 26:24, to Jacob in Isaiah 43:1, to Moses in Exodus 14:13, to Joshua in Joshua 1:9, to David, to Solomon, to Jeremiah, and to God's people again and again. Over 700 times the Lord said to His people, "Fear not." An average of two times a day the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Fear not."*

*I am so glad the Lord spoke to me once again through his words today on my birthday. During the last three years, repeatedly the enemy, Satan, has tried his level best to frighten me through various methods. But the Lord has spoken to me once again. It is true that He's spoken to me through various Scriptures throughout my life and throughout this severe persecution. But today He said, "Fear not, Thomas, I am with you. Be not dismayed. Do not be shattered, broken, or terrified." Praise the Lord!*

Is God finished with Papa? On Papa's birthday, of all things, just a month before he fell ill, God is telling him that this journey is not over yet: "I have chosen you and shall not cast you away." As long as Papa is still breathing, God is not finished with him. God still has a purpose and a plan for Papa—one that we must all wait patiently to see unfold.

I love the account from Sandy when she wrote about an experience at the hospital:

**December 23, 2008:** *During one particular period of quiet yesterday, Papa rested for about twenty minutes. When he woke up, it appeared like he could see and hear someone. The room was very still and quiet, which is unusual for a hospital. I opened my mouth to ask him if he needed anything, but nothing would come out. It was if the Holy Spirit quieted me.*

*I watched for the next twenty-five minutes while Papa appeared to listen and respond animatedly in a one-sided conversation. He laughed and smiled—a normal smile, not the crooked smile that I have seen as evidence of the stroke. It was the most awe-inspiring moment of my life. As the room filled with unexplainable peace, chill bumps sprung up all over me.*

*Now, as a good little southern Baptist girl, I don't expect visitations from angels, and certainly not from Jesus. But I think He was here yesterday, and I think He visited with Papa, giving him the encouragement that he needed. Someone like Papa would believe it when Jesus showed up. I wonder had Moses had a sidekick out in the desert, if he would have just thought Moses was talking to a bush.*

*I believe that Jesus was here, and I am so happy for Papa. Yet I am humbled by the fact that, although I sensed His presence, I did not see Him. Watching all this unfold, the Holy Spirit impressed one thing on my heart. Although it grieves me that Papa cannot communicate with us right now, he is completely able to communicate with the One he holds most dear. And the One he holds most dear is holding him up in His right hand even now.*

In light of Papa's journals and all that God has done to bring him this far to write special pages of His-story, I personally wonder if the stroke could possibly be keeping Papa silent for the declaration of a new thing God is doing in our times. Perhaps a magnificent vision is being birthed. God could have taken Papa home in December. But He didn't. There's a reason Papa is still here...and I believe it's an important reason. Perhaps the silence is the announcement of a special unveiling of a blessing—maybe even a blessing to the world. Only time will tell.

## **Heart of Father God**

## Chapter 17: Hands that Hold the World

*[The Lord said to Abraham] "...blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Genesis 22:17-18 (NKJV)*

### **Papa last exhortations...**

Dearly beloved friend, do you know that where you are right now is the place that was kept for you by God "for such a time as this?" We each have been assigned a place in this world and given a position. There is no better time or location you could be placed for sharing the Good News than where you live and work right now.

God's true followers have more persecution now than ever before in history. In such a time and such a place as you have been assigned in history, will you intercede for God's people—even at personal risk? Like Queen Esther, will you too say, "I will not count my life precious unto me, but I will serve my God and His people. If I perish, I perish. I cannot lose my life for a better cause than this, because it is better to die courageously for my God and His people, rather than to die as a coward."

I know God gave me birth in just the right place and to just the right family. Then He gave me the right mission field at just the right time with the right work for me. I have faced many enemies who want to destroy me, but God brought me here that I might serve Him and His people with courage.

God's people are commanded to redeem the time. God has given 24 hours, 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds in each day to every person. Everyone is commanded to redeem that time and make it fruitful and useful. Instead of *redeeming* the time, the wicked people of the world will only *pass* the time. They have so many things to waste their time on: excessive TV and entertainment, gambling, partying, gossiping—all are great time wasters in the scope and purpose of eternity.

If we lose money, we can regain it by working hard. Health we can gain back by good medicine. Even lost character and lost opportunities can be corrected. But lost time can never be regained. There is no guarantee that we will get another day or another chance.

When I found the joy of the Lord at age twenty, I did not want to waste one single day. Beloved, the days are evil. Redeem the time and use it for the Kingdom of God.

In fifty-one years of following Him, the Lord has never asked me to do anything that I was unable to do. Hard, yes, but never impossible. He prompted me to walk 500 miles from Chennai to Chenganoor in fifty-seven days, and then He gave the ability, health, faith, and courage to do so. In 1960 the Lord asked me to go to Kota, Rajasthan, where it had only recently been against the law to be a Christian in most of the states and kingdoms.

After we got to Rajasthan, God asked me to start churches, schools, orphanages, Bible institutes, radio programs, and I did what I could with what I had. Even when I did not have any money, I still did what I could do. When I went to the leper colony with no money or food to give, I still went and shook hand with hundreds of lepers. No matter what I did or didn't have, one thing is true: *I always did what I could.*

It is true that I do get impatient waiting for God's promises. But God's timing is not my choice. There is nothing to do other than wait. When we were waiting for money to come in so we could go to Rajasthan, what else could we do but wait? There was no other way.

When you see a pool or lake full of fish, you can stand on the shore and say, "Man, look at all those fish." But you're not going to get all the fish at once. The easiest way is to sit down and put the hook out there, and get one. Then you look again and see so many more fish and you think it will take forever to catch them all. But after three or four hours, you look behind you and you will see so many fish lying there. They are ready for your food.

Waiting on God's promises is the same. I want one million orphans and one million churches in 600,00 villages. Those are my fish. But what did I have to do when I came to Kota? I had to put my hook in and start one church while sitting under a tree. Now almost fifty years of ministry later, we look and see that the Lord helped us to start over 21,000 churches! But I am not done fishing. When I look at the bank behind my shoulder at the end of my life, I want one million. And God will do it! He promised to give exceedingly abundantly above what we could ask or think.

In the process, we must look back and see what God has given so far. That is what we are commanded to do. Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done for you. When I do this, I say, "Man, what a God we serve." I wanted to stay

under the tree and start *one church*. Now look how many we have! I don't get discouraged by what I don't yet have as long as I stay focused on what is already behind me, sitting on the bank.

Friend, what can you do? What work has God asked you to do? Even if you are only a boy with a lunchbox containing five small loaves of bread and two small fish, give it to feed the hungry multitude and see what God will do with it. You may be a widow with two pennies, or a businessman with lots of money, but both can be used for the Kingdom of God. You may be gifted for preaching, singing, teaching, writing, nursing, or administrating, and God wants you to give that for His service, too. When you do all that you can do, no matter what it is, your name will be made great before God.

The past two years, I've had the great pleasure of sending out Bible College graduates into the mission field. After all the problems against the ministry in 2006, no one dreamed we could have another graduation service in Kota. But we graduated many more students who are now living in villages, towns, and cities, bringing the love of Jesus and His Good News to their fellow countrymen. For many, a Bible, the clothes on their back, and a heart of compassion is all that they could bring with them to the field. Most of our graduates go out into the field completely unsupported, simply trusting God to meet their needs.

Friends, they are ready and willing to go, but so many of our students cannot even afford train fare to get to their desired location. We have pastors like Jacob and his wife Anita, who are so eager to begin a Hope Home ministry, but who will build the building or pay their rent? We have graduates who want to pursue nurse's training so they can enter villages that ordinarily wouldn't allow Christian workers, but they will welcome trained medical professionals. Who will provide for their training? Pastor Emmanuel has two churches fifteen miles apart, but has no vehicle. Who will send these faithful workers into the field and help meet their needs?

Every graduate is unique and wants to pursue a different ministry field, but they all have one thing in common: the desire to know Him and make Him known. Some, like Palwesh, want to pursue children's ministry, others, like Satya, choose to work among slum dwellers. Ramesh has a special heart for education and wants to begin a school outreach. You can help a faithful worker begin their journey of faith and service. A gift as simple as train fare, food, clothes or a motorcycle would be an excellent blessing. You can play a crucial role in the blessing and rescuing of bodies and souls.

People asked Andrew Murray in England, “What is the greatest hindrance for mission work?” You know what he said? *Money*. He said in those days, if every born-again Christian were giving one penny a day, the world could be evangelized. I say it is the same today. If every born again Christian in America were to give one dollar a day, I say the world could be evangelized. That is what people should give for mission work, one dollar a day.

It is true, sometimes I get discouraged; I’m a human being. That is one reason I pray over my vision so often. “Lord, give me one million orphans and give me one million dollars a month, Help the street children. Give me a desire to seek first the Kingdom of God. Give me 100,000 village schools, 1,000 city schools, and twenty-five major cities.” See, when I read through and pray through this list every day, the passion comes back into my heart.

And then I see how the Lord has blessed the ministry in all places and in every way. When I saw Bill Bright at Liberty University back in the 90’s, we talked about our ministry experiences since our first meeting in India at Hindustan Bible College. By this time, our ministry was raising about 3,000 orphans, and we had started 8,000 churches in India and had spread to Nepal, Tibet, Burma and other countries. Bill Bright said, “Thomas, if I knew that my twenty-five dollars a month could do this much, I would have invested most of my money in this work. I praise God that I was able to help you in 1960.”

But the work is not finished. Pray with us for One Million Arrows—one million godly and faithful orphans to become a formidable force against the powers of darkness.

### **Arrows in the Latter Days**

God has blessed U.S. as one of the most prosperous countries in the world. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, America alone sent more missionaries than the rest of the world together. Even today, America is giving more money to furthering the Gospel than the whole world put together. I believe this is the reason God has blessed and honored America.

I have come to the U.S. for the last thirty years, and I have seen great revival and change. Now, churches have more young people and every seminary is packed. America is sending more missionaries than ever before through short term missions such as, Youth With A Mission (YWAM), Campus Crusade, Teen Mania, Overseas Missions (OM), Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), and others. I praise God for the churches in the U.S. today, reaching the world through radio, TV, Gospel literature, and Bibles.

I am especially grateful for the financial blessings given to Hopegivers. In 1978, we had five small schools, eleven small churches, twelve students in one small Bible Institute, and twenty-four orphans. Today the Lord has increased our work to 9,500 missionaries, 21,000 churches, and currently we have over 10,000 orphans in our care. One year we even graduated 6,000 missionaries at once. God did it all, but He used the help we received from America.

Friends, I thank you for helping us financially, for your prayers and fasting, and even your tears for us. Especially for the last several years, when we passed through fiery trials, you faithfully helped us. I can say that God has opened effective doors for us that have not been able to be shut, though we always have many adversaries. But we need your continued prayers and support for this vision.

God said that *all children* are arrows in the hands of the mighty Man, Jesus Christ. *All we have to do in order to evangelize the whole world is to take the arrows and place them into Jesus' hand.* Let not the devil discourage you. Let us continue to give as much as we can to carry on the work of the Gospel. Let us take time at least once a week to fast and pray for our nations, and for our people. Let us humble ourselves and pray for world evangelism and revival for the latter days.

### **Julie explores Papa's role in His-story (God's story)...**

Through the course of spending a few momentous occasions with Papa, and especially while writing this book, he has become a both a mentor, and especially a "Papa" to me. His example of faith and obedience throughout a life of opposition and struggle has impacted my life deeply. His demonstration of extending a loving touch to every person he meets who needs to see God "with skin on" is inspiring. If there's one thing I think that everyone who knows Papa would agree upon, it's this: You can't be in Papa's presence without being changed by his love.

Many times since meeting Papa, I have been thrilled by this thought. Papa is not simply a visionary parent; I personally believe his purpose is much bigger than that. Papa left his homeland in south India to move 1,200 miles to an uncharted destination selected by God in north India to become the father of a multitude of orphans who are currently blessing and changing their world for Christ. I believe Papa is truly a modern-day Abraham, the father of many nations of children—godly offspring—who are becoming the heritage of the Kingdom on earth, finishing the work of the harvest. It is the heart of Abraham, and ultimately the heart of the God of Abraham dwelling within him, that makes Papa care so much about "the least of these."

Abraham, a biblical type of Heavenly Father, was the only one of his kind in the Bible. He was the Patriarch of God's unconditional covenant of love for all mankind, and he was sealed with the promise of God to bless all families and all nations through his offspring with the coming Messiah. Yes, Papa is a lot like Abraham—a Heavenly Father type of our day.

It gives me goose bumps just thinking about the implications of how this one man is impacting His-story. In addition to the calling and the impact he's had on the world already, I can only imagine what is ahead for he and his spiritual offspring in the days and years to come.

Papa told me once, "I like the name Abraham. If God wants to bless me as He blessed Abraham, I have no problem with that. I always wanted to have more children, and that is why He gave me orphans. Perhaps my children will become a great multitude and fill the earth with God's love."

### **Another Life Touched**

Papa's hands have reached out across time and space to hold and heal many people in this world with the love of God, but there's one more story I'd like to share.

My Mom battled cancer for six long years until it finally took her life June 19, 2009, incidentally on the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ammini's death. Mom never met Papa, and she never got to read his story. She only heard stories of him from me, and saw a few pictures from my time in India. But from what she heard about him, she was just as smitten by his loving fatherly heart as others who have met him.

The final six months of her life commenced with yet another one of our many trips together to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, in December of 2008. It was a rather gloomy time for both of us, stuck in cold, snowy Minnesota over the holidays while Mom got radiation treatments for a painful tumor threatening to collapse her spine. It was during this trip we got the news from her doctor that we had dreaded for so long: "Only a few months left."

While Mom was battling out pain and the news of her imminent death in Rochester, Papa was having his own life-threatening battles in the hospital in Columbus, Georgia. He'd already had his massive stroke around the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, and was undergoing therapy for that, as well as continued treatment for his parasitic pneumonia. By this time, Papa was unable to walk or speak, and no one knew if or when he might be able to do so again.

One afternoon I came into the living room of the home where we were staying to find Mom waking up from a nap. Because of pain, she was only able to sleep sitting up in a recliner. I noticed right away she had a light in her eyes that I hadn't seen in a long time.

"I just had a dream about Papa," she said.

"Really? What was your dream?" I asked.

"I came into this room and Papa was lying on a bed. He didn't say anything to me, but as I walked toward his bed, he reached out and took my hand and held it. I can't describe the peaceful and comforting feeling that came over me. I've never felt anything like it in my life. In fact, I can still feel it."

"Wow, Mom. That is so beautiful. What was he wearing?"

"He had on pants and a long, white shirt with a different kind of collar—sort of hard to describe because I haven't seen one like it before."

I continued to question her as to any other significant details, but that was it. A simple dream of a simple man's profound heavenly love and comfort. And whenever she thought about her dream in the coming days and weeks, the comfort and peace she'd experienced holding Papa's hand surrounded her once again like a warm blanket of love and strength.

About six weeks later in February was when I went down to Columbus to help take care of Papa for about ten days. While I was there with him at the care center, I took a few pictures of him. After returning home, I showed the pictures to mom. Her eyes grew wide with excitement. "That's the shirt Papa was wearing in my dream!"

I had long since forgotten about her dream, but she hadn't. And I hadn't paid much attention to Papa's attire when I was with him. He was dressed in his usual attire—a long white shirt made in India with long sleeves and a special collar, different than American styles.

Four months later, I sat with my Mom in her last unconscious moments of life. Taking her hand, I leaned over the bed and whispered into her ear. "Mom, you're not alone. Remember the way you felt when Papa was holding your hand. You are going to feel that happy and peaceful again soon when Jesus takes your hand and walks you to the other side."

The peaceful way Mom died was surely as if Jesus held her hand to the very end, walking her down the sunlit path to her new home with her Heavenly Papa, where she will await her soon coming resurrection of joy.

Papa's hands. The most tender and loving of human hands, reaching out to touch all those in need—the lonely, the poor, the desperate, the sinful, the enslaved, the unlovely, the unloved...*the untouchables*. But Papa would want us to recognize that it is not he who made his hands great. They were made great by tender loving hands the One of whom he is a type, the Father of us all who were once untouchables. "...remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded [untouchable]...having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13).

I'm so thankful that Papa was willing, available, and faithful to give the world a small yet worthy glimpse of our very own Heavenly Papa's faithful heart and loving hands—hands that hold the world.

## **Epilogue: A note from Papa**

### **My Happy Birthday Message**

Dearly Beloved,

Thank you for wishing me Happy 73<sup>rd</sup> Birthday today, October 14, 2008. Already I have received a few hundred happy birthday messages before 6:00 a.m. In the past seventy-three years, the shadow of death has come near me many times, but the Lord enabled me to see my birthday for another year. Let me give the words from Psalm 16:8-11 that were brought to my attention on this most happy day.

“I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory [my inner self] rejoices; my body too shall rest and confidently dwell in safety, For You will not abandon me to Sheol (the place of the dead), neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (AMP).

I praise God he permitted me to live seventy-three years, enabling me to see the path of life and to learn the secret of the fullness of joy. I can say as the Lord is holding my right hand, helping me for my future. My future is brighter than ever before and I praise God once again for His promises on my 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The Hand that created and sustains the whole Universe is holding me. What more security do I need for my life? What more security do you need for your life? No one can pluck us out of this Father’s Hand.

If you want inner joy and hope in your heart, if you want the stability that God offers, set the Lord always before you and keep Him at your right hand. Only then will you never be moved. If you want God’s companionship and escape from corruption, keep the Lord always before you and keep him on your right hand. This is what I want to do the rest of my days.

Praise the Lord for this beautiful word, and the secret of joy, rest, and hope. If you are looking for a life full of purpose, joy, and pleasures, keep the Lord before you always. This is my dream and prayer for the rest of my days.

May God bless you richly with all blessings and joy.

M.A. “Papa” Thomas

## Letters from Admirers

### Pastor Joseph Bawi Ceu

One Friday night, I earnestly prayed and fasted with Dr. M.A. Thomas the whole night at the assembly hall in Kota for a graduation ceremony where I was about to graduate with a B.D degree. We were in prayer at 1:00 a.m. when suddenly about 4,000 anti-Christians joined together and came out to fight against Dr. M.A Thomas and take his life. When they reached the Bishop house, they were all the way around his house and porch also. They shouted, “We want Dr. M.A Thomas.” At that time two police came to him quickly and said, “Many persecutors have come to fight against you and to take your life.”

During this time, all the Bible students and professors were full of fear. It really seemed that we were going to flee from this place to escape. Nevertheless, Dr. M.A. Thomas was full of strength, absolutely not afraid of them. He said to me, “Touch your bosom and you will feel your heart racing. That is because you are afraid.” I felt my chest and he was absolutely correct—my heart was racing!

Then he said again, “Come and touch my chest. My heart is not afraid of them because the Lord said to me, “Sit at my right hand, until I make all your enemies a footstool under your feet” (Ps 110:1). I felt his chest and it was completely calm. Great wonder came over me because Dr. M.A. said he regarded his enemies as grasshoppers. During this time Dr. M.A. Thomas prayed earnestly to the Lord. That very hour, all our enemies unexpectedly fled and ran back from Dr. M.A Thomas. Praise the Lord for He has done mighty things yet again.

From that very hour his boldness and teaching encouraged me strongly in my life, and his faith and teaching is alive in my heart. This is my strongest lesson for my spiritual growth.

Now I am a pastor and I have an orphanage. When my orphans and I prayed and sang loudly to the Lord at night, anti-Christians stoned us angrily in 2006. At that time, the boldness of Dr. M.A Thomas and his teaching strengthened me, and I did not cease prayer. We continued prayer without ceasing, and I took the idea from him to “sit at the Lord’s right hand, till He makes my enemies a footstool under my feet.” After that, the anti-Christians ran back and there was a great calm. Amen!

### **Wesley R. Withers**

Papa is my sister's father-in-law. As we were preparing for him to stay with us in Pennsylvania for a few days, we thought that he might wish for a few days of rest. This was to be my first time meeting him personally. Of course, with his reputation for working hard and always wanting to share his vision for India, I should not have been surprised by his question upon arrival: "When will we have the Bible study and how many people will be coming?" We made some frantic phone calls and rounded up about fifteen people who met him and remain interested prayer partners to this day.

I have been fortunate to meet some of America's most famous and successful preachers and evangelists, yet his simple faith shrouded in a life committed to holiness still moves me to this day. Though he does nothing to be imposing, the presence of God that covers him distinguishes him as a "man of God."

### **Dr. Lewis Gregory**

Brother M.A. Thomas came to Bible Pathway Ministries in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in 1982, where we both were speakers at the annual Pathway Bible Conference. During our time together, it became evident that Brother Thomas had a heartfelt passion for God and a genuine compassion for people.

A couple of months later when the Lord led us to begin Source Ministries International, we went to meet with our friend Wayne Belt to get his advice and prayer. M.A. Thomas was visiting Wayne at the time and he got very excited about our call to go to other countries to teach leaders about their identity in Christ. His comments were very challenging. We all prayed together before we left and his prayer for us was most inspirational.

But the greatest encouragement came when M.A. pulled out a twenty-dollar bill, handed it to me, and said, "Here is a donation to help you start this ministry." Wow, that touched my heart deeply! I was reminded about the time when I was in Seminary and the Lord led my wife and me to give up eating meat so we would have enough money to support a local minister from India. Now ten years later, a fellow minister from India was used of God to help us begin our ministry. Truly we reap what we sow!

—Dr. Lewis Gregory  
Source Ministries International

### **Dr. Rex Austin**

I first met Dr. M.A. Thomas in 1976 at Southwest Baptist. Over the years I have treasured the time I've spent with him. In my mind I can see him passing out hundreds of tracts as we traveled.

In a land ruled by the caste system, this Great Man of God would humble himself and wash the feet of lepers, feed little children and meet with kings and presidents.

I will never meet the apostle Paul this side of Heaven, but I believe M.A. was very similar in his love and work for the Lord.

### **Mr. M.A. Jos**

In 1970, I went to Kota to spend a couple of days with brother M.A. Thomas. But as soon as I reached there I got news from Bharatpur (the place I came from) that someone had passed away. I had to return immediately and it would not have been possible for me to come back again any time soon to Kota. Brother Thomas was feeling bad that I could only spend half an hour with him after traveling for eight hours. So to ensure that I come back to spend a couple of days of fellowship with him, he decided to accompany me.

After attending the funeral service, we reached the railway station six hours early to board a train back to Kota. Since the train was scheduled to arrive at midnight, we decided to spread out our bed sheets and lay on the platform waiting for the train. For a man like him to have taken so much trouble to ensure that he got to spend some time of fellowship with me reveals his Christ-like attitude.

Once when I met with him after he became the Bishop, I told him, "Brother Thomas, I would still like to address you the same old way." He said, "Dear Jos, even if you don't use any form of address, it wouldn't bother me because I have taken this title up only to be able to help others and not myself."

I can never forget these incidents.

—Mr. M.A. Jos

(Evangelist and close friend from the early days of ministry in North India)

### **Barbara Vettel**

Here are some things I admire about M.A. Thomas: His availability to everyone from 6:00 a.m. till 11:00 at night; his sense of humor, no complaining even though he has much physical distress; his incredible prayer life; keeping track of so many people on a personal basis;

his undying love for the orphaned and abandoned children of India; the list goes on. But my most memorable event with this great man of God was from a telephone conversation with him in March of 2006.

Persecution had started in January of the same year and had accelerated at an incredible rate. Dr. Thomas had to go in hiding, only able to stay one or two days in the same place. Pictures of him were in all the bus and train stations and in the airports across India. If arrested, he would go to jail; if the militant anti-Christians got him first he would be killed.

I never expected to hear from him. But that fateful day in March he called me. It was very short: “Barbara Aunty, I wanted you to know that this will probably be the last time you hear from me. Please, don’t let your people forget about the children. I love you.” He then hung up.

At that moment I experienced the Holy Spirit taking over to express my emotions to God; I certainly could not. I can only imagine how I would have whined and cried about myself if I was ever in his position.

Here was this wonderful servant of God, calling me, believing he would soon be martyred for Christ. In this horrific situation he didn’t say he was fearful. He didn’t ask for prayer for himself. Dr. Thomas had on his mind the ministry God had begun through him back in 1960 to win India to Christ through the millions of children on the streets. I am convinced that if we all had the dedication of Dr. Thomas the Lord would have already returned.

—Barbara Vettel

Hopegivers Hope Ambassador

### **Jim Stallings**

M.A. Thomas first came to my church around 1979 here in Atlanta and I loved him since that first meeting. I took him to the Holiday Inn near my church for a meal and just as he was about to take a sip of water from his glass I startled him by saying, “Don’t drink the water!” He asked in amazement, “Why?” I replied, “It will make you well.” He enjoyed the humor immensely. He still reminds me of that occasion quite often.

When M. A. first came to the USA, he was staying with a certain family and he had very little understanding of our customs. For instance, the lady of the house asked him if he would like something to eat. As I recall he had just arrived in town and had not eaten for some time. Holding to the Indian way of doing things he replied, “No, thank you!” He was just being polite for it is customary to refuse refreshment at least twice in India. She never asked again to his

chagrin. He said he was soooooo hungry that night and since then has never refused food upon the first invitation.

I personally think M. A. Thomas is the finest Christian man I have ever known. No other man with which I am acquainted has been so mistreated, taken advantage, deceived and disappointed by people who say they are his friends and certainly know better, and yet he responds to them and treats them as if they were doing him favors. How gracious and loving he is—I am sure you know by now. Anyway I hope your book can, even in a small way, communicate to its readers the favor this man has enjoyed from God and the faithfulness and love he has returned to Him by his unceasing reverence and obedience, and his unrelenting care and concern for helpless people. He may not be the kind of “great man” of God as many are reputed to be, but he is undoubtedly “a man of a great God,” and his life reflects it. Blessings upon you in this endeavor.

—Jim Stallings

Pastor of Maranatha Baptist Church, Lilburn, GA

### **Pastor Don Grosvenor**

After meeting Dr. Thomas in the year of 2001 at a Ministers Breakfast, I invited him to come and speak at our church. He came on a Sunday morning and blessed the people tremendously. When he spoke he exuded life, passion, and vision. His message was so anointed by the Holy Spirit.

After the service his host and good friend, Jonathan Byrd, invited us to go to lunch. We went to Houston’s Restaurant and enjoyed a great time of fellowship. While fellowshiping around the lovely meal, Dr. Thomas asked me a question. “Can you come to India for our next School Graduation?” He very eloquently shared about how many graduated that year, and how they were anticipating 1,000 at the next graduation. He even explained how they were sent out on bicycles.

My answer was the typical, spiritual answer, “Well, let me pray about it.” To which he quickly replied, “That’s a cop out! What is there to pray about? There are too many preachers that use that excuse.”

Well, to say the least, I was totally blown away. However, because I was sincere and did pray, I felt a strong leading to go and even to take my wife. I guess he was right after all. It seemed like God had already spoke to him when he asked me.

What a trip that was. To get to speak to those 1,043 graduates and all the assembled guests was truly a memorable highlight in my life. While there I had the unique opportunity to sit in his office and talk to him, which was an inspiring experience I shall never forget. My heart will ever be grateful to Dr. Thomas for listening to God and inviting me to attend and speak at that 2002 graduation.

**Rev. Th. Janga**

I was a graduate of Emmanuel Bible College in 1990 and with Emmanuel Ministries until 2000. But now the Lord has led me into the dark nation of Nepal for the sake of the Gospel. There are many things that encourage me through the life of this man of God. I call him my spiritual father. His vision, his hard labor—there are many things I could mention that have impacted me. I still follow his method in my ministry today. We appreciate your prayers for Nepal, as we have recently had freedom of religion. May we take this opportunity as a great challenge to reach many of our Nepalese.

**Robby Brumberg**

One of my fav Papa stories is when I got the privilege of driving him home from the airport one time. We were just chatting about various things. I was asking him what India used to be like, etc., when out of nowhere he starts praying. I've never seen anyone have such a fluid, constant fellowship with God. As if God was riding in the backseat, Papa proceeds to pray from Newnan to the exit where the Thomas's live (at least one hour). This man of God also went out of his way to pray for me and my future and wife. He always said he prayed for my father every day, which meant a lot to me as well.

After stopping and a short period of silence, he busts out with really loud singing until we reach the driveway. It was by far the best drive home from the airport of my life...

**Becky Wadkins**

A devo on the Hopegivers website not long ago had the Scripture verse on being imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1-2). Immediately, I thought of Dr. M.A. being a true follower of God and how he's sacrificially let Jesus Christ love others through him, especially the little ones that are so often gathered around him. He is a real and very devoted friend of God.

**Alan Miller**

Brother Thomas first came to us in the late 1970s. He was a welcome follow-up to our good departed friend Paul Gupta (Bobby's dad). At that time our fledgling church was meeting

in the tiny building of another body and we were bursting at the seams. Thomas was (and still is) so humble, full of the joy of our Lord, and had such a powerful story and message. We knelt and prayed with him before he was to speak and then he did something that will stick with us forever. He bent down and did a simple but dramatic thing. He removed his shoes before entering the pulpit. Our hearts have been knit together with his ever since.

—Alan Miller

Believers' Chapel, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

**Carter C. Sitterson, Jr.**

I met M.A. Thomas only once in my life and only briefly (1.5 hours) and unexpectedly, but I am forever changed. During a two-week trip to India in 2007 for Christmas, we were serving and shooting video at the orphanage in Raipura outside Kota. One afternoon, we decided to stop by the Bible College founded by M.A. to see if we could by chance get an interview for the video. We were told he was at a funeral, but would be back in thirty minutes or so. After traveling some 8,000 miles from the U.S. to India, thirty minutes wasn't all that bad of a wait if, in fact, we would be allowed to speak with him. Of which I had my doubts. After all, he was the founder of a busy ministry.

I was completely wrong. When he arrived and heard what we were doing, he graciously granted us his time and attention and asked us to come into his office. After 30-45 minutes of interviewing him, having heard his testimony and how God has worked in his life, I wanted nothing more than to spend even more time with him asking questions and talking about life! If you ever get to meet M.A., you will know what I mean. Hearing his story leaves you with a million questions! But surely he had more important things to get to. Besides, CEO's in America never spare a few minutes on drop in visitors!

Much to my continued delight, M.A. asked us to stay and have tea and bread, to share a bit more time with him. We talked about God, about life, and how we should not be burdened by the future! Our responsibility is to make it through today, to focus on the work God has for us this day and not to worry about what tomorrow will bring. We shared Bible stories and life experiences, both trivial and meaningful. We talked about giving up everything for God, even our very breath, and laughed about jokes I can't even remember! It was like catching up with an old friend, or a father figure, yet we were from two different countries and two different generations, complete strangers only an hour before.

There is a depth to his person that I have never experienced before—an understanding deep inside, from one spirit to another—that just made me know I was spending time with a man of God, with an angel on earth. I didn't want our time to end, but as all good things must come to a close, it was time for us to get back to the orphanage and continue our shoot. I may or may not meet M.A. again on this earth, but I know that I will be forever changed for the better by the short time I shared with him last Christmas. Thank you M.A., for you have touched me and so many people! God bless!

### **Jeff Dolan**

I knew we had to meet him. Something deep in my spirit told me we needed to hear what he had to say. It was Christmas Eve, 2007. Our small U.S. team had traveled for the first time to Kota, India, where we would share Christmas with the orphans of Dr. M.A. Thomas. My buddy and I jumped at the first chance to possibly meet him in person. I remember waiting for him much of the afternoon. We felt like we were about to meet with one of the great saints of the church, the spiritual leader of India. Afterward, we were convinced that was true.

When we finally sat down with Dr. Thomas in his office, we knew why we had come. His great big smile and kind eyes welcomed us to have some chai tea and bread. His unwavering focus and message of Christ drew us in, and his wit and charm made us laugh and feel at home.

Being young men and searching for answers, we asked him many questions. His answer was simple yet profound. "Go!" he said with his booming voice and rock solid conviction. "Go!" There was no time to tarry. There was no room for doubt. All the questions we had for him led to that simple answer—the Great Commission. His message powerfully reset our minds on the mind of Christ. We were reminded that our lives are part of something far beyond our problems and pains.

Dr. Thomas will forever embody the Great Commission in my life, and meeting him was a gift. He stands as a spiritual lighthouse for all of those who need direction in India and around the world. I am proud to be a part of his legacy."

### **Dr. James Thomas**

I first met Dr. M.A. Thomas in 1977 at Deoliali for the All India Congress on missions and evangelism. While many were in sartorial splendor, Dr. Thomas was in his Kurta, with a cloth handspun shoulder bag and a broad smile. I can still visualize him praying loudly at the intercession in the evening during the congress.

It was good to see Dr Thomas' work among the orphans. Many in later years became stalwarts in helping with missions. His schools were a place of excellence in education, character building, and spiritual enrichment. His convocations saw thousands trained as missionaries, with different levels of education, for the far and outlying areas.

I had opportunity to conduct a cardiac camp at the Kota hospital run by his mission. Many children with heart defects were seen. Dr. Thomas was keen to get them checked up further and was a bit sad when all couldn't be helped with costly surgeries.

Later years, we were saddened by how he and his son, Dr. Samuel were hounded by corrupt politicians and unscrupulous enemies in the local area, forced to live away from their beloved mission compound which was built to serve the lowly and the needy of the region. But prayers prevailed and they were able to bounce back to further activities for His Kingdom, energized and not in the least defeated.

Dr. Thomas has battled bereavement, health problems, loneliness, want, poverty, and lack of resources. Yet he has remained a tower of strength for his Lord. Not may have suffered this much, yet brought great heights for the Church in India and the spread of the Gospel, that men and women, boys and girls be brought to the saving knowledge of the Lord. God bless Dr. M.A. Thomas, his family, and his beloved mission.

—Dr. James Thomas

Vice Chancellor & Professor of Cardiac Surgery Padmashree Dr. D. Y. Patil University

R.H.E.M.A. International

### **Tannen S. VanZwieten**

The whirlwind began when I was finishing a summer of working in Japan. At the end of my time there, I was left with about week before heading home. Friends from the U.S. were taking advantage of this time and our proximity to neighboring Asian countries to visit new places and see some sights. I was reminded of a friend telling me that if I wanted to learn about orphanage ministry, I should check out Hopegivers. I barely knocked on doors and the next thing I knew I was standing in Tokyo with a visa and a passport, headed for New Delhi.

Five days on the ground in India left me and a friend with a whopping two days in Rajasthan. It does not seem like it would be possible for such a short trip to be “worth it” from a ministry point of view, but it was. I am not sure how most people would react to two twenty-something girls with ill-fitting Punjabis showing up on their doorstep muttering something about

wanting to help orphans in sub-Saharan Africa, but M.A. and Sam Thomas (and their staff) cleared time to spend with us. They ushered us into meeting after meeting as they sought to teach us everything they could about orphan ministry. Elizabeth and I scrambled to write everything down before rushing off to the next meeting.

Finally, near the end of the day we sat down with M. A. Thomas. After everything his ministry has accomplished and the many, many lives that have been changed, I imagine that it would be very easy to let pride creep in. But when we walked into his study, not even a hint of pride or superiority could be detected. Just complete humility. And despite suffering from persecution and loss, he had an overwhelming sense of peacefulness. How does he do it? Thankfully, after years and years of experience in ministry, he was willing to share his secret with us free of charge. Here is the formula: read your Bible, pray, and fast.

It is so easy to get caught up in the details of ministry or life and forget about what is important. To me, M.A. Thomas is someone who has gone through many highs and lows, but has kept his focus on the main thing—the Lord.

**Rev. Solomon Thang Khang**

I am the translator of Bible Pathway into Burmese, completed on July 9, 2008. We have orphanage and children care for the Lord's service in Myanmar. I have known about Dr. M.A. Thomas since 2007 through letters because of Karen Hawkins, Language Coordinator of Bible Pathway Ministries. As my knowledge is concerned, the Lord powerfully uses Dr. M. A. Thomas for His service in India. Though we have not seen each other face to face, I know he is a very good one.

—Rev. Solomon Thang Khang

General Secretary of The Christian Churches of Myanmar &  
Director of Myanmar Mission Literature Center & Compassion for the Hungry Ministry

Endnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> Lily, all quotes taken from an interview in a tribal village in Jharkhand, India, November 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> All references taken from Psalm 31.

<sup>iii</sup> Johann Christof-Arnold, *Seeking Peace*, Plume, 2000.

<sup>iv</sup> Dr. M.A. Thomas, “Martyr’s Pledge,” recited by his graduating Bible college students.