

September 2020

A Saint in the Leper Village

There may be no more pitiful people on the face of the earth than the lepers of India. India is one of five countries in the world that each have a small but significant number of people with leprosy. Sixty percent of the world's lepers reside in India. As in Biblical times the lepers are isolated and segregated from the general population-confined to live in their own villages throughout the country. It is a life of loneliness, persecution and physical disability.



Fate has caused one such village in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh near the state capital of Raipur, to cross paths with Capstone Ministries. Biskot Sika was in his last year of a Baptist bible college when he began to pray for God's leading as to how he could serve Him.

He was led to share the Gospel message of God's love as an evangelist on the streets of Raipur. It was there he met the lepers begging on the streets. For the last eight years he has ministered to them three days each week in between his evangelist calling. He is only supported by his wife -a housekeeper in the city hospital.

Leprosy is caused by a very slow growing intracellular bacterium called Mycobacterium leprae which divides every two weeks. Treatment is effective but must extend from six to twelve months with daily antibiotics. Symptoms usually take three to five years to develop after exposure and are irreversible. It still exists in India due to limited access to medical care among the poor.

The bacteria invades the skin cells causing disfigurement-often on the face; and it invades the peripheral nerve cells causing loss of sensation and muscle weakness. The sensory loss makes them prone to

injuries such as lacerations, fractures, burns and infections of the extremities any of which commonly lead to amputation. The weakness often leaves their hands and feet with a claw-like deformity. The bacterium may also affect the cornea of the eye causing pain and visual loss.

Throughout history mankind has dreaded the devastating consequences of leprosy. They feared that it was highly contagious, which it is not, and have established elaborate barriers to protect themselves from contact with a leper. One must have prolonged and close contact with a leper to become infected.

The 120 lepers (forty of which are children) in the village can only survive by begging on the streets. The deformities of their hands and feet preclude any manual work. All have now been medically treated but it was too late to prevent the irreversible complications. They will walk or bike, as able, the three to six miles to the surrounding villages or to Raipur to beg for a rupee (about two cents) or a small portion of rice. Some will stay home to care for the totally disabled or young children. All are illiterate. Seventy have become Christians under Sika's discipleship.

With the recent COVID epidemic and a national home quarantine, their livelihood was suspended. Confined to their homes they could no longer beg for food or money. They were at risk of starving. God provided for their dire need through connecting Sika with Capstone Ministries-thereby supplying funds for food and basic necessities during the lock-down.

Prayer needs:

1. Funds to build a church for the leper village Christians.
2. Safety for India as the COVID pandemic overwhelmed the medical services for the poor.
3. Thanksgiving for expansion of Capstone Bible Institute to Sierra Leone and now over 1100 pastors and evangelists are being trained world wide-850 in India.
4. For the Capstone sponsored Jesus movie to be shown in churches in India in their native languages and offered to the public.
5. Love, strength and courage for believers suffering from the widespread and aggressive persecution of Christians by the radical Hindus.

