

In Due Season

(The story of a man who refused to turn back)

“And let us not grow weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we do not faint.” (Galatians 6:9)

A young man about 20 waits beside the railroad tracks – to die. His life, which should be full of promise, is a bitter disappointment. His slavery to smoking, alcohol and drugs has created chaos in his heart and enormous tension in his family. There is no alternative, he feels, than to end his life by stepping in front of a speeding train.

Brought up in a nominal Christian home, Joseph Rao had heard God's Word plenty of times, but he had rejected it in favor of his own destructive desires. As he waited for death to thunder down the tracks, a Bible verse came to his mind from out of the past:

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Then, in the last seconds before his life was to end, Joseph heard a voice speak to him: "This is not the end. Why do you want to finish your life? Your body is My temple; do not destroy it. I want to use you."

Joseph suddenly knew that the answer to his problems did not lie in suicide, but he was still unsure where to find freedom from the bondage of his sinful nature. He returned home confused.

Three months passed, and Joseph was still depressed. One day during his shift at the factory, a Christian co-worker told him that Jesus loved him.

"If Jesus loves me," Joseph responded, "why am I a miserable man? Can Jesus set me free from my addictions?" As the believer shared the Gospel, Joseph listened hungrily and accepted the man's Invitation to attend an evangelistic meeting in a nearby town. There, the Holy Spirit used the preacher's message to convict Joseph of his desperate need for forgiveness. That night he repented of his sins and gave his heart to Jesus.

Immediately Joseph knew that his life had been transformed.

"God touched me and set me free," he later wrote. "Great joy and peace entered my heart.

The devil had been ruling my life, but now I was completely changed. I started living for Christ and witnessing to my friends at work."

It wasn't long before he realized that God was calling him into full-time service to share the Gospel with those who had never heard it. Joseph readily obeyed, leaving his job and enrolling in a three-year Bible school to prepare himself for ministry. It was during this time that the Lord put a specific burden on his heart for a totally unreach area of his native Maharashtra state.

When he arrived at his new mission field after graduation, Joseph rented a small room and began his outreach work, distributing tracts from house to house and sharing the Gospel with anyone who would listen. The Lord had directed him to visit every home in all the surrounding towns and villages, and so Joseph set a goal to contact 300 households per day.

It was hard work, rising early and traveling day after day across the dusty plains, walking from one community to the next, and going to bed late at night. Joseph's physical labor was made even more challenging as he encountered the hardened hearts of people who not only resisted his message but also warned him not to come back. Then, too, the predominance of witchcraft among the villagers revealed a steely barrier of spiritual darkness that had dominated the area for centuries.

But Joseph pressed on. All that kept him going was his absolute certainty in God's calling on his life.

'I Began to Claim Them for the Lord'

A young native missionary stands on a hilltop. Spread out on the hazy plains below him, amid the fields, farmlands and dusty paths, are towns and villages. Not a single believer in Jesus lives among them. He stands there alone and pours his heart out to the Lord.

As the days and weeks went by without a single response to Joseph's message of hope in Christ, spending time with his Lord became increasingly vital to him. Every day he would climb to the top of a nearby mesa and spend hours crying out to God and drawing strength from Him.

"God provided this quiet place of solitude," Joseph later recounted. "I could see the towns and villages off in the distance, and I began to claim them for the Lord. One after another, I would lift their people up to Him." He fasted for days, sometimes weeks at a time, literally laying down his life for the souls the Lord had called him to reach.

And all the while, Joseph faithfully continued his systematic outreach work, walking from one village to the next, leaving no home unreached.

As Joseph became known in the community, it didn't take long for the resistance to begin.

"I faced much opposition," he recalled, "and every door closed for me." The first two years of ministry would be a severe test of Joseph's resolve to remain true to his calling from the Lord.

A group of angry, drunken men once confronted the missionary, threatening him with a beating if he didn't leave. "I will finish my work first," Joseph told them, and stood his ground.

On another occasion, while distributing Gospel literature, some local villagers grabbed his tracts and destroyed them. They warned him to stop preaching.

Once, after Joseph conducted an open-air evangelistic meeting, a mob vented its wrath by stoning him.

One of the greatest dangers Joseph faced was from a group of Baluchi tribespeople. This particular community made its living through robbery and liquor production, and no outsiders, not even law enforcement officials, dared set foot inside their colony. The Baluchis had their own form of justice, and it was best to stay as far away from them as possible. The Gospel would not be welcome—that much was certain.

Did you Know?

Joseph Rao was the first Gospel for Asia missionary to serve in the state of Maharashtra.

But Joseph had the opportunity to witness to a Baluchi man and, despite the threat to his safety, decided to visit this community and see how his new friend was doing. Before the missionary knew what was happening, he had been beaten and locked in a room. His abductors planned to come back and kill him to ensure he would never come there to preach again. But God miraculously delivered him: The villager he had planned to visit heard his cries and helped him escape.

Weeks passed into months, then a year, and almost two. Still Joseph remained faithful to his calling, resolutely traveling to the villages, handing out tracts and telling of Christ's love. And still he faced resistance, rejection and opposition. There was no sign of even one heart opening to his message.

'I Cried Out to the Lord'

A native missionary, still youthful yet aged by hardship, is on his knees, his face to the ground—at the end of himself. He has poured himself out for the souls of his mission field, fasting days and weeks on end and trudging from house to house with the message of hope. He has endured beatings, stonings and insults for the sake of the Gospel. But he has seen no fruit in return—not even one soul has responded—and now he weeps before his God, broken and discouraged.

It had been two years since Joseph first arrived.

"I cried out to the Lord to send me somewhere else—anywhere. But the Lord said to me, 'Don't pray for another place. I have put you in this place, and I will sustain you.' "

Despite his feelings, Joseph made a deliberate decision that day to trust God's promise instead of walking away from his calling. What could have resulted in complete failure became a turning point in Joseph's ministry.

And slowly, as hearts began to respond to the Holy Spirit, Joseph had the joy of leading one person after another to faith in Christ. His ministry grew. One year later, he was pastoring a church of 35 new believers.

And the growth continued.

Joseph decided to organize a large open-air meeting to spread the hope of Jesus even farther. In faith, he rented a local stadium. The first night, only 35 to 40 curious villagers attended. But small numbers didn't deter Joseph. After sharing a Gospel message, Joseph prayed for any who had needs. The Lord was faithful to confirm His Word and healed many from their illnesses,

including one woman who had been crippled.

The majority of the people on Joseph's mission field were held captive by the devil through witchcraft and lived in fear of misfortune, sickness and death. Little did they know that the rituals and sacrifices they performed to free themselves from oppression actually opened their lives even more to the control of the enemy.

That night, the small group gathered in the stadium witnessed—for the first time in their lives—the love the living God had for them and His power to overcome Satan. With astonishment and joy, they spread the word of this Good News they had both heard and seen.

On the second night of the crusade, Joseph watched in amazement as 700 people showed up! During the last few meetings, 1,500 came each night to hear the Gospel. Nineteen more believers were added to his church.

'Out of Nothing God Created Everything'

Now 18 years older than when he first came to this area, a native missionary faithfully continues to obey God's call that originally brought him here. He travels to the villages and towns, preaching the Gospel, distributing tracts, praying for the sick, singing with the children. The fruits of his faithfulness have multiplied, and today he stands in front of the men, women and children of growing congregations, worshiping with them and teaching them from the Word of God.

Today, Joseph Rao's ministry in the arid lands of Maharashtra is reaping a harvest from what used to be hard, unyielding soil. Now when he climbs to the top of the hill and looks over the plains, he can point out the towns and villages—more than 165 at last report— where he has visited every home and shared the Gospel.

"No one has any excuse that they have not heard about Jesus."

The Lord has enabled him to plant 25 growing churches and another 28 mission stations, all where the Gospel was previously unknown. He currently pastors seven of these churches, each with more than 100 believers—which means he holds a service every day of the week—and the other 18 are pastored by native missionaries under his supervision.

"Out of nothing God created everything in this place," Joseph says. And his dependence upon God through prayer continues to be the backbone of his ministry. He holds an early-morning prayer service every day, and many of the believers join him.

He supervises a ladies' team that ministers to children and young people. He also coordinates a film team that travels throughout his area and shows the Indian-made Man of Mercy film on the life of Jesus at least eight times per month.

And the Baluchi village, where Joseph once nearly became the victim of a deadly plot, now has a congregation of about 30 Baluchis who gather every week to worship the living God.

Joseph's attitude toward serving the Lord, whatever the circumstances, is to do it joyfully. He is aware of the dangers and the struggles—they are certainly no strangers to him. But for Joseph Rao, the clearest thing on his mind and in his heart is his calling from the Lord.

"God gave me a vision to reach the lost despite persecution and stoning. I made a difficult decision. I will not turn from my ministry; I will serve the Lord whether I am hungry or poor or beaten or facing death. I will be faithful to the Lord no matter what."

When you support a missionary like Joseph, you encourage him in his ministry, join in his work and share in his victories!

Reaching The Most Unreached

Joseph Rao is one of more than 16,500 native missionaries serving with Gospel for Asia in 10 Asian nations. With more than 30,000 fellowships planted in Asia, their vision and passion is to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who have never before heard His name.

Visit www.gfa.org/sponsor
for more information, or call 1-800-946-2742 (U.S.) or 1-888-946-2742 (Canada).