

BEFORE WINTER COMES

*The biography of a young missionary
used by the Lord to bring the gospel
to many thousands in the forgotten Adivasi
village of Vijayanagaram, India*

**Originally written in Malayalam by
Evangelist Kunjumon Thottapilly**

**REWRITTEN BY
ANIL TOM P THOMAS**

The biography of Evangelist VP Fernandes

Digital Edition for Release in Churches/ Fellowships

This version has been specially compiled for forwarding or circulating in churches and youth fellowships. Normally these books are sold and the proceeds go towards Evangelist Fernandus mission activities. Instead we would like to request you, the reader, to support Fernandus by making a remittance of what ever you can directly to his bank account so that the mission activities can continue in Andhra Pradesh.

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HABAKKUK 3:17-19 (NIV)

*“¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*

*¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.*

*¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.”*

Foreword

K. A. Philip

To carry the gospel to the Adivasis and underprivileged tribes living in hard to reach mountainous areas of Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh is a daunting task. This book is the miraculous account of various instances which shows how our Lord has taken Fernandus by his hand and used him to spread the gospel. This book was originally written in Malayalam by my dear friend Kunjumon Thottapally. This book chronicles the success of Evangelist VP Fernandus in setting up over 50 churches. Such success cannot happen without a spirit-filled approach or being submissive to the Lord. Though we live in a modern age, the most potent weapon an evangelist can carry is the power of prayer. Without humility or an appetite for hard work, such success is not achievable.

Fernandus reached Andhra Pradesh in 1991; the Lord has enabled him to establish more than fifty churches in Vijayanagaram area. We rejoice with brother Fernandus that the Lord has empowered him to do so much and more for the Lord. This feat should inspire us to consider how great is the grace of our Lord. We should also take a moment to ask if ourselves what more can we do for the Lord.

I want to write about a few incidents that have touched my heart. When Fernandus first travelled to Andhra Pradesh along with his wife and 1-year old, the child was so ill that they feared the worst. In faith, they submitted to the Lord in prayer; the miraculous recovery will bring tears of joy to every reader as well as fill our hearts with praise. Not to be missed is the many experiences of victory by prayer that are similar to how George Müller had undergone. Brother Charles John and Brother P. V. Thambi are direct witnesses to how the Lord provided water for the baptism. All these experiences are in vain if it does not inspire us to submit ourselves to the Lord's will in prayer and faith.

The title of this biography is also a challenge and a call to action. The book recounts the past, and we are spectators to that history, it is a call to action for all of us. To pray and to participate, and therein is the secret to success. The title of the book "Before Winter Comes" does not signify the severe roman winter. Rather it indicates the hard winter that lies ahead of us, of the fast-approaching end times, when no one can work to spread the gospel.

My heartfelt desire and hope remain that this book will inspire people to bring forth rich fruits of the spirit in service to the Lord, may the Lord's name be glorified.

20th June 2018

K. A. Philip

Mylapara

Author's Notes

The biography of VP Fernandus is the story of a penniless evangelist, who along with his wife and their one-year-old son set out for Andhra Pradesh on a mission to bring lost souls to Christ. The book is a testimony to God's faithfulness in big things and small things, in everything.

This book was originally written in Malayalam (A south Indian language) by evangelist Kunjumon Thottapally aimed at reaching out to the Brethren believers from Kerala (a south Indian state). Hence, many references, people and places are from Kerala, I have rewritten this book while trying to do justice to the content that Mr Kunjumon created.

This book seeks to inspire and to transform, if stuck in the lukewarm stupor of being a passive observer while the world passes you by, then we pray that this book will jolt you into action. To ask ourselves what more must we do?

Fernandus, through his life work in this book, shows how prayer, followed by action brings results. The sacrifice, tears and sweat notwithstanding, he has demonstrated a sustained effort to keep going. I imagine that, early on, it would have been quite easy for Fernandus to turn around and retreat in defeat. He could have returned to the relative comfort of his early life. However, in the face of adversity, Fernandus preserved through faith and prayer. Maybe it's time that we too must pray, participate and support. All we need to do is to let the Lord know that we are willing. The

master potter will make of us what He will. Whether it is in the hot hills and forests of Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh or the far mountain tops of the Himalayas, it doesn't matter; The Lord has a plan, just that we need to submit to His will before winter comes.

At the time of going to press, Fernandus had established more than 62 churches and the number is still growing. Let us, along with Fernandus, strive to reach His will before winter comes.

I encourage you to write or whatsapp Fernandus to find out more about what are the latest prayer topics and how you can support him. He is quite happy to share mission updates. You may experience a delay in response as many areas that he goes to work in does not have mobile phone coverage.

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Preface

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV) *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* this was the final commandment that Jesus gave.

We need to build churches, the ill need treatment; children need Sunday schools. Many are the needs, and few are the hands. Furthermore, gospel outreach programs have to be conducted, and holiday camps must be organised. A Lord's servant who desires to do all this always faces an almost constant constraint of resources. As believers, we must recognise and support the many evangelists both in Kerala and outside who strive to do such things in pursuit of the great commission that the Lord has given.

The sad reality is that the long-suffering evangelist who sacrifices his time and effort for building the church is often met with criticism from within. The evangelist spends time and effort in outreach programs, house to house visits, organising baptisms, conducting Bible classes. He constantly struggles against divisive forces of society, religious groups and politicians. Yet, the most damage is done by our own who seek to discourage and drag down the efforts that the evangelist makes.

In contrast, we have “armchair evangelists” people who sit in the comfort of their climate-controlled rooms, who play “internet games”, the politicians and religious leaders like them as they do not challenge the establishment. These armchair evangelists are well-loved by the public and enjoy the constant company, support and admiration of the children of God.

However, if the children of God stood in unity with the front line evangelists and supported the great commission, India would by now have become a Christian nation. As a community, the Brethren church would be well known in India. Through the light of the local churches, India would have shined forth as a nation.

The largest network of organisations in the world is the collection of local churches. The world must be filled with churches that consider Jesus as its head, rising forth in its spiritual beauty and service to society. The growth of the local churches is the responsibility of every believer. The Lord’s servant should guide and encourage each church to conduct child ministries, ladies program, and other ministries; we should not forget that without a church, there is no strength or unity or growth!

We live in a society that seeks to honour the mother of Jesus rather than Jesus himself; we glorify the cross on which Jesus was crucified instead of Jesus. We are silent when we see subgroups that promote cliques instead of the local church. We keep quiet when we see that associations forget the local churches and instead focus on building the strength of the association — all of these which in turn makes the church weaker.

A quick look at the modern-day grand conventions and outreach programs would leave us confused; we no longer have devout preachers who come to deliver the gospel. Instead, we have “musical nights” performed by pseudo rock stars who will sing a few songs in different languages all the while outwardly professing great faith. We will have a quick message and a namesake gospel call; the people will enjoy the music and disperse with no action or results.

If we are willing to re-energise ourselves like the early churches of the first century, when people were willing to go from house to house to win the flock over, one soul at a time, then we will see a great revival in Kerala. We will see spiritual growth, a willingness for people to attend church. All over the world, we know the youth are fleeing away from the church, in India, we have to reverse that and bring the youth back into our churches.

Instead, we have many organisations and groups that are not relevant nor instructed by the Lord. David paid for thirty thousand soldiers to bring the Ark back, but when he found his mistake, he turned to the Lord and correct himself, We too must turn to the Lord and correct ourselves.

Like Gideon, the Lord has helped me in His way, to set up and to minister to over a dozen churches in Malabar and Idukki area, the Lord grants me the grace to work for them. As the Lord has said, *“I will be with you till the end of time”* and this gives me great peace, The Lord has blessed us in many ways, we have our churches in all places, and I thought that this was a great feat that the Lord had enabled through me. Imagine my surprise and happiness when I heard of the astounding work that a Malayali evangelist named Fernandus was doing in Vijyanagaram in Andhra Pradesh and that he had set up over fifty churches.

Many believers have chosen to undervalue the work that Fernandus has done in Andhra Pradesh without visiting or understanding the depth of the work. I had inquired with many evangelists and other prominent Brethren believers who had visited and were witnesses to the work being done there, including the late brother K V Koshy, Prof Mathews Abraham, Charles John, PV Thampi, MA Joy, AO Thomas, Jacob Thomas, Thomas Mathew, Samuel T Sam, Simon Varkey, KA George and James Varughese among many

others. From their testimonies, I was able to get a clearer picture. I had already started praying for various ministries in Andhra Pradesh when Fernandus invited me for a ten-day ministry. I got the opportunity to visit many churches in far-flung areas, separated by forests and witness the mighty way that the Lord has used Fernandus.

During our interactions, I developed a strong bond with Fernandus; I am humbled by how the Lord has enabled him to move from victory to victory despite crippling circumstances. He was not very skilled in using technology or modern communication tools to spread the word of his ministries. Though many believers from all parts of the world support Fernandus in the ministry financially and with prayer, I could also see that Fernandus was suffering, the spirit of God moved me to act. I was burdened to share the wonderful testimony to as many brethren believers as possible. This book is a result of that burden. I praise God that He has strengthened my hands to participate with Fernandus and to witness his ministry through this book.

Fernandus is not “connected” he does not know anybody of influence; instead, this humble Lord’s servant is a challenge to any believer, missionary or evangelist anywhere in the world. Armed with the word of God, charged with faith and accompanied by his wife, Fernandus has gone out to evangelise Andhra Pradesh one person

at a time. With no money or bank deposits to fall upon, persecuted continuously by the devil with one trial after the other, often blamed by fellow believers, the Lord has used Fernandus in a mighty manner. Many among us have not faced the challenges that Fernandus faces, yet we need to ask ourselves, “What have we done for the Lord?” Maybe we now need to ask ourselves “What shall we do for the Lord?”

There are many such villages in Andhra Pradesh, India has many thousands more, we have a shrinking window of opportunity, we need to act while the door to Andhra Pradesh is still open. We need to act while the doors of India is still open. We need to attend to the fields of harvest while the fields are still ripe. I pray that this book may be an inspiration and motivation for us to act. All of us shoulder this immense responsibility; we must toil shoulder to shoulder, let us bond with them and bind ourselves to them, let us grieve with them and rejoice with them. Our support is not only with the money or our prayers, it with our hands, our feet and our souls when we join in their efforts. We don't have time to waste; I urge you to put your first step forward, our Lord will see you, recognise you and carry you through.

In Christ

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Contents

1.	From Rags to Rags	18
2.	Humble Beginnings	21
3.	Ask the Lord of the Harvest – Mathew 9:38.....	28
4.	Genesis 2:18.....	33
5.	Let's Cut the Tree	37
6.	At the Threshold of Grace	46
7.	Fertile the Land	52
8.	My Grace is Sufficient for you	61
9.	Breaking Ground.....	73
10.	Working the Harvest.....	81
11.	I want Chicken Biryani today	97
12.	The Baptism, The Weddings and Victory by Prayers	105
13.	Ephesians 2:10	121
14.	Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow	130
15.	Yea Though I Walk Through the Valley of	138
16.	Before Winter Comes.....	143
17.	Felicitations	147

1

From Rags to Rags

To a person of faith, there are everyday challenges that one faces. This book is an accounting of God's remarkable faithfulness at every cross-section of a Christian's life. This book testifies to the ongoing ministries in the harvest heavy fields of Andhra Pradesh - India, and how God inspired one man and how through that one man, many made that leap of faith.

This leap of faith has resulted in over fifty new churches being established, many lives being saved, the spiritual transformation of many people, not to mention the social change and emancipation for many of Andhra's Adivasi tribal communities. Every incident, every experience mentioned here is for the greater glory of God.

If you expect to read about grand plans and sweeping statements, of large conventions and huge rallies, this may not be the right book for you. This is not a rags to riches story in the literal sense. By worldly standards, it is a rags to rags story. V.P. Fernandus was never a rich man; rather, he came from a very ordinary family that had to struggle to make ends meet. When he decided to follow the Lord, what little financial support he got from his family was cut off. He was destitute. Despite deprivation, pain, struggles, hardships, and despair, when the Lord honours the work of evangelists, no man can stand against it. By the standards measured in heaven, this is an inspiring story of rags to riches.

For every name mentioned here in this book, there are hundreds and sometimes thousands of names that are not mentioned that are equally worthy. We know that effective gospel work is not about one person; rather, it is God at work directing many. It is the combined, concerted effort involving many people—some who toil in the fields, some who spend an equal amount of time and effort on their knees praying, many who provide material support to enable the mission logistics, with each person playing his part so that souls may be won to the Lord, one at a time. May each precious sheep be restored to the flock and the Shepherd be glorified.

All the incidents and experiences mentioned in this book are true, even more, so the harder to believe

the stories. The uniting factor among these stories is the boundless grace of Jesus Christ. The grace that empowers a very ordinary man like us to work for the Lord, to transform lives and bring the light to many. In the pages to come, we will read about how the Lord had taken Fernandus step by step, he echoes the Psalmist at every stage when he joyfully says, “*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows*” Psalm 23:5 (NIV).

2

Humble Beginnings

The youngest child of Vattathara Peter Papacahen and Kunjunjumma, Fernandus hailed from the town of Erumely. Erumely is in the southeastern part of Kottayam district in Kerala, India. Well known for its religious harmony, Erumely is a rest point for the few million Hindu pilgrims that come to visit nearby Sabarimala every year.

Fernandus studied in Ummikuuppu high school in Erumely. During his studies, he was drawn into politics and became a communist activist. It wasn't that Fernandus had the ambition to get into leadership or power; instead, Fernandus was always sensitive to the sufferings of the common man. He was continually looking for solutions that

could take care of the people. He wanted to know how he could be part of the solution and help them. Looking at life around him, all he saw was that the common man was getting exploited.

Communism seemed to have the correct answers. Fernandus felt that he could help, serve the people as well as prevent them from being exploited. Fernandus rose rapidly within the local communist apparatus. When Fernandus joined the party, his father nursed a secret pride that his son was becoming a social activist. Always a man of action and energy, Soon Fernandus got selected as the CPI (Communist Party of India) Taluk secretary, and later he became the AIYF (All India Youth Federation) youth district secretary. His family looked on with pride as Fernandus grew within the ranks. In most conservative families, joining politics was frowned upon, but not in the Vattathara family where everyone almost considered it a respectable profession. His political activism was based on getting employment for the many educated unemployed youths of Kerala. "A Job or Jail" was the slogan that he took to heart and started many efforts for this. He organised many protests and was at the forefront of leading attacks on the local police station. Slowly, without realising, Fernandus started becoming part of the problem rather than the solution. As the activism got more and more politically charged and violent, the demands made from Fernandus became more and darker. The pride that his parents felt was turning to fear.

If Fernandus had continued in active politics, he would probably have reached a leadership position that would have brought recognition, power, and wealth. The deeper he got into politics, the more he started understanding that politics were also about backstabbing and taking undue advantage of opportunities, and he wasn't happy about this. Slowly, the angst and the disillusionment started festering within.

The "job or jail" campaign was gaining momentum in Erumely since Fernandus was at the forefront of the campaign, he had to lead the picketing and the protests. One sunny afternoon Fernandus was crossing the road to participate in a picketing rally at the police station when an acquaintance saw him and waved him over. Fernandus knew the fellow. His name was Kunjumon; he was an evangelist, these fellows got their money from overseas and would not do any meaningful work. Fernandus knew that these fellows often spoke about Jesus and were a general waste of time. He considered evangelists as one more class of people that were exploiting the poor people. Evangelist Kunjumon came over and told him that he wanted to visit him the next day in the morning. Fernandus was nonplussed wondering what would an "evangelist" possibly want from a communist party worker.

The next day morning, Fernandus had forgotten about his planned meeting with Kunjumon. He was quite surprised when evangelist Kunjumon pulled up at his gate.

After exchanging pleasantries, the two men started into a deep conversation that would last over six hours. At the end, Fernandus realised that he was a sinner. He had seen the darkness and the futility of his ways. He now knew that there was nothing that he could do to roll away the burden and weight he felt in his soul but to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Fernandus now understood that Jesus wasn't some foreign god and understood he had been missing Christ all along in his life!

As a result of evangelist Kunjumon's efforts, Fernandus accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour in 1982. The joy of stepping into freedom was infectious, and he could not stop telling people about Jesus. More importantly, the Holy Spirit started working from within. The transformation had begun, and in Fernandus, you could see the fruits of the spirit, Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"*. A period marked by strong spiritual growth; Fernandus started spending more time studying and understanding the Word of God. He understood the strength of prayer and confession of weakness. He began actively seeking out the companionship of fellow believers and understanding the Bible better. Above all, he was also driven by the burden to share the gospel with as many people as possible.

The biggest burden that Fernandus had was to share the gospel with his own family. After all, the example that Jesus had demonstrated was clear to him. Jesus had healed many and sent them back to their own families so that they could spread the good news with their friends and families. However, Fernandus's family wasn't very receptive. They were downright hostile. The family was quite wary of the new "born-again" belief that their youngest son had taken on. Initially, they thought that this was one more fad that Fernandus was experimenting. As time progressed, Fernandus seemed to get stronger and stronger in his faith.

The family knew about the Brethren church, its practices and background. It was in direct contradiction to everything their traditional church said and against all the teachings of their fathers and ancestors. The family had had a long-standing tradition of being staunch Catholics and had a reputation in the local society of being good "church members".

Being a good church member meant regularly going to attend mass, obeying the commands of the priests, participating in perfunctory social and ceremonial days, and generally being decent. Such docile compliance ensured that one could get all the protection that the church could provide, including access to schooling, recommendations to colleges, and maybe even an excellent job!

Fernandus had given up on all of that. Now that he was born again, he abandoned a promising career in local politics, or even starting a business. Instead, Fernandus had decided that he wanted to serve his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as a full-time evangelist. His father was dismayed! His mother was sad because she knew her son would lose everything he had and would come back empty-handed. She had seen quite a few of these Brethren evangelists and knew that all they could expect was starvation and hardship. She worried that her son would never be accepted into their community and would be an outcast for the rest of his life.

Among the four children that V.P. Papachen had, he had already decided Fernandus would be consecrated to the church and would be ordained as a priest. In society, the general standard was that if you sent somebody from your family to be a priest or a nun, you would be considered as a “respectable family.” Some said that if you sent somebody from your family to be a priest, the entire family could get a free pass to heaven. Fernandus came in and upset all their well-laid plans with his new faith.

Fernandus protested loudly. Nobody had told him about his father’s master plan to make Fernandus a priest or to use that to get a “safe seat to heaven.” The truth of the matter was that Fernandus knew that even if you had an archbishop in the family, it still could not guarantee you any respectability or a potential future seat in heaven.

Fernandus started working more closely with the local Brethren church in Erumely. He was spurred onward by three things—the desire to know more about the Lord, the burden to spread the gospel and to share his joy with as many people as possible. He started going for various outreach and evangelisation programs. Fernandus would sing and dance in public. In those days, outreach programs were much more open and less repressed than in modern times. Society started noticing. People began asking the family about Fernandus, and he started becoming a source of embarrassment and shame to the family.

3

Ask the Lord of the Harvest – Mathew 9:38

Now that Fernandus was born again and he had joy deep in his heart, he wanted more. Fernandus wanted to spread the love; he wanted to go forth and share his happiness with the world. He was also aware that he now needed to learn more about the Lord before he could become a useful tool for the Lord. Fernandus was clear that his calling was to be a full-time servant for the Lord. He recognised that Jesus wanted him to be an evangelist spreading the good news to as many as possible. He had many unanswered questions, where was the mission field? when would he have to go, and what should be done? Fernandus did not know the answers yet, but he knew he had to prepare for the harvest.

Many believers had recommended the Brethren Bible Institute (BBI) at Pathanamthitta as an excellent place to study. It was also imperative that Fernandus stay away from his hometown because his family was embarrassed with his efforts and tempers were frayed. A change would be nice.

Fernandus sent his application to the institute. He was pensive. Why should they accept him? His academic track record was not the best, and he was a “young” believer. Why should they take him to study the Word of God? We can only imagine his joy when he got the acceptance letter from BBI.

Since Fernandus had never read the Bible or attended Sunday school, every lesson was a new experience. Every day brought new learnings, It was exciting. He was exposed to concepts and ideas that were completely different from what he had thought. It was a time of discovery, coupled with the joy that fellowship among believers can bring!

During his time at the Bible school, he got to understand the need for baptism, so he was baptised by the principal of the college, Dr K.C. Thomas on 22 December 1983.

The BBI had an excellent curriculum. In addition to training students in the Bible, the doctrines and related matters, the college took a lot of effort to train the students on how to spread the gospel, how to administer the various

activities of the church, and other practical matters. BBI still does an excellent job in training and equipping many preachers, many who work in different parts of India and not just in Kerala.

During the convocation ceremony at the BBI, mission calls were made for the ministry work in northern India and north-eastern states. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) says, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Fernandus continued to be in prayer so that the Lord might show him the fields that Fernandus should labour in.

During vacation time at the Bible school, Fernandus would go back home and work with the local church in Erumely and take part in gospel outreach programs. He still did not know where he had to go. Surely the Lord would point him in the right direction. However, people in society began to notice, and the people would walk up to members of the family and ask them about Fernandus. The unwelcome attention was embarrassing for the dyed-in-the-wool staunch Catholics like the Vattathara family. They felt that Fernandus was dragging the family name down, and they had become a source of ridicule in the local society. His elder brothers and his parents tried forcing him to renounce his faith. They gave him the ultimate threat that he would get a share of his inheritance only if he renounced his faith and

came back to the Catholic church. As far as Fernandus was concerned, this was an easy choice. He would much rather have eternal salvation rather than get the family inheritance!

In 1987, Fernandus completed his course at the Bible school, and returned to his hometown. Fully charged, he would go house visiting in the local areas and would go into the mountains on foot, visiting various homes to spread the gospel. In the evenings, Fernandus would carry a gas lantern on his head as he traversed the mountains. Local villagers would mock him and thereby his family. Life was becoming complicated with resistance from all quarters.

Fernandus turned to the Bible, and the Word of God revealed how all the faith warriors had faced resistance. Moses faced constant opposition and rebellion from Israel, a nation he was charged to lead and carry out of Egypt. David faced resistance and threats on his life from his king whom he served, from his son whom he nurtured and raised, from the people whom he had led and served. All of these faith warriors were drained of their courage at some point of time or the other, and in their pain, they turned to the Lord! Fernandus too turned to the Lord and was strengthened. During these times, Evangelist Kunjumon, who had led Fernandus to Christ, was a frequent visitor. He encouraged Fernandus, upheld him in prayers, and continued to inspire him.

We read in the gospels about the sad and depressed disciples who were leaving Jerusalem. On the road to Emmaus, they met Jesus, the very same disheartened disciples who were fleeing Jerusalem turned around and went back to Jerusalem to testify with joy and happiness about the resurrection! Fernandus had many similar experiences where the Lord would send different people to inspire and strengthen him and set him back on the right path. All glory to the Lord, who strengthens every one of us as is required at exactly the right time.

4

Genesis 2:18

“The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Selvabhai Harris was a local CPM leader and activist in Kattakada, (Thiruvananthapuram Trivandrum). Originally from a CSI (Church of South India) background, he had long given up on his faith was well known for his political activism. He had brought up his family to be open-minded as he did not believe in blind faith. His daughter Usha Selvabhai Harris grew in her father's shadow. A cheerful and lively young woman, Usha had an air of curiosity about most things. However, there was an emptiness in her and Usha knew that if she searched diligently, she would find the answers.

That was when she heard that a certain man called Johnkutty Peroorkada was organising a “gospel” meeting at a neighbour’s home. She had no idea what a gospel meeting was. She hoped it would be more interesting than the boring political meetings that her father normally organised. A few of her friends would be going, so she also decided to tag along, maybe the speeches would be entertaining!

At one of these gospel meetings, Usha felt that the message seemed to be addressed only at her. She felt the conviction of sins and understood that she had to accept Jesus Christ as her Saviour. Usha understood that this was the only way to be free of sins. So she accepted Jesus Christ as her Saviour fully believing the Christ died on the cross for her sins, and that Christ rose up on the third day defeating death. Sure enough, Usha felt her burdens roll away, blanketed in happiness that she could not explain, Usha was born again! She was a believer! However, she could not share this joy at home; her parents would not understand, nor would they accept her faith. So Usha continued to be a secret believer, till she got married.

In time Usha grew in the Lord. The assembly elders in Kattakada church, especially brother Thankiah and brother Japa Singh had taken the young sister under their wings and wanted to be as supportive as possible to this brave child of God. Usha felt the need to obey the Lord

in the waters of baptism, and she got baptised without her family knowing and continued to grow in faith. Brother Thankiah was now burdened with finding a suitable match for Sister Usha, and this became a prayer topic among the church elders. Among the various outreach activities that brother Thankiah led, was his monthly visit to Erumely area to distribute gospel tracts to the many pilgrims that would converge there. The locals, including Fernandus's father, knew brother Thankiah. One day Fernandus Sr struck up a conversation with brother Thankiah and told him that he was looking for a suitable life partner for his son Fernandus. He indicated that that Fernandus was born again. Brother Thankiah and brother Japa Singh decided to try and propose Sister Usha as a suitable match. Both the parents were contacted, photographs were exchanged, the marriage was fixed, much to the joy of both families.

Fernandus was a bit confused; he wanted his wife to be born again, preferably baptised, it would be too much to expect a mission burden; anyway, the Lord who has guided him up until now will lead him onward. Fernandus had to move on in faith. Usha and Fernandus got married on 28th February 1988. One can only imagine how much Fernandus must have rejoiced in the Lord when he found out after his wedding that not only was his wife born again, but she was baptised and had the fire and depth of spirit to commit without hesitation to a life of mission and evangelism!

There are many evangelists who create a plan B, Fernandus did not have a plan B; his only intention was to depend upon the Lord. He did not think that if his family did not support him, his in-laws would support him financially as he was going to the mission field. His in-laws were not even believers, and there would be no financial support forthcoming from that source. Wouldn't the Lord provide the necessary financial requirements needed for His ministry? To quote Hebrews 13:6 (NIV), "*So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'*". Fernandus could say with confidence that he did not marry for money or influence, rather Fernandus married with the hope that he would gain a life partner who would willingly serve the Lord by his side as he toiled in the mission fields that the Lord would set apart for Fernandus.

Our Lord is the Lord of bountiful blessings, when He blesses us, He doesn't bless us for our bare minimum needs, He chooses to bless in abundance, doesn't Philippians 4:19 (NIV) say "*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus*" whether it was at the wedding in Cana or when Jesus fed the five thousand or provided fishes to Peter, there was always an abundance in his blessings, and so it was when Jesus blessed Fernandus with a life partner, He blessed her with faith, fervour and above all an intense and abiding burden for mission work. Jehovah Jireh in all things!

5

Let's Cut the Tree

In 1989, Porinamala church had arranged special meetings in which the guest speaker was evangelist M.S. Thomas. He started testifying of the work happening in the darkness at Andhra Pradesh, explaining the various challenges and difficulties there. Brother Thomas was working in Vijayanagaram, a town near to Vishakhapatnam (Vizag). In particular, he spoke about the lack of able workers in the mission field and raised a mission call. Each word seemed to speak directly to Fernandus. Was this why God was training him and preparing him? Was Andhra the mission field that he had to go? Only the Spirit would be able to give him the right answers, and for that, he had to spend time on his knees before he spoke with anyone else.

Fernandus sat with Usha and confided to her first, telling her how he felt that the messages were addressed to him and had challenged him. Together they spent time in prayer and decided to move onward to Andhra in faith.

On the last day of the special meetings, Fernandus stood up and testified to the church about his desire to go and work in the fields of Andhra Pradesh as a full-time gospel worker. He wanted to spread the message of God's love and to bring as many people as possible to Christ. The church rejoiced that the Holy Spirit had moved one from among them. The elders promised as much support as possible. Since Usha was pregnant, they counselled Fernandus to leave for Andhra after she gave birth. Fernandus felt joy and relief, relief that he was now awarded a mission from none other than the creator of all heavens and earth. The period of waiting was over. He rejoiced because he was counted worthy of working in the field.

The days ahead were filled with a sense of purpose as he and the church started praying for Andhra. Evangelist M.S. Thomas gave his address and telephone number at Vijayanagaram in Andhra before leaving. The time had now come to start preparing for the mission.

In time, God blessed Fernandus and Usha with a baby boy. They named him Alex. God was blessing them and the family was growing!

Fernandus's hometown, Erumelly, is an important transit point for the millions of Hindu devotees that make the annual pilgrimage to Sabarimala. Of the many pilgrims that come from all over India, the most come from Andhra. He had seen vehicles with the number plate starting with AP, and he'd made the connection that these vehicles came from Andhra Pradesh. Fernandus knew a bit of the Tamil language and could manage a bit of Hindi; however, he had no clue of Telugu, which was the mother tongue spoken in Andhra.

Fernandus had heard and read about the famous Malayali missionary Evangelist M.E. Cherian, who had gone to labour in Madurai in Tamil Nadu without knowing any Tamil. He had heard Brother M. E Cherian testifying at a convention that the only Tamil word Brother Cherian knew was how to say yes. Using that and God's abundant grace, he was able to do God's work and rapidly build many churches in Madurai. Fernandus did not know how to say yes in Telegu, but he knew that the creator of all languages is the same Lord that was sending him to Andhra Pradesh. At the right time, the Lord would provide the required knowledge.

The Lord desires people of all languages, faith, castes, and creeds. The Lord did not send highly educated and trained disciples into the world to spread the gospel. Instead, he used mostly poor, uneducated fishermen and made them fishers of men!

Madurai was a fast-developing town and had people who knew some English. Brother Cherian, who knew English, could manage. Fernandus, who had barely completed his high school, did not understand any English. All he knew was that the Lord would provide when he was required to know.

In hindsight, twenty-seven years later, Fernandus was still not comfortable with English. However, he mastered Telegu. He translated sermons from Malayalam to Telegu and handled it well.

Evangelist M.S. Thomas called Fernandus in the early part of 1991. He invited Fernandus over to Andhra. Brother Thomas wanted to retire from active fieldwork for health reasons and had to return to Kerala. Fernandus joyfully accepted. Now that Alex was about a year old, they could leave from Kerala and start their work in earnest. The Lord's timing is always perfect!

When Fernandus told his family that he was planning to go to Andhra, the family thought that he was getting a transfer. The family was partly noncommittal and partly relieved; this meant that Fernandus would not be causing them any more embarrassment in their hometown.

Fernandus did not know how to fund the trip. He needed to book tickets, buy essential supplies, and prepare.

After some thought, he had a brain wave; they had a large jackfruit tree growing at home, the wood is commonly used to make furniture. If he could convince the family to cut and sell the tree, he would have some money to prepare for the trip. Surprisingly, the family accepted the idea. He got Rs four thousand five hundred for the tree. He took the unexpected support from the family as one more sign from the Lord that he should go to Andhra.

Things started moving fast. As soon as he got the money, he booked a ticket for Usha, Alex, and himself. He went on to buy emergency supplies for the trip. He had very little money left over after settling all expenses and purchases. Though he was worried that he had no cash, Fernandus calmed down when he realised that an evangelist does not need to carry money with him. Isn't that the example given in the Bible? The Lord provides as much as required as frequently as necessary. A soldier does not go to war with weapons that the soldier purchases; instead, the king offers the weapons and provisions. And since Fernandus was a soldier in God's mighty army, the Lord would take care of his daily material needs as well as his spiritual needs.

When the Lord taught us the prayer in Matthew 6, he did not teach us to pray for money. He taught us to pray for our daily needs both for the body and our soul (Matthew 6:11) because he is with us continually.

Prayerfully, they decided to travel on the second of May 1991. A few days before their journey, the church elder, Brother T.J. Joseph, asked Fernandus to accompany him on a short trip to nearby Pathanamthitta. Brother Joseph took him to the house of Brother T.M. Daniel. Brother Daniel had retired from government service and now worked to support gospel workers as much as he could. The soft-spoken brother spent time with them in prayer and strengthened Fernandus for his onward mission. On the way back, Brother Joseph recounted stories of Brother Mamachen, who was Brother Daniel's father. Brother Mamachen was a stalwart believer, a role model among the Brethren believers of old, a model church elder and source of inspiration to many. Later, Fernandus came to know that Brother Daniel's children were also evangelists and people who supported the gospel and its furtherance. In particular, Brother Daniel's son, Brother Sunny T Daniel, was a full-time gospel worker working in a neighbouring state (Near to Vijayanagaram), Odisha.

If you look at the milestones in the Fernandus family, everyone would agree that the day they were saved was the most important in their lives. However, as a family, the second of May 1991 was possibly the second most important day in their lives so far. It was a day with far-reaching consequences. They left Kerala for Andhra not willing to look back or turn back, in eager anticipation of

the mission fields ahead of them. They did not know what all travails would accost them. All they knew was that they were going in faith to serve their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Fernandus, along with his wife and two-year-old son, were leaving Erumely and Kerala to go on a mission. Fernandus was preparing to leave his childhood home to a place that he did not know, to a place where nobody knew him. For all practical purposes, Fernandus could have been going to a foreign country, because everything would be different—language, customs, food, practices. It was exciting, yet daunting.

His own parents had almost given up on him. They were tired of his faith and related antics. The larger family wasn't around to give Fernandus a tearful farewell. They were bitter because Fernandus was leaving in defiance of the established family norms and traditions; he had chosen to abandon his family faith and his inheritance. To add insult to injury, Fernandus was taking away his wife and their one-year-old son to work in tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh—about 1600 kilometres away.

Though the family were 'Christians', their faith was not in Jesus; instead, their faith was in Mary. The Bible very clearly says in Deuteronomy 5:8 (NIV) that *"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."* The

conventional Catholic faith meant that Fernandus and his family worshipped an idol of Mary, and they believed that God wanted them to praise and worship Mary too. They could not understand why Fernandus had chosen to give up on the comforts and familiarity of their current life. Following this sect “brethren”- born again believers offered no protection or support that the Catholic church could give.

Fernandus's father slipped out of the house early in the morning so that he would not have to say goodbye to his son. He did not want to face the other brethren believers who had come to send Fernandus away. They were the people that drove his son away from him. His elder brother did not bother to open the door to his room and come outside to bid him farewell. Fernandus's sister-in-law busied herself with household chores in the kitchen so that she could also avoid the awkward situation.

The elder of the local Brethren church, Brother Joseph, and his wife, Sister Aleyamma, came to pray and send the family onward. Instead of a celebratory farewell with joy and happiness, his household had a funeral feel to it. Everyone in the family was trying to mask their grief and busied themselves with their daily chores and routines.

As the Fernandus family was leaving home, it was hard not to feel anxious. All their worldly possessions had fit into a small travel bag in which there a few old shirts, two pairs of pants and a few old saris that Usha had. There was not

even a toy for young little Alex. Fernandus carried the bag as Usha carried little Alex and they started to walk towards the bus stand. Their onward journey had multiple challenges. From Erumely they had to catch a bus to Changanaseery. From Changanassery they had to get to Alleppy. At Alleppy they had to pick a rickshaw to the train station and then from there, they would board the Bokaro Express. The train would take them via Chennai to Vijayanagar a sleepy little town that borders Orissa (now called Odisha).

The young couple had never travelled by train before, let alone on an overnight journey. Many questions crowded their mind. They had taken some rice with them to cover the two-day trip. They could drink the tap water on the train. They had to learn how to use the toilets on the train. How would they sleep on the bunk beds? Would it be comfortable? How did you climb on top? How could one sleep in front of strangers? Would they wake up and get down at the right station? There were many questions. There was nobody that they could ask for help, and it all seemed daunting. They had already taken the decision months before, had spent time in prayer, and was moving forward in faith. Now that the moment was upon them, doubts and questions crowded their mind, they were at the edge and had to commit. The Lord would provide for each step of their journey.

6

At the Threshold of Grace

The excitement and the anxiety of their journey created mixed feelings in the Fernandus family. On the one hand, they were happy to leave as they had a mission field to focus upon. After spending much time in prayer, the Lord had been shown the way forward. On the other hand, they were leaving the comfort of the known and stepping into the unknown.

Fernandus had spoken to friends and family to prepare for the first train trip. They had left from home quite early for the three-hour trip to Alleppy town. Though Alleppy was the nearest railhead and city-town of importance, Fernandus did not know anyone there; the family went straight to the railway station.

The Bokharo Express starts from Alleppy; the train was already at the platform. Fernandus found their carriage without much difficulty and settled into their berth. With only a small travel bag between the three of them, settling in wasn't much of a challenge either. As the time for departure approached, the train started filling up with passengers. Time seemed to move slowly, and finally, with a slow jerk, the train started moving!

All three of them were staring out of the window with fascination. As the train ventured further north, they saw the change in vegetation and of the lay of the land. As they crossed over from Kerala into neighbouring Tamil Nadu, the coconut trees gave way to sugarcane fields. The lush greenery of Kerala faded into more arid and dry vegetation of Tamil Nadu.

Alex was born with asthma, and their doctor had advised against any long journeys. The doctor had asked them not to travel more than 20 kilometres a day, to rest and to pace the trip for Alex so that he would not get another asthma attack.

The month of May meant that the weather was cruelly hot! The hot winds blew into the compartment. Though Alex seemed fine, he started getting restless and showing signs of discomfort. With the warm winds and constant rattle of the train, the little child fell into an exhausted slumber, and after a while, he woke up crying. Alex wasn't hungry, nor was he thirsty, but clearly, he was suffering, and he wouldn't

stop crying. The baby was writhing uncontrollably; his eyes had started bulging out. He was shivering and kicking his legs out. Alex was in apparent distress; the young parents did not know what to do!

A few medical students happened to be in the same compartment. Hearing the child's cries, they came over and had a look. A cursory examination was all they needed. Alex was suffering from an asthma attack. He was slowly turning blue and needed urgent medical assistance. He had to be given oxygen immediately, or they were at the risk of losing Alex forever. The medical students advised Fernandus to get down at the next station and rush to the nearest hospital to save the young child.

It was already dark outside. The train had already crossed into Tamil Nadu, a state or a language they did not know. Fernandus would need to find a hospital in the middle of the night and get Alex treatment. He did not have any money, nor did he have somebody to reach out to and ask for help. Dark despair started to crowd upon them. Usha put Alex on her shoulder and slowly, the exhausted child fell into a stupor. Gingerly they laid Alex on the middle berth. The Fernandus family then did the only thing that they knew to do—they opened up their hearts to their Father in heaven. All the despair and grief came tumbling out. They were no longer excited to see new places nor were they excited to go to Andhra Pradesh. All they wanted was a miracle cure for Alex.

“Lord, don’t you know that we don’t have money to take Alex to the hospital, let alone for the treatment?”

Lord, don’t you know that this onward push to Andhra Pradesh will stop if we break our journey here?”

Lord, aren’t we going to Andhra Pradesh because you asked us to go?”

Though we started as three souls, will our journey end now with one soul already lost?”

Will we be reduced to two? Don’t you need us to work in Andhra Pradesh?”

Wasn’t Andhra Pradesh part of your plan and will for us?”

The questions started coming rapidly as they opened up to the Lord.

“If Alex gets better, then clearly it is a sign that you intend for us to go to Andhra Pradesh. If not, then the signs are clear, we will have turn back.” The distressed family had forgotten that people were sitting next to them as they continued in fervent and passionate prayer for their son. Time had lost meaning, and the prayer had gone on longer than they intended. With no tears left, they broke out of the prayer and looked towards the middle berth. No sounds were coming from there. It was quite possible that Alex had died and they hadn’t noticed. Fernandus exchanged glances with Usha. Who would look up and take the lifeless body? How would

they tell the people that the child had died? How would they respond to the medical students if they asked why they didn't take the child to the hospital. The crowd on the train might turn upon these young parents, and like Jonah faced the sinking ship owners, what answers would they give? *"Oh Lord, you would have to grant the strength to get through this ..."*

Gathering up all their courage, Fernandus and Usha peeked up to the middle berth to see that not only had Alex not died, but he had also woken up. He seemed better and was playing silently by himself! Oh, praise the Mighty Lord! He had not only healed Alex, but he had also cured Alex of asthma. Since that day, Alex has never had asthma again. By the grace of God, Alex is a young man, working as a full-time evangelist in Andhra Pradesh. He is married, and our Lord has blessed him with a family. He is a father to two young children. We wipe tears of joy when we remember how the Lord healed him on that train journey. Hallelujah!

You all know of how the commander of God's armies met Joshua with an unsheathed sword and told him that Canaan was for Israel. Fernandus felt that this experience was very similar! Fernandus felt that God had validated his faith and said that the fruitful harvest of Andhra Pradesh was for him. The Lord needed to forge Fernandus in the fire so that he would not fade in the sunlight of the many challenges that Andhra Pradesh would throw at him.

Fernandus would go on to face politicians, thieves, communal discord, and so many trials from different and diverse sources. He was firmly anchored in faith and strengthened in the courage of the Lord. Fernandus would time and again call upon the many promises that Jesus had given to all believers.

As the train sped through the darkness, the Fernandus family slept soundly. Whatever worries they had fled. It did not bother them anymore that they did not have the money nor that they did not have a backup plan. They had experienced firsthand the wondrous joy of the Lord, demonstrating His providence. They had received immutable proof that they were heading exactly where the Lord wanted them to be, and there was no greater joy than that!

From the passing signs and railway stations, they knew that they had entered into Andhra Pradesh. The flat plains were mixed with villages, and they thought this was what they would expect. Little did they know instead of the plains, they would be working and living in the lee of the Vindhyan mountain ranges bordering Odisha.

The eventful train journey finally came to an end on the third of May. They got down at Vijayanagaram and caught a cycle rickshaw to get to the house of the evangelist of M.S. Thomas.

7

Fertile the Land

Vijayanagaram, also known as Bijaynagar, was part of the Vijayanagara Empire (also called the Kingdom of Bisnegar by the Portuguese). Based in the Deccan Plateau region in South India, it was established in 1336 by Harihara I and his brother Bukka Raya I of Sangama Dynasty. The empire covered most of South India. Modern-day Chennai, Goa, Kozhikode, Kondungalur, and Kollam were all vassal states that were under the patronage of the empire. The fort that Harihara I and his brother made at Vijayanagaram was built with running water, plumbing and had a circumference of 60 miles. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers, along with cavalry and assault teams, were garrisoned there. Vijayanagaram was a large military base even by modern

standards. In addition to cavalry and foot regiments, Vijayanagaram was home to a full-fledged naval base. Due to its immense military might, the empire was successful in halting marauding raiders from the north and was a threat to the smaller surrounding neighbouring states.

With over three harbours/ports in the area, Vijayanagaram had bustling maritime trade. The Krishna Godavari basin ensured that the fertile land was watered well, with abundant natural resources including gold, silver, and precious gems. International trade flourished, and prosperity followed. Art and culture grew, and soon the Portuguese came knocking, seeking to set up trade channels. The Portuguese bought their religions as well, and today Vijayanagaram can trace up to 600 years of catholic influence in the region.

The empire reached its peak during the rule of Krishna Deva Raya. The Vijayanagaram armies were at its zenith; the realm gained territory in the north and eastern Deccan, including Kalinga. All of this was in addition to the already established presence in the south. Many famous monuments were either completed or commissioned during the time of Krishna Deva Raya.

After Krishna Deva Rayas's time, two sultanates to the north of Vijayanagara united and attacked Aliya Rama Raya's army. On the twenty-third of January 1565 at the

Battle of Talikota, the two generals of the Vijayanagara army switched sides and turned their loyalty to the united Sultanates. They captured Aliya Rama Raya and beheaded him on the spot. In the resulting confusion and havoc, the army was routed.

The Sultanate army plundered Vijayanagaram. Robert Sewell, in his book, *The Forgotten Empire*, concludes thus – *“With fire and sword, with crowbars and axes, they carried on day after day their work of destruction. Never perhaps in the history of the world has such havoc been wrought, and wrought so suddenly, on so splendid a city; teeming with a wealthy and industrious population in the full plenitude of prosperity one day, and on the next seized, pillaged, and reduced to ruins, amid scenes of savage massacre and horrors begging description.”*

The population fled the horrors of this destruction and escaped to the surrounding mountains and deep forests. After the violence and mayhem, the city never recovered, the people had lost everything, and having nothing to return to, stayed on in the mountains—a lost generation.

Adapting to harsh new realities and without access to education, healthcare, nutrition, or knowledge, the progressive people of Vijayanagar slipped into neglect, superstition, and backwardness. We know them today as the Adivasis of Vijayanagaram.

There are thousands of such villages spread all over Andhra Pradesh. God wanted to use people like Fernandus to bring salvation to those that were hidden in darkness or lost to the light.

In 2014, the north-western portion of Andhra Pradesh was separated to form the new state of Telangana. Telangana borders Andhra Pradesh in the northwest, Chhattisgarh and Odisha in the northeast, Karnataka in the west, Tamil Nadu in the south and the Bay of Bengal in the East.

The economy of Andhra Pradesh is dependent on agriculture and livestock. Four rivers of India, the Godavari, Krishna, Penna, and Thungabhadra flow through the state and provide irrigation. Andhra Pradesh is an exporter of many agricultural products and is also known as “Rice Bowl of India.” There are many multi-state irrigation projects under development, including Godavari River Basin Irrigation Projects and Nagarjuna Sagar Dam. Livestock and poultry farms are quite common in Andhra Pradesh. The state is also the largest producer of eggs in the country, and hence, nicknamed the “Egg Bowl of Asia.” Andhra Pradesh contributes over 10 per cent of total fish and over 70 per cent of the shrimp production of India. The geographical location of the state allows marine fishing as well as inland fish production. In addition to a shipyard at Vishakhapatnam, the state has two major seaports, namely Visakhapatnam and Krishnapatnam.

Though Andhra Pradesh has a high per capita income and high GDP on account of its agriculture, industry, and natural resources, the Adivasis continue to be ignored. Forgotten for centuries, the innocent and naive Adivasis must be shown the light. Steeped in superstition and isolated from the modern world, only the gospel can set them free. The gospel will ensure that this lost generation will get a moral framework, a spiritual compass and the foundation to live lives of freedom.

As teams would go from village to village in the mountains spreading the gospel and working among the Adivasis, goodness and mercy also followed. It would start with simple things like teaching people how to clothe themselves properly to giving simple guidelines on hygiene and better living, followed by primary education and so on. As the people emerged into the light, the government would also step in, and other support services would follow—electricity, lighting, water supplies, roads, government schools, health care, better housing, transportation and so forth. Village by village, person by person, they would emerge from the isolation of centuries to the freedom, facilities, and conveniences that all of us take for granted today.

The capital of the erstwhile Vijayanagar empire, Vijayangaram, never fully recovered despite the many

years since. Still impoverished, all prosperity and progress seemed to have gone to nearby Vishakahapatanam which had a shipyard, an international airport, ports, and many other commercial and industrial facilities.

The Lord had not abandoned Vijayanagaram. There was an active church there, and Evangelist M.S. Thomas was working there as a full-time missionary. He lived in a small house with his wife and two children, yet he welcomed Fernandus and his family into their home.

Fernandus needed to settle down and get to know this foreign land, and there could be no better way than to make himself useful in the day-to-day chores of the Thomas household. He would go to the local flour mill to get the rice, ragi, or other spices powdered. He would carry out the daily errands, which included buying things from different shops. He wanted to be useful in any way possible. Usha would also help in any way with all the household chores of cooking and cleaning. It was a beautiful and blessed time of love and learning, of finding new mercies each day. Fernandus was further motivated by the fact that God did not forget Joshua, who ministered unto Moses or how Elisha took care of his master Elijah. The verses of Hebrew 6:10 (NIV) echoed in his ears, *“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”*

Vijayanagaram had an active church and fellowship. There was a central police reserve camp close by, and most of the believers were policemen from far way churches who were staying at the camp. He was very active and happy in the fellowship and assembly activities, yet Fernandus was not satisfied. Fernandus felt that he had to start taking action to move towards the real goal of why he came to Andhra Pradesh. He had to get the good news to people that had never known about Jesus and salvation. The desire to spread the gospel drove him, and he continued to pray fervently that God would light up the path for him to follow.

Fernandus had to step out of the shadows and the comfort that Evangelist M.S. Thomas provided. From the relative shade and convenience of working with dear Brother Thomas, Fernandus had to venture into the harsh heat of Andhra Pradesh.

Fernandus met Brother K.M. Thambi through Evangelist M.S. Thomas. Hailing from Ranni in Pathanamthitta district, Brother Thambi had retired from the railways as a TTE (Train Ticket Examiner). He was a born-again believer who went to the Pentecostal church. Thambi, along with his friend Thomas from Placheri (also near Ranni in Pathanamthitta), had started a poultry farm in a place called Chelur which was about 2 kilometres away. Thomas got a job in Dubai and had to leave. The chicken farm had to be shut down and was lying unused.

At the farm next to the chicken coops (cages) they had built a two-room, tin-roofed shed for storing chicken feed, which was now lying unused. Thambi was kind enough to allow Fernandus and Usha to stay there in that shed for free. Fernandus could use this as his base to start his efforts to spread the gospel.

It was peak summer and extremely hot outside, and because of the tin roof, it was even hotter inside, yet the Fernandus family was grateful that they had a place to sleep. It did not matter that they did not have money or food. The Lord had provided for them till today and would continue to provide for their tomorrows also.

Brethren churches do not have a head office; they do not have an official designation or a corporate governance framework. The Lord's servants do not have a fixed salary, nor do they have a system of transfers or promotions. They work by faith, depending on how the Lord directs people to support them. Most of the time, the Lord's servants suffer hardship and penury. The Lord uses these experiences to build up character and to make them understand the real value of discipleship. It grows the faith and builds dependence on our Lord.

When David Livingstone went to Africa or William Carey went to India, they did not have the financial backing of wealthy supporters. Instead, they went forth on the

promises of the Lord. For the past two millennia, millions of believers depended on the unwavering presence of the Lord and the faith that He would provide for them. Even today, the promise of 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV), “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*”, is relevant.

Fernandus did not have any support system; thus, hardship and poverty was a constant companion. He did not have any form of support from either his or Usha’s family, as both were non-believers. Their hometown assembly in Erumely did not have the money to support Fernandus regularly. Neither the Bible college at Chathanur nor the Vijayanagaram Assembly could support Fernandus. Our God’s promise was not that the church or believers would be with us; God promised that He would be with us! The Lord would provide and that is all that mattered

8

My Grace is Sufficient for you

Usha was two months pregnant with their second child. If she were in Kerala, they would have taken proper care of her with nourishing food and adequate rest. The circumstances at Chelur were drastically different. Fernandus did not have any money. He believed that the God who sustained Elijah with a crow had already made plans and provisions for the family.

The poultry farm that they were living on had many papaya plants, and because the land had been fertilised well with chicken waste, the crop prodigious. Every day, Usha and Fernandus would cut green papaya, boil it with salt and eat it. The Lord sustained Elijah first with a crow;

later, he used a widow and then his angel. When one came, the other stopped, it was never that the widow and the crow would minister to Elijah at the same time. One way or another, the Lord would always take care of Fernandus. The Lord in His infinite wisdom had arranged for papayas to be grown there several years before Fernandus would even think of coming to Andhra Pradesh. The Lord knew that Fernandus wouldn't have money to buy food. He knew that Usha would be pregnant and that He had to make plans so that Fernandus and his family would not starve. Every meal of salted papayas was one more opportunity to praise God for His provisions and blessings. If God, in His love for humanity could give his only son to redeem our sins, why won't He provide us?

Initially, Fernandus thought that his enforced diet of papayas was a big sacrifice compared to what he was used to in Kerala. He knew that during the monsoons in Kerala, the Adivasis of Kerala lived off forest-grown jackfruit as they did not have recourse to anything else. When Fernandus found that the Adivasis of Andhra Pradesh lived on a diet of wild roots, dung beetles, gnats and cockroaches, he felt that the jackfruits of Kerala were a luxury and his papaya diet was a grand feast! Quite often, a different view can change the perspective with which we encounter a situation. What was a reason for fret and worry can just as quickly become a reason for joy and praise!

Dr Lakshmi Bhai was the superintendent at the Maharaja hospital. She had come to the poultry farm, unaware that Thomas had left for Dubai. Thomas had arranged for a helper to work at Dr Lakshmi's house. The person was no longer available, so the doctor came to check with Thomas to see if he could arrange for someone else. She was a little surprised to see that the chicken farm was not operational. She called out to see if someone was there.

Usha was lying down; she had been feeling tired lately, despite being pregnant, she had lost weight and was emaciated. Seeing Dr Lakshmi, she got up. The doctor noticed that her dress was spotted with blood, and upon pressing further, came to know Usha was pregnant and had been bleeding for two days. The doctor understood the grim reality that Usha had miscarried and her pregnancy had aborted. She insisted on taking Usha to the hospital immediately in her car. At the hospital, an emergency DNC procedure was carried out to stabilise her and later discharged.

In hindsight, one has to be amazed at how God provides for His children. On the one hand, Fernandus did not have enough money for a square meal, let alone funds to take Usha to the hospital or to treat her. Fernandus did not know a hospital nearby, let alone a doctor. When the

Lord intervened, he did not send a lowly doctor; he sent the superintendent of the hospital in her car! He provided for the best possible medical care. Our heart rejoices with the Psalmist when he says, *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;”* Psalm 23:4 (NIV). An atheist may say dismiss this as a coincidence, we know better. This instance is one more example that proves that the Lord values each of us and our burdens are for him to carry.

This was a milestone event for Fernandus; despite the miscarriage, it helped him to rearrange his priorities. Every day through different experiences, Fernandus was reminded of how magnificently the Lord was providing for him and his family. Fernandus started to spend more time in intercessory prayer for others instead of supplicatory prayers for himself. Fernandus took the experience of Job to heart; when Job was afflicted with sores, he continued to pray for others. Did not our Lord restore Job to more than double of what he had before?

God would use different people to strengthen and fortify Fernandus in the early days of his mission. His mentor, Evangelist E. Kunjumon, was en route to see his wife. She was working at the nearby Nirsapur hospital; he was led by the Spirit to break his journey at Vijayanagaram and see Fernandus. He was carrying a whole lot of snacks

and savouries, which he left behind with Fernandus. It was a joyous occasion to reconnect and share memories, for Fernandus and Brother Kunjumon to meet and reinforce each other. There were many other servants of the Lord from neighbouring districts who would pass by, often with a kind word or to strengthen and reassure. Particularly noteworthy was the efforts of an evangelist from nearby Vishakhapatnam, Brother A.G. Jacob.

As Usha started getting stronger and could start walking, the couple would go from house to house to pray for others and speak the good news of salvation. Today Chelur is a prosperous area, filled with big buildings, back in the day, it was a simple village filled with huts and poor people. Fernandus and Usha would stand outside in the evening watching as the labourers returned to their own homes after completing a hard day's work. They would invite the villagers home and speak the gospel to them in what little broken Telegu that they could manage. Many would ignore them; the braver ones would stay and listen to Fernandus. In pidgin Telegu, Fernandus would put his hands on their head and pray for them. The efforts that Fernandus was making was a new and novel experience for them. The villagers would bring their friends and ultimately, more and more people began to hear the gospel.

One could only marvel at how the Lord had shaped and formed Fernandus in his mother's womb in preparation for his endeavours in Andhra Pradesh. For Galatians 1:15 (NIV) says, *"But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me"* .or as was said in Jeremiah 1:5 (NIV) *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart;"* Though Fernandus was from Kerala, his body build and skin tone was identical to the people of Andhra Pradesh. People would express disbelief when Fernandus would tell that he was not from Andhra Pradesh rather from Kerala.

The hard work spent in the mission fields of Chelur started paying off. People in and around Chelur area started believing in the Lord as their Saviour, they started getting baptised, and a church was formed. The new believers did not care where the evangelist was from; they did not care for their family or friends; instead, they chose to be baptised. They did not need a big building or a cemetery. The wonder-working power of the resurrected and ever-living Christ was at work here. These believers had experienced firsthand what the Lord Jesus said—"I am with you." As the people told the woman of Samaria when they got to hear the good news firsthand, John 4:42 (NIV)., *"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world"*

Indeed, it a praiseworthy moment when a sinner receives the good news and salvation from sins. Though many are saved, many more need to be saved!

Standing at Chelur, Fernandus would gaze to the mountains in the distance. He knew that many Adivasis make the long trek daily to find work and sustenance. He knew that the real fields of his labour lay in those mountains. To reach and work in the mountains, he needed resources in the form of food, travel expenses, and materials. Through many incidents, the Lord had shown him that he had to work and bring forth fruit in the fertile fields of Andhra Pradesh. Fernandus was convinced that Jesus would provide for his spiritual needs as well as his temporal requirements. He knew that the Lord would provide.

He had been prepared and made ready by the Lord for working in Andhra Pradesh. Fernandus would draw inspiration from the experiences of Moses. God led Moses and the nation of Israel through the wilderness; He led them through the bitter wilderness of Marah. Before reaching the wilderness of Marah, the Lord took Moses through a journey of preparation, trials and discipleship so that Moses would be ready to do God's will. Moses endured the hardships along with the Israelites; however, his biggest challenges was not with the children of Israel; rather, it was in the solitude of the desert while tending to his father-in-law's sheep. As

much as God took Moses through periods of bitterness and hardship, the Lord also blessed and rewarded Moses with happiness and fellowship. Psalms 90:15 (NIV), says, “*Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.*”

When looking from the mount of Horeb, Moses could see down to Egypt. If God has to take you on a journey and takes you to the summit of Mount Horeb, then you must also submit yourself to the Lord so that He can prepare you for this journey. You must continue in prayer so that He can mould you. Later, when the Lord prepared the nation to go to war against the Amalekites, Moses climbed on top of Mount Rephidim and raised his hands toward the heavens (Exodus 17:9). We must not forget it was a war won primarily by prayer and then by the sword. To defeat the Amalekites, Moses raised his hands towards the heavens in prayer throughout the day. Fernandus was also challenged to continue in prayer—to look up to the mountains where the Adivasis stayed and to uphold their salvation to the Lord in prayer.

To fall at the feet of the Lord in prayer, one did not need food, money, or resources. Prayer sharpens your soul as you prepare for the battle for souls. For Fernandus, it was indeed profitable to spend his time in prayer in preparation for the arduous battles that he would have to fight.

In Mathew 17:27, we know the story of how Jesus provided money for paying the temple tax both for himself and for his disciple Peter. Likewise, Jesus provided for Fernandus. The new believers of Chelur assembly were not affluent; they did not have money to bring for tithe. Instead, they would bring rice, corn, or ragi millets. So the family had sufficient food to eat, yet the mountains would beckon to Fernandus. Many souls needed saving, and Fernandus needed money to rent a bicycle and supplies to go to the villages. For sure, the Lord would provide!

Fernandus mind went back to his hero Evangelist M.E. Cherian. This pioneering missionary had achieved many things for the Lord, and one among them was a magazine that he published from Madurai called, *Suvisheshakan*. Fernandus thought that if he wrote to the magazine about the mission efforts that he was taking in Andhra Pradesh, many would pray, and he might be able to get some support from believers who were subscribers. So, he wrote a letter to Evangelist M.E. Cherian detailing the work and how he had a door opened in Chelur. Fernandus explained the challenges and the opportunities that lay ahead. He hoped that the dear brother would publish the letter and that it would move people to pray for the ministry and lend him a helping hand as the Lord would lead.

The Word of God has so many examples of how believers would seek support from one another. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, Paul saw a door opened at Troas and was hoping for Titus also to join him in support of the ministry work. We read how Nehemiah yearned for the presence and support of his brothers to join him in the efforts to build the wall. King David sang that we should together uphold His name. Work for the Lord means that people work severally and jointly, often supporting one another in prayer and fellowship. Fernandus, also in the middle of his difficulties, hoped that he had the support of his fellow believers in his effort to redeem lost souls.

A few weeks passed, and Fernandus continued to wait, hoping to get a reply from Brother Cherian. We can only imagine his disappointment when he heard that Brother Cherian had passed away and gone to be with Lord!

The subsequent issue of the *Suvisheshakan* covered the ministry of Brother Cherian and many testimonies of how he had fought bravely for the Lord. The magazine detailed the many travails that Brother Cherian had suffered in the early years. He toiled in the coal-lined streets of Madurai, what a mighty warrior for God! One story that inspired Fernandus was when Brother Cherian had taken his pregnant wife to the hospital for the delivery of their child. He did not have money to pay the rickshaw driver.

Brother Cherian apologised and told him, “Even if you take me to the hospital, I don’t have any money to pay you”. The rickshaw driver, a poor man himself, was just as happy to take Brother Cherian to the hospital for no fees. See how the Lord found a willing rickshaw driver in the crowded city of Madurai who was willing to take the pregnant wife of an evangelist to the hospital. The Lord sent the rickshaw driver to Brother Cherian’s house at the appropriate time. He then gave the rickshaw driver a willing heart to take them to the hospital without expecting any money. We can be sure that heaven will bless the rickshaw driver in ways that we cannot imagine. We can also rejoice in seeing how the Lord takes care of every detail of our lives knowing full well what we are going through!

Since Brother Cherian had gone to be with the Lord, Fernandus laid the matter to rest and continued with his efforts. Fernandus could not afford to rest and relax as there were many souls to be won. Weeks passed by and weeks turned into months. One sunny day, the local postman hunted him down and said there were a few envelopes for him. Fernandus looked at these envelopes that had red and blue patterned borders. Nobody had sent him an airmail letter before, and this was indeed a novelty! Each letter had a similar story to tell, “We read about your ministry in the *Suvisheshakan* magazine and are praying for you. We wish to support you.” All the letters carried either

a cheque or a demand draft. The letters came from far and wide, from believers all over Kerala and some other places outside Kerala also! From Thiruvananthapuram, Punalur, Thrissur, Mylapra—Fernandus could not contain his joy—how bountiful was the Lord's provisions! He wrote back to all of them. Fernandus would go on to establish strong relationships with Brother T.M. Daniels from Pathanamathita and with the Late Brother K.V. Koshy from Mylapra among many others. A few brothers from that first batch continues to write and support Fernandus in his efforts. All of this happened because Brother Cherian's children read the letter that Fernandus had written to their father and chose to publish it. As a result of their efforts, the Lord worked in the hearts of many believers all over the world. Many churches have been established and many souls that have been won for the Lord, all of which had its origins in that one letter.

9

Breaking Ground

One sunny day, Fernandus set out for a village called Vadakumpettah. It was a bit far from Chelur, so he rented a bicycle and went there. His Telegu was still very weak, Fernandus realised that the only way to learn the language was to keep using it at every given opportunity. Vadankumpettah had a novel feature. The village entrance was through an arch modelled to symbolise the legs of Hanuman. Anyone wanting to enter or exit the village had to pass underneath Hanuman's legs!

The rules of social engagement in the village dictated that any new or unknown visitor must first visit the village elder and seek permission to get in and talk to people. Fernandus

was blissfully ignorant of such a custom. Understandably the elders were disturbed to see a stranger communicating and interacting with the people. The village elder and a few people went up to Fernandus and started talking to him.

“Nee vu donga?” Fernandus thought that donga might mean like a sanyasi or a priest, so he smiled back and nodded his head.

“NEE VU DONGA?” This time the people seemed more aggressive and angry as they repeated the question. Fernandus was confused. He did not know how to respond, so he smiled weakly and again nodded his head.

Upon seeing his response, a few villagers started taking sticks to beat him, and one fellow caught hold of Fernandus by the collar. Things were going to turn ugly very soon. They started shouting, a mob was getting ready to lynch Fernandus. It was then that the postman who had recently visited Fernandus was passing by and was shocked to see Fernandus in the middle of it. When the villagers told the postman that they had caught a “donga” and that Fernandus had admitted it, the postman doubled up in laughter. He explained to the angry crowd that Fernandus was not a donga. Instead, Fernandus was like a priest from the church, and that he was an honest and simple man. Finally, the postman also explained to the elder that Fernandus was new to Andhra Pradesh and that he

did not know Telegu or local customs. The postman then explained a relieved Fernandus that a donga means thief!

The apologetic villagers welcomed a very sheepish Fernandus warmly into their homes. It seems that the Lord sent the postman to Fernandus at the right time; otherwise, he would have been lynched by villagers for a simple misunderstanding.

One way or another, it was important that Fernandus master Telegu. There was no other way that he could connect with the people and create a bond.

The narrow escape from a severe thrashing at Vadakumpettah created a resolve in Fernandus to master the language. Not one to sit and let matters take their course, Fernandus reached out to a few sources to see if there was someone who could help him learn Telegu. Help came in the form of Brother Thambi, his sister in law was working at the nearby leprosy mission hospital. She knew a man by the name of Venkat Rao. Venkat was proficient in both Telegu and Malayalam! Another example of how God takes care of things for us. We have to learn to ask in faith!

Venkat agreed to come in the evenings after his work was over. Instead of sitting at home and having a tutoring-based approach to learning the language, Fernandus decided on a more practical approach. The two of them would rent a bicycle and head out to a village. On the way,

they would practice grammar, Fernandus would pedal while Rao would sit behind and tutor him. At the village, Venkat would translate the gospel as Fernandus would preach from Malayalam to Telegu. Fernandus would chip in Telegu with what little he knew as well. On the way back when they would take a break from the cycling while resting in the shade under a tree, the lessons would continue unabated! It took about six months, but within that time, Fernandus was able to preach the gospel in Telegu.

Venkat Rao would make Fernandus write down many commonly used phrases to get it into his mind; he would make Fernandus write it down several times, much like how school children are forced to repeat and write phrases so that he would not forget.

By this time, Fernandus had identified many villages where they could preach the gospel. They had visited the villages a couple of times. Now the time had come for them to make a stronger push. Fernandus needed a team to go there with him. They had to take a few days' provision and camp there for a few days. They had to carry food, blankets, and other items so that the gospel team was not a burden to the already impoverished people. Fernandus did not have any money with him either. The only recourse and the best solution was to commit the matter in prayer, leave it with the Lord. Wouldn't He find an answer?

A few days later, Fernandus received another airmail envelope. The letter was from a Brother Daniel Kunjumon, who was originally from Pathanamthitta. He was based in the United States. The envelope also carried a message that read *“My Dear Son Fernandus, I came to know of your work from Brother T.M. Daniel. Don’t worry about the money, carry on the ministry. I will send you Rs 2,500/- every month.”* With this support, regular outreach camp programs commenced from Chelur. Surely the Lord was working and moving people from different parts of the world to support Fernandus. What amazing grace! How blessed is it when the Lord is your quartermaster, providing what you need for every day.

We have to understand the complex socio-economic and cultural context of the Adivasi life in the mountains for us to appreciate the enormity of the burden Fernandus was facing. Adivasis have very limited access to clothing. Men wear a loincloth to cover their privates only. Women wear just a sari and don’t wear undergarments. Most of the time, young boys and girls don’t wear any clothes at all. They eat what grows wild, consume wild honey, occasionally they hunt and capture animals. They live in one-room huts and beddings are made either out of hay or dried grass. In these primitive conditions, hygiene is terrible. The huts are infested with flies, mosquitos, and lice. Since the Adivasis don’t plan their families, they tend to have too many children. Any

form of modern health care is absent, and when people are afflicted with illness, they rely on traditional treatments or witchcraft. Understandably life expectancy among the adults are low, and infant/child mortality among the Adivasis is high.

All forms of social control that we are used to in modern-day societies are completely missing, both boys and girls chew paan from an early age. Rolling up tobacco leaves and smoking is quite common. Both men and women drink alcohol heavily and are often under the influence of drugs like Ganja. One can see intoxicated people lying on the roadside regularly. The resulting social atrocities are common. Idol worship of trees and stones are common.

As part of their religion influenced superstitions, it is common to see heavily mutilated faces with macabre piercings. The people fear that the gods of the forest and the mountains will punish them if they do not participate in these practices. Some tribes offer human sacrifices. These superstitious practices are a hindrance to the furtherance of the gospel. Born-again Adivasis started removing their piercings and abstaining from alcohol and drugs once they saw the light and realised the truth.

The visitors to these areas usually are hustlers and traders from the city. They come to swindle the wealth of the forest and the efforts of the Adivasis. So outsiders

are treated with fear and suspicion, it takes several visits to build a relationship and a degree of trust with these simple people. To reach these villages, one has to trek for hours through mountains and forests that are infested with poisonous snakes and wild animals.

Despite the challenges and the hardships, if we can bring the gospel to the Adivasis, they will stand forever in the light. They will not backslide. Others have not sown false seeds, and this is a fertile land. The Adivasis of Vijayanagram area are hidden treasures. If we can show them the right way, they will grow spiritually, and as a community. They will enjoy the richness of life that only the gospel can give. The future generations will be blessed; God's name will be glorified in these villages. If we tarry, we may not even be able to step into some of these villages. Therefore the urgent need to mobilise and lend our efforts in-person to help these people.

We have a history where missionaries came from England, America, Germany, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia to spread the gospel. They arrived at great personal sacrifice and endured many hardships during their mission here. As Indians living in India, we don't have to undergo such difficulties or travails. We should be ashamed that there are so many villages in India that have not heard the gospel even once. It is sad that despite proper training

and education, many evangelists still choose to stay in the relative comfort and material affluence of Kerala rather than moving to more fertile lands like Andhra Pradesh. Fernandus is an excellent example of how the Lord will use people who have the desire to grow and gain people for Christ.

10

Working the Harvest

One of the first places that the Chelur assembly started working in was Bubli village. Back in the day, Bubli was a prosperous town with a rich cultural history. After the fateful battle of Bubli, the city never recovered and has since been reclaimed by the forests.

Fernandus would rent a bicycle, pack three meals and then make the 70-kilometre trip. It was rare that he would be able to return before early morning the next day. Though renting a bicycle was not very expensive, Fernandus would rarely have the money to rent one. He had to depend on the Lord in faith to show him away. It once happened that on the day Fernandus was planning to go to Bubli, he did not have

any money with him for expenses. Fernandus was trying to figure out a way to proceed when a rag picker walked in off the streets and asked him if he had any junk he would like to sell. Fernandus had two aluminium vessels drying in the sun. Without further thought he sold one and raised money to go to Bubli. The Lord sees these selfless acts and chooses to honour it by blessing the labour of his hands. Today, there are over three hundred believers in fellowship at the Bubli assembly. Many of them are government employees. They worship in a partially completed assembly hall. Fernandus and Usha stay at Chelur, towards the end of the week, they would go to Bubli, stay overnight and conduct Bible classes. Usha would teach the women, and on Sunday, they returned home after the Sunday school and worship meetings. The believers at Bubli expect to finish work on the assembly hall by May 2019.

Three believers played a significant role in the evangelical work at Bubli. Ramarao was a welder, Sathyanarayanan was a policeman, and Narasayyah was an auto-rickshaw driver. These three hard-working brothers were part of the first fruits of Chelur, and all three of them quit their regular jobs and went on to become full-time evangelists. Ramarao and his wife did not have children, his wife (Radha) would sing amazingly well. As a result of their combined gospel activity, they were able to establish churches at Dhorapod and Kharakvalsa. There are now over eighty believers who

go to that church. Ramrao also ministers in both of the above churches and at Reddyvalsa. Sathyanarayan works in Dhanapettah where there are over a hundred believers, while Narasayyah ministers in Bodpattah, where over fifty believers congregate.

After gaining mastery over the language, Fernandus no longer needed Venkat Rao to accompany him to the villages. Instead, Brother Vijayakumar, a policeman, would go along with Fernandus. The villagers respected a policeman as a symbol of authority. You can imagine the credibility with which the gospel was received in the villages.

The people mentioned above were all from Andhra Pradesh and were from the local background. They were enthusiastic, they had courage, determination, and drive, and what the people lacked in experience and knowledge, they made up for with energy and approach. Though they are not very proficient in the Word, they were able to relate to the new believers and work closely with them, which in turn led to the spiritual growth of the assembly.

Fernandus appreciated the help; it would be better to get the help of believers who were well versed with the Word of God and could teach the Bible with more depth and expertise. So Fernandus reached out and invited Brother P.M. Georgekutty and his younger brother, P.M. Jaisen. He put Brother Georgekutty in charge of Bubli Assembly.

Though the church did not have much income, the assembly would always take extra effort to ensure that they were reasonably well-taken care off. Brother Jaisen went on to work in Vijayanagaram town assembly and settled there.

Working in the villages of Andhra Pradesh is different from working in Kerala. Adapting to the village life in Andhra is drastically different from the village life of Kerala. Even evangelists who come from the villages in Kerala can find it difficult in Andhra Pradesh. The basic amenities that they would expect to find in villages is absent in Andhra Pradesh. Many prefer to work in the towns. Even if they come, lifestyle and culture are different, and it takes some time to adapt and grow roots.

In 1993, Fernandus received an unexpected visitor, an elderly gentleman from Kerala. Fernandus did not know who had come to meet him. You can imagine his joy and surprise when he found out that this was Brother Daniel Kunjumon from the USA who used to send him money every month. The dear brother had come to see for himself the work that was going on and to find out if there could be more ways in which he could provide more assistance.

With much prayer, the two of them planned to start a school of evangelism. Since the climate could be harsh, they decided to keep the courses limited to three months at a time. They needed to bring a system where they could

train the teachers, build a sound doctrinal foundation, develop proficiency in the Word of God, build language and speaking skills. The brother put in eighty thousand rupees to set up the school and to defray the expenses of conducting the course. The first batch itself was a success. They had over twenty students who today are the mainstay of many assemblies in Andhra Pradesh.

The next year, the dear brother came and conducted the classes for another batch. Brother Daniel had the vision to advance the gospel and understood the importance of timely support for both the mission and the missionaries. On that day blessed God will reveal the extent of love that Brother Daniel had for spreading the gospel. For reasons unknown, Brother Daniel was deported from India.

Brother Daniel asked Fernandus to apply for his passport so that he could take Fernandus to visit various assemblies in America. Fernades could testify and provide mission updates; he had never travelled outside India. He hadn't even visited most states in India. His one experience flying was from Mumbai to Vishakapatnam because Brother Samuel T. Sam, Elanthur had provided a ticket.

All our plans are sovereign to God's will; The Lord forbade Isaac (Genesis 26:2) to go to Egypt. The same Lord told his son Jacob to go to Egypt (Genesis 46:3). The Lord, who sent Moses to Egypt, did not allow for Zipporah

or his children to be with him (Exodus 18:2). God has a clear and definite plan for us. Sometimes He reveals it to us, sometimes He doesn't. It did not matter whether it was an overseas trip to the USA, or travel within India or a bicycle journey between villages. Unless the creator of heaven and earth wills it, nothing would happen. If the Lord wanted it, nothing could stop it either. We have to move onward in faith, accepting His will for us. Sometimes it is to travel and sometimes to stay and grow roots. Sometimes it is to walk and sometimes to kneel and pray. If Fernandus could go overseas and talk about his ministries to the believers and garner support and resources for his missions, he would consider that as a blessing from the Lord. However, he was not going to go out of his way to pursue an overseas trip; instead, he would leave it at the feet of the Lord in prayer.

Fernandus believed that anything that detracts focus away from the principal objective of spreading the gospel is not fruitful. The Lord provides all provisions that are needed for the ministry. Jesus moves the hearts and minds of his people spread all over the world. Though travelling to Kerala was much more comfortable than going overseas, there were very few assemblies in Kerala that he visited. Fernandus did not feel comfortable leaving the young believers alone to fend for themselves. There were many wolves in sheep's clothing that were circling, and he needed to take proper care.

Conversely, the Lord sent Malayali believers, from different parts of India, from different parts of the world. Believers came, they saw, they prayed, they worked and participated with Fernandus in the various ministries he was undertaking. In turn, they would go and testify to the work that Fernandus was doing in Andhra Pradesh. One such effort was taken by Brother Thomas Mathew from Elanthur with the result that Fernandus got to go to Kuwait in January 2019.

One time a jealous believer wrote an accusatory letter against Fernandus to Mylapra Assembly. The oversight of the assembly took the message very seriously. They wanted to investigate this in detail and find out if there was any truth to the accusations. Brother K.V. Philip was assigned the task of finding out the details and reporting back. If there were any truth in the allegations, then the assembly would stop all further support and funding. They would let all other churches know why they were doing so.

Brother K.V. Koshy, along with Professor Mathews Abraham from Kottarakara, came to Vijayanagaram. They had asked the brother who wrote the letter also to be present. Each accusation was reviewed jointly, and the brother who made the accusation was asked to substantiate the allegations. Like it is mentioned in Psalms 1:5, the wicked cannot stand in the presence of the righteous! Such was the silence of the accuser.

Brother K.V. Koshy returned and submitted a report that the accusations were baseless. The respect and love that Mylapra assembly had for Fernandus grew many folds. They enhanced the support that they were providing, and the churchy started collecting and sending clothes. Brother Koshy was taking the lead in coordinating and supporting this. When he became bedridden, his son, Brother George Koshy, took over and continued to provide support. Fernandus was much motivated and strengthened by the support and encouragement that Brother Koshy and Brother Philip had extended to him.

Brother Mathews Philipose from Dallas, Brother M.A. Joy, and Brother George Koshy from Mylapra would take the effort to collect and send winter clothes and blankets. The winters in the forest can be exceedingly cold, and the rugs are essential.

Sometimes, Fernandus felt that the love that these senior and respected believers showered on him was far more than they would show their brothers. It's not that the brothers did not know that there would be criticism and jealousy, it was because they were first-hand witnesses to how the Lord was using Fernandus to spread the gospel. Believers like Barnabas saw the grace of God at work and rejoiced in God's providence. For others, it was just jealousy manifested by insulting the hard work or denying help and

support when most needed. An evangelist needs the most help when he starts his ministry, not when he is well settled and stable. We need to be more aware and sensitive to the needs of the mission. The most important form of support is the battle that is fought on our knees; all other types of support are secondary. We need to ask ourselves if we have spent time on our knees today praying for the many lost souls of India. We need to ask ourselves if heaven has heard from us today, can we beseech the Lord for more souls.

Fernandus and Usha were never rich; on the contrary, they were poor by worldly standards. The couple did not bow their heads before anyone, nor live without dignity. Prolific Malayalam hymn-writer the late T.K. Samuel wrote a song, called, “Enthoru Albudapurshan Kristhu,/ എന്തൊരാൾക്കുത പുരുഷൻ ക്രിസ്തു” (what *an amazing man is Christ*) always inspired Fernandus in this context. Fernandus felt that this song was written just for him as it seemed to echo his circumstances and situations.

Songs by T.K. Samuel was a regular inclusion in all gospel outreach programs at the Bible Institute and Porianmala Assembly. It was a happy coincidence that Brother Sam T. Samuel was the son of the songwriter that most inspired Fernandus, brother Sam was also responsible for letting the world know of the various ministries that Fernandus was undertaking in Andhra Pradesh.

It's quite common to malign others out of pure spite and jealousy with no reason. In contrast, here was a brother who would encourage and motivate others. When Jesus blessed Peter abundantly with fish, he gave so that Peter was able to share with John as well. Jesus prepared and enabled Zacchaeus so that he was ready to donate up to half his wealth. Many people live among us feel that whatever material wealth that the Lord blesses them with should be saved and kept only for their children and subsequent generations. Maybe it's because they think the Lord may not bless future generations, or perhaps it's a general lack of faith that the Lord will provide?

If we turn to the Bible, in John 21:10, we see that Jesus first blessed Peter with as much fish as they could take, and then Jesus asked them to bring some to Him. There is a more profound parallel and instruction hidden in this innocuous verse. The subtle direction to children of God is simple. Our Lord, He blesses us abundantly, always beyond what we deserve. However, it is our responsibility and obligation to give joyfully to the Lord. Most people understand that. However, the overlooked truth is that we must first give to the Lord, and then what remains can be used for our needs and requirements. There are a few who believe that the Lord has first taken his share and then gives to us. Therefore, whatever we receive as material blessings are entirely for us. This doctrine is completely wrong. The

fruits we bring for the Lord must be given to either the assembly tithe or the Lord's servants that labour in the fields. It may happen that the evangelists may not conform to the colour or the behaviour or the perception that you carry in your mind of how an ideal evangelist should be. However, it is the Lord who has chosen them. We need to see if the Lord is using them or if they are faithful to the Lord's work. If we look at Abraham's example, you don't see Abraham examining Melchizedek's work with a magnifying glass or doing private background checks. Abraham gave. The Lord counted it as one more act of righteousness that he carried out in faith. As modern-day believers, we need to ensure that we provide in faith as required. The Lord will do the rest!

Brother Samuel T. Sam had gone to attend a convention at Kumbanad, and there he read about the ministry in Andhra Pradesh in a leaflet that was being handed out. He called up Fernandus and started interacting with him. In 2006, he came to Andhra Pradesh accompanied by Evangelist K.C. Gabriel and Evangelist P.K. Babu to experience first-hand God's profound mercy extended to the many believers in Andhra Pradesh. Paul testified about Onesimus to Philemon, saying that Onesimus was somebody who provided comfort to Paul, that the Lord would bless his family for the service he offered (2 Timothy 1:15). Philemon also carried a testimony (Philemon 1:7) that he was one that provided comfort the others.

Our Lord is quick to bless those who uplift the humble and encourage them. Psalms 41:1-3 (NIV) says, *“Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the Lord delivers them in times of trouble. The Lord protects and preserves them—they are counted among the blessed in the land—he does not give them over to the desire of their foes. The Lord sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness.”* Brother Samuel T Sam is a beautiful example of this. He was a frequent visitor, and responsible for sending so many believers to Andhra Pradesh to see how Jesus was blessing the various gospel programs there.

As the Word of the ministry and the efforts started reaching out, many assemblies based in the States and India began to contacting Fernandus to see how they could also help. Brother Varghese John (Georgie), who is based in Dallas, came to understand how difficult it was to traverse long distances and reach far-flung areas. With the help of his family, they bought a Bolero jeep for Fernandus. With easily accessible transport, miles began to shrink and extend their reach. They were able to visit more places frequently and spend more quality time on the ground, which in turn led to the start of more assemblies.

As you all know, there has been rapid development in India in the last decade. Andhra Pradesh was not left behind either. New roads to villages were laid, electrification

followed, and bit by bit progress and development came to the Adivasis' villages of Andhra Pradesh. Though growth was welcome, it would bring a few unwelcome visitors like communalism and caste politics. If we can bring the light of the gospel to the villages before those uninvited guests grow roots, then the villagers would be able to escape from the strife that follows. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy, is from a Brethren background. Upon coming to know about developmental work with the Adivasi, he was quite happy to help and support in the development.

The outreach team from Chelur assembly would go from village to village to take Bible classes. They went to the New Colony to teach a small group of people who had shown interest in learning more about the Word of God and the gospel. One Sunday Fernandus was ministering in New Colony. A police jeep drove into the area while he was teaching, you can imagine their dismay when all the villagers fled at the sight of the police vehicle. The policemen rounded up the gospel workers and started to question them.

“What are you doing here?”

“How do you know these villagers?”

“Where are you from?”

The policemen then explained that New Colony was a village that was famous for its thieves. In the mornings,

the women would go from house to house under the guise of begging for money. They would observe who all were at home—if they had a dog, how the gate was secured, how close were the neighbours, and so forth. The women would go back and report matters to the men who would then leave at night to loot the houses. As the frequency of burglaries increased, they became a constant source of irritation to the policemen. Many would get caught, would land up in jail, serve the jail sentence, return home, and promptly return to their life of crime.

The policemen told the shocked evangelists that this was not the right place for them to come. They were warned in no uncertain terms not to get involved with these criminals and to avoid any interactions with them. Not deterred by the dire warnings of the policemen, the gospel team continued to pray for the villagers and would continue to minister to them. Jesus says in Matthew 19:26 (NIV), “*With God all things are possible,*” and this was true here also. Twenty-one families accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and went on to get baptised and joined in fellowship with the Chelur assembly. The ladies quit the begging gangs, and the men gave up their life of crime! The change that Jesus made in them was amazing.

Fernandus took the gram panchayat president to the police station and made a declaration that they had come to know Jesus as their Lord. The panchayat president testified that their residents were now transformed into and had abandoned their life of crime. They further requested that all previous criminal cases outstanding in their names should be dropped. The Superintendent of Police (S.P) wanted to meet this person who was able to change the life of so many people where the police had not been able to yield results. When Fernandus went to the police station, the S.P. congratulated him for the change that he was able to affect. These new believers continue to be members of the Chelur assembly, they have a good testimony, and they are hard workers.

Ephesians 4:28 (NIV) says, *“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”* When Jesus went to paradise, He took with him the redeemed thief. When the first church was formed, there were reformed thieves in it. Many think that the church must include only people from good families, with a high moral standard, and should be from affluent family background. Such discrimination is causing the decline of the church in most parts of the world.

We should be prepared to accept all kinds of people from all over the world into our churches. Romans 15:7 (NIV) says, “*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*” When we are blind to caste, creed, or any other form of discrimination, when we bring people from all walks of life to the Lord, we glorify his name. Many churches in the west are being converted into mosques and cinema theatres because there aren’t enough members to attend the church. This shortage of believers has occurred due to many churches adopting a policy of discrimination.

11

I want Chicken Biryani today

Adivasis have a different approach to children. While family planning is absent, the Adivasis do not place any particular importance on nurturing a child and bringing it up to adulthood. For the vast majority of them, children are just the inevitable and necessary part of living. The Adivasis do not resort to modern-day practices of female infanticide or abortion. For these reasons, there are many children born to the Adivasis, and they are generally not well looked after. Due to a lack of immunity, access to quality health care or nutritious food, child mortality is quite high.

Since alcohol and Ganja are readily available, the typical father and mother spend the day “high.” They share

both alcohol and Ganja with the children also. There is no special care or protection given to younger girls; therefore, unwed teenage mothers are quite common.

Cholera, jaundice, and malaria are customary among the villagers, and it's common for children to get infected. The ill child is thrown out of the house to protect the other children. To survive, the child has to sleep outdoors and go from house to house to beg for some food. Some people would throw stones and shoo them away; some are more charitable and give them food. The ill child becomes weaker as the sickness progresses till the child dies. The dead child is then wrapped in hay and then buried. Such is the way of life in an Adivasi village.

The government has set up orphanages in the towns, and the Adivasis prefer to send their children to these orphanages, as it offers the best of both worlds. The orphanages take care of rearing the children, and the Adivasis can visit them or bring them home on holidays. They don't have the burden of raising the children or taking care of their expenses either. On the other hand, the government orphanages are not very keen on bringing these children on board. Adivasi children are slower to study than other children. They are not used to the confinement and discipline of living in a town or a city and prefer to be free and unfettered. Controlling the Adivasi children can be a big challenge. You need a lot of patience and love to grow these children and take good care of them.

Fernandus was not financially self-reliant, however when he saw the state of these children in need of loving homes and care and decided to bring a few of the worse-off children to his house and take care of them. Fernandus believed that even if he did not have enough food at home, what little food he had, he would share with all of them and that the Lord would lead them on. He would teach them how to read and write, he would show them the Word of God, the Lord would lead. It started from one child, and over time, twenty-eight children came to stay with Fernandus. Almost every one of them came to believe in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Some of them went on to become full-time evangelists, and most of them are active members in the local assemblies.

There are new laws and regulations concerning orphanages, Fernandus cannot run an orphanage at his home without violating the new laws. If the new law had not come, Fernandus would have continued to run the orphanage in his home. Nowadays, Fernandus sends such abandoned children to government-run hostels that have been specially set up to take care of the Adivasi children.

At the time that Fernandus was running the orphanage, many incidents of grace and love kept showing Fernandus how great was the Lord's love and mercy. Doesn't the Bible say that the Lord is a Father to the orphans and a fair judge

for the widows? Though the orphanage was a small one, they experienced the mighty hand of the Lord's provision in all their day-to-day requirements. When the children of Israel wandered through the desert, they were given manna for each day, appropriate to their daily needs. Similarly, the Lord would take this small orphanage of twenty-eight children under His wings and provide for their needs, as was necessary at just the right time.

Usha would look after the children as if they were her own, and one day she was distraught as they did not have any rice for the next day's breakfast. As a principle, Fernandus would not buy anything on credit or borrow money from others, as this would impact their testimony and cause others to point fingers at Fernandus and his faith. Though the local shopkeepers all knew Fernandus and would have been happy to give him supplies on credit, buying from them without paying for it was out of the question. So Fernandus and Usha both knelt, and with tears, they prayed for all the children in their house. It did not matter whether they were Adivasi children or their own—they were all their own!

Unknown to them, a believer from Thunivalsala assembly had planned to give his tithe as a sack of rice. On this night, the brother could not sleep. The Lord had worked in his mind that he should deliver his contribution in the morning itself. So before dawn broke, he hired a van

and came to Fernandus's house with two big sacks of rice. A sleepy Fernandus opened the door, and you can imagine Usha's and his joy to learn how God had answered his prayer for rice by sending someone with rice.

Fernandus explained to the dear brother about his prayer the night before and how the Lord had moved him. Both brothers praised God for His divine providence. By the time the children woke up and were ready for school, breakfast and lunch were ready. The children were not aware of what had happened the day before, but somehow breakfast that day seemed to be extra tasty!

God provides the appropriate support needed at the right time. His provision is not too little nor too much. His care is not too early nor too late—He is always at the right time. It's just that we have to learn to accept the Lord's provision and His timing in faith.

One day the children had finished the morning prayer and breakfast and were getting ready for school. Fernandus was with them, and he asked them what they wanted to eat in the evening when they get back from school. The children would typically say that they wish for dosa, idli, vada, etc., but today mischievous little Naidu shouted from the back, "I want chicken biriyani today!" All the children laughed at him. They all knew things were not easy and managing a vada itself was difficult, let alone biriyani, that too chicken biriyani.

Fernandus did not skip a beat; he asked the children to pray about it; the Lord would provide as appropriate. Naidu must have prayed hard! The neighbouring Mayuri restaurant had taken an order for a wedding reception. Many of the guests had not been able to come to the wedding, so much food was leftover. The owner of the restaurant told his staff to take the extra Biryani to Kerala pastor's (Fernandus's home) orphanage and give it to them. A little before school was over; a van came to the orphanage. A very surprised Fernandus and Usha watched in wonder as the staff dropped off enough chicken biriyani to feed the orphanage for the next three days!

Though they had asked only for one meal, the Lord provided them enough for three days. Heaven heard Naidu's prayers and all children rejoiced in the little child's faith! See how our Lord provides for all our needs, both spiritual needs and our day-to-day material needs, as appropriate and as required. There were many other incidents. Many children from nearby areas would send cakes and sweets to the orphanage to celebrate birthdays. In everything Jehovah Jireh!

All the children at the orphanage got to build a strong foundation of faith; they got to see and experience the Lord's love. The children were able to build a strong foundation of trust. They saw how the Lord provided for all their needs.

Usha was initially reluctant to start the orphanage because she knew that they did not have the means nor the support to run an orphanage smoothly. Since that time, she saw the many occasions on which the Lord had stepped in to help them. Charged with faith, nobody prayed as fervently for the orphanage or put in as much as effort as Usha did. She worked tirelessly to take care of the needs of the children, to dress them, to feed them, to teach them, to be a mother for them, to bring them up in the way of the Lord. She gave her all.

Once Fernandus had travelled to Kerala to meet with some people to testify about his ministry. Usha had called up to tell him that there was no more rice left. They had nothing to cook for lunch that day. Fernandus had a predictable response—let us pray. So he stepped out from his meeting and Usha went to her room, and both of them in two different parts of the country prayed as one to the Lord. Vastly relieved that they had put their burden on the Lord, both of them got back to what they were doing, knowing the Lord would provide.

A little later, Usha called again. She said that two of their neighbours had come home carrying a 100-kilo sack of rice. It turns out that there was a big accident on the main road, and traffic had to be re-routed by their home. A lorry carrying rice was passing by. Right in front of the orphanage,

the truck braked hard, and a sack of rice tumbled down. The truck driver was not aware of the falling bag and sped away. These two Samaritans saw the bag falling in front of the orphanage. There was no doubt in their mind that this rice was for the orphanage. Why else would it fall in front of the orphanage? Now Usha wanted to know whether she could use this rice. Was this the Lord answering their prayers? Wasn't it Jesus who put the coin in the fish's mouth, wasn't it Jesus who filled Peter's net with fish? Wasn't it the Lord who put bread in the crow's mouth? The Lord has always provided, still provides, and will continue to provide.

When the wind blew down, the children of Israel got quails. The Lord directed the wind to obey his command and take care of His children. The Lord will change the course of the wind, water, or even roads to take care of His children. We need to pray, pray with faith!

12

The Baptism, The Weddings and Victory by Prayers

There is a poultry farm near the assembly hall in Chelur, and many of the employees there were Adivasi labourers. There was one person called Pentanna who would look at the believers returning from the assembly hall after worship with wonder and respect. He noted that they dressed well, and none of them smoked or chewed pan. They always seemed happy. Pentanna wanted to know what was going on and wondered if he could be like them also? One day he saw Fernandus in a nearby shop. Fernandus had seen him a couple of times and so smiled at him. Mustering up his courage, Pentanna asked him how he too could join the

“church” and be like the other believers who came there. Fernandus invited him home, explained the gospel to him, and soon after Pentanna also became a believer. He too became a partaker in the joy and hope of being a born-again believer.

As Pentanna grew in the Lord, he carried a heavy burdened for his brothers and sisters. He wanted to know how he could bring them the good news so that they too could share in his joy. He testified about this in the assembly. The assembly took up the matter in earnest. Pentanna came from a place that was about one hundred and forty km away. They would have to travel eighty kilometers by bus and then walk through the hills and the mountains till they reached Sunaba village. A fifteen-member team was put together for this. Pentanna went a couple of days in advance to make the preparations, while the group followed a few days later.

The accepted practice in villages is that the gospel team has first to explain things to the head villager, and only with his approval could they proceed further. Since the gospel program had music, prayers, and gospel messages, all the villages were keen to attend. Later on, the follow-up team made multiple visits to the Sunaba. People started coming forward after accepting Jesus as their Saviour, and many expressed the desire to be baptised.

Fernandus planned for a suitable date for the baptism. Evangelist Charles John of Ranni and Evangelist P.V. Thambi from Kollam were invited over to help. There was a small stream running through Sunaba, and Fernandus thought that they could cut a small pool in the path of the flow and use that pool as a makeshift baptism tank. Work commenced, and water started accumulating in the tank. As it grew closer to the baptism date, the flow of water from the stream started reducing until it reduced to a trickle. The water in the pool was less than waist-high. There was not enough water to baptise one person, let alone the one hundred and forty people who had expressed their desire to be baptised. The next best location for a baptism involved a treacherous and a long trek to another place, and this was not a practical option.

There were one hundred and forty eager and enthusiastic new believers ready to be baptised; friends and relatives from nearby villages had also come to witness this event. Postponing the baptism due to lack of water would be akin to a disaster. The new believers would become the laughing stock of the town. The faith of these people would come under pressure as the other villagers would destroy their credibility. There was an air of expectancy and intrigue. How would the baptism happen, where would they get the water? What was going on? Fernandus and the evangelists emerged from the shed with prayers on their lips. The Lord had to provide a way out of this.

“Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years” James 5:17 (NIV). If Elijah could pray that it would rain, then definitely the believers could pray for rain as well. The skies were clear, and the sun was burning hot. However, as the prayers for the baptism started, the skies began to darken, and soon it rained so hard that the pool filled and overflowed. The rain disguised the tears of joy that all the believers shed on that day. The rain was a sign not only for the one hundred and forty people; it was a sign to all the people gathered on that day. Everybody got to see the glory of God as the entire village rejoiced and joined together to praise God. The baptism for all one hundred and forty people was carried out with great rejoicing. Fernandus was worried if any communal players would come and disrupt the proceedings. He need not have bothered as the Lord provided all forms of protection on that day, and there were no problems from any anti-social elements.

You could see the transformation in the people. They started to give up Ganja and smoking; they stopped wearing unnecessary ornaments or getting piercings. You have to realise that Sunaba was a place that was well known for practising human sacrifices and other forms of sorcery. Steeped in superstitions and traditions, the villagers saw a new reality. Influenced by the gospel, the women were open

to change; they started to dress better; they learned how to cook food properly. They learned personal and public hygiene from the gospel workers. Usha and Sister Alice took the lead in teaching the women in the villages about these issues.

Alice and her husband, Brother Raju, were from Meenthulli assembly in Kannur district in Kerala. Their daughter Leah was running the Grace English school in the nearby Thunivalsala area. The school was running classes from playschool to ninth grade. A recent cyclone had destroyed the roof of the school, this couple waited on the Lord in faith. A significant portion of their energy and efforts went toward the gospel outreach happening in Andhra Pradesh. Their parent assembly in Meenthulli and the evangelist there, Brother K.U. Thomas also continues to support the gospel outreach programs with their presence and other ways as much as is possible. By the grace of God, today, over two hundred believers gather and worship at Thunivalsala, they have built an assembly hall there. Brother Ashokan and his family take care of the assembly. Fernandus and his team would provide support for conducting Bible classes and taking care of social events like weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

Sisas faluk is a village that is about one hundred sixty kilometers from Chelur. In 2016 there were about one

hundred and eighteen believers who testified the Lord in the waters of baptism. Among the believers were many who used to believe in sorcery and superstitions. Fernandus would implement a schedule of frequent follow-up and regular engagement with other believers to ensure that the new believers do not backslide. If they were to return to their old ways, many would abandon the faith, and the local church could break apart. Fernandus used to bring in many senior and experienced brothers to take classes. Brother K.A. George from New York and Brother Samuel T. Sam and Brother Simon Varkey from Niravath, Munnar were brothers who provided a lot of support.

Brother AO Thomas from Kottarakara, Evangelist John Varughese, Brother Thomas Mathew (Sunny) from Kuwait, and Brother Philip Mathews from Dallas used to participate in many ministries and support the efforts in many ways.

There are many unspoken challenges to the ministry in Andhra Pradesh. Many people say working in Andhra Pradesh is easy. On the contrary, the battle is hard; the enemy is unrelenting. Satan has many tools at his disposal including communal organisations, religious fundamentalist groups, Naxalite factions, communist cells, local vested political lobbyists, the ever-present alcohol and drug mafias. These are some of the many groups that would work against the spreading of the gospel. In January 2018,

a group of miscreants in Andhra Pradesh seized Bibles from believers and set them on fire in the middle of the road. We want to remind you that the gospel work in Andhra Pradesh is challenging. Leading souls to Christ is not an easy job; on the contrary, quite hard. We all know wresting souls back to the Lord requires much prayer, effort, determination, sacrifice, and above all, tremendous amounts of faith.

There is a village near Chelur called Gundalpettu. As the name suggests, the town is full of goondas (anti-social elements). Once Fernandus and the gospel team were going house to house and distributing tracts to the people there. Somebody went and complained to the village elder that there was some activity going on without his permission. The elder was very angry. He got the villagers together, armed with sticks and stones they came to Fernandus to find out what was going on. When Fernandus explained what was happening, the elder commanded the gospel team to go back to the houses and collect back the tracts. Then he told the gospel workers to start running for their lives. If they turned back and looked, the elder would give the command for the people to stone them and beat them up. All the members of the gospel team ran from Gundalpettu for their lives. Even Usha, who was eight months pregnant with Kiran at that time, was not shown any mercy! However, the gospel team was relieved and praised God that they did not get beaten up and that the Lord had shown mercy.

Many years later, work on the Chelur assembly hall was progressing. Fernandus recognised a construction worker who was part of the original group from Gundalpettu that had threatened them, though the construction worker did not know him. He invited all the workers for a meal of pulao and chicken curry. After the lunch, and they were getting ready to go back, Fernandus reminded them of the previous incident that had happened a few years again. The workers were embarrassed and bashful. This time the worker invited the gospel workers back to Gundalpettu. Fernandus and the gospel team received a warm welcome, and things were drastically different from their previous experience. Today, by the grace of God, there are two assemblies there. See how the Lord works wonders, miracles there!

Since Fernandus treated the villagers with dignity and respect, they welcomed him. The villagers were willing to listen to the gospel. They no longer considered the doctrine as a threat. Instead, Fernandus became a friend. There are many that attempt to trivialise the progress by saying Fernandus was buying souls for a meal. We know that salvation cannot be bought or sold like a commodity.

As the ministry progressed in Sunaba, many believers came forward and joined the church. In due course of time, Fernandus was able to organise a community wedding service where twenty-two couples got married on the same

day. The magnificent provision of the Lord is unforgettable! Brother Mathews Philips was a major supporter of this event. They were able to provide for each couple essential kitchen utensils and Rs 10,000/- each. The friends and family of these twenty-two couples came from near and far, and it was a joyous occasion complete with a meal. Brother Benny from Shimoga was a source of constant support. Sister Molly was also able to extend fellowship from the sisters of Mylapra assembly and New York.

On the 22nd of May 2017, a second community wedding was held on mount Kyarangi, which is about a hundred kilometres further from Chelur. Ten couples got married on that day. Advocate Baby Paul- Angamaly, Brother P.V. Xavier - Karimannur, Evangelist Simon Varkey -Niravath, Munnar, and Brother M.C -John New Delhi was among the brothers that participated.

All these families are happy and doing well by the grace of God! Of particular mention is Brother Simon; he was a well-regarded guide between villages. He was not in good health, and both his kidneys had been affected. He recently went to be with the Lord. Let us uphold the dear brother's wife and two children in our prayers.

There are many mental patients among the Adivasis in the villages. Paranoia or depression may arise from multiple factors that include the fear out of superstitions and voodoo

magic, the fear of wild animals. Some lose their mental balance due to feelings of accumulated guilt of sins past. For many, alcohol and drug abuse and the out-of-proportion myths and stories of local folklore play a role. The Adivasis have a culture that focuses on sorcery and dark magic. The result is an environment of fear and hysteria, which in turn crystallises as one form of mental illness or the other.

The symptoms are many. Either people sit in the corner of the room without talking or eating, or sometimes they are prone to hyperactive behaviour characterised by occasional violence. The villagers interpret such action as the spirit of dead people possessing the people, or the forest goddess showing her displeasure. The only available cure is in the form of sorcery or dark magic. The local temple priests resort to physical abuse as a form of shock treatment. Some die as a result of the beatings they receive, and suicide is common.

With the power of prayer, it is possible to restore these shattered lives, to bring them back to normal. For who can heal as the Lord heals? Faith heals, faith can cure mental and physical illness. We walk into the homes of these people; we state that the Lord saves. He can heal. He can restore, Jesus can redeem you. Quite often, they bring out their unwell ones and ask Fernandus to pray for them. Can we say that we can pray for them only if they are born again

and baptised? On the contrary, if we humble ourselves and pray with a broken heart, the Lord will hear and bless not only the village and the unwell ones but even those who pray for the healing.

Once Fernandus was away in a village when he got a desperate call from Usha. She said somebody was waiting for Fernandus. They had come from Vishakhapatnam and was waiting in the assembly hall. Local medicine men said that the person was possessed by the devil or some evil spirit. An acquaintance told them that the Kerala pastor/evangelist at Chelur was famous for casting out evil spirits. With nowhere to go, the family thought that it might be a good idea to go to Fernandus. After meeting with them, Fernandus confided the reality of the situation to Usha. The afflicted person had some form of mental illness, yet they could not abandon the person who was suffering. Fernandus believed that they could fall at the throne of grace and claim a victory; there was no other way out of this! Fernandus explained the gospel to all the relatives who brought in the person. They all listened and believed; they also started participating in the prayers.

The evil spirit that possessed Saul would depart when David would sing psalms with his harp. When Paul and Silas prayed, sang hymns and praised God in the dungeons, the very foundations of the jails shook as their chains fell away.

Fernandus also prayed with the same faith. The afflicted one started calming down, and slowly he began to pay attention to the messages and the songs. By the second day, he stabilised. Today the “severely possessed” man is in fellowship with the Vishakhapatnam assembly. The brother is now a government employee and lives a normal healthy life.

When visiting villages, it is common to have many such patients brought to Fernandus and the team. Most of the time, the patient has been severely frightened by some incident. The gospel team does not hesitate to put their hands on the heads of these dear ones and pray for them. It gives the patient a measure of peace and helps the furtherance of the gospel in the village.

Once when the gospel team went to Khadakvala village where Brother Ram Rao was ministering, they chanced upon a woman possessed by an evil spirit. Upon seeing the brothers and sisters, this woman shrieked and fled to a hut. She started shouting out that these people were servants of God; they were followers of Christ, that Jesus was her brother, and so forth. She started shouting that the evangelists should leave the village immediately, that the local village goddess was angry, and if she were mad, she would destroy the town! The gospel team all got together around this hapless woman and started singing and ministering unto her. The lady calmed down and soon

stabilised, this had a profound effect on the rest of the village as everybody was more willing to listen to the Word of God.

On another occasion, the gospel team went to Dhanpetta village where Brother C.H. Sathyanarayan was ministering. A blindfolded snake charmer had all the villagers gathered in a circle as he was demonstrating his skills and “supernatural powers.” Seeing the crowd, the gospel team also went there to find out what was going on. The moment the believers came there, the snake charmer started complaining that the snakes were no longer responding to him, and this was because of the new visitors. The snake charmer insisted that the believers must leave for him to work. When the believers left, the snake charmer was able to control the snake and continue with the show. We believe that this was our Lord Jesus, who came into the midst and caused this disturbance to the snake charmer. In the village, the news spread like wildfire. These ordinary-looking people who came to talk about Jesus were much more potent than the snake charmer! One more victory and a blessing for the furtherance of the gospel. Today that village has more than one hundred believers in fellowship with the local assembly.

Mathew Kodithottam had once fallen from the top of a two-story building, and his life hasn't been easy since. He was married, suffered from constant pain, and despite many years of being married was not blessed with a child.

Mathew was from an IPC (Pentecostal background) and was studying at a Bible college in Andhra Pradesh. Somebody had told Mathew to go and meet Fernandus and maybe he could help. Fernandus felt that if they submitted the matter to the Lord in prayer, the Lord would hear, so Fernandus and his family and Mathew and his family also knelt in prayer before the Lord. Within two months his wife had conceived. After completing his studies, Mathew went back to Kerala and joined in fellowship with the local Brethren assembly.

Many would like to trivialise the success of the Vijayanagaram mission. We cannot claim that success due to substantial financial support. On the contrary, they rarely had the money to make both ends meet. Neither was their success because of the trained skill of the evangelists. The gospel team never made any promises of future material prosperity. They did not threaten the people saying that a divine axe would fall from the sky and destroy them if people did not accept the Lord. In summary, the only reason why the gospel efforts in Vijayanagaram succeeded and they were able to establish over fifty assemblies in different parts of the district was because of the power of prayer. When believers from different parts of the world unify and get together in prayer, our Lord hears, our Lord blesses, and most importantly, our Lord acts! Vijayanagaram is not the first mission outreach in Andhra Pradesh. Many believers went ahead to different parts of Andhra Pradesh long before

Fernandus did and established hundreds of assemblies all over the state. The Godavari Mission set by the overseas missionaries during the time of the British rule in the Godavari delta area are examples of how thousands of people from Andhra Pradesh have been won over to the Lord!

Though we have many orators, biblical scholars, hard-working evangelists and outreach programs, we lack in one major area, we stumble. We require prayer. If we were to introspect on our churches, you would find that prayer meeting are the least attended meetings in our churches. The Lord said that *“My temple is a temple of prayer”*. He did not say that His temple is a temple of Bible study or grand messages or doctrine classes or singing! As believers, every one of us has to take charge of the battle by using the power of prayer. We have to take charge of corporate prayer and spend a significant amount of time alone in prayer. Mark 11:24 (NIV) says, *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

We all know how the Lord’s prayer goes,

“Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

*Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.”*

Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

We often assume that “our” and “us” in the prayer means “I” or “me” as an individual. Let us consider “our” and “us” mentioned in the prayer represents the local church; we are then awakened to a whole new dimension of what we must do for our churches. We should carry the burden of prayer for the church as a whole and one another as individuals. Hence, let us come together in the church and uphold one another in prayer along the lines mentioned above. Let us not wait until some disaster overtakes us. Instead, let us bond together now before winter comes upon us. Let us spend time on our knees for the assembly, for the mission, for the harvest and the many lost souls that the Lord may show mercy and save.

13

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

1. The spiritual and material needs of Andhra Pradesh may seem to be daunting. We must not forget that at the throne of grace, there are no shortages, only an abundance of grace.

An assembly hall with a tin sheet roof would cost about Rs 500,000/- (5 lakhs). More than twenty-five places need assembly halls. With support from various churches work has been progressing. We have been able to complete work partially on fifteen assembly halls, about three lakhs per building would see this through. In everything, the

Lord has been gracious, and He continues to provide for both our day to day needs and the large projects that we have undertaken in faith. Bubli has a large church hall that needs at least ten lakh rupees more. The Lord will provide.

<Author's update: At the time of publishing - Work on Bubli assembly hall has concluded>

Medical camps must be set up for the many that need healthcare. We must set up vocational training camps so that the believers may have some form of for employment. Many young brothers and sisters need to be married. A lethargic sarkar must be prodded onward to provide electricity and tube wells. Many believers live in huts, though the government provides aid for houses to be built, it is our responsibility to support them in any way we can. We have to distribute Bibles, songbooks and organise study material for Sunday school classes. We need to pray and guide the children that stay in the hostels in addition to arranging for higher education at Bible colleges; the list can go on.

Most of the evangelists take care of several assemblies; they run from one church to another. Most often, these places don't have any form of bus transport; hence, a motorbike is a necessity.

Conducting camps is a source of joy for the mission; it is a time of great learning, bonding and fellowship. The prayer camps are potent instruments of prayer and praise

because many believers gather together to learn from the Word of God and to praise God. However, we must have the right infrastructure to run this efficiently, including cooking utensils, food, supplies, mats, generators, mike sets, and a minibus.

Fernandus has also started a convention ministry for the neighbouring villages, which would cost about two lakh rupees towards setting up, light, sound, chairs, organisation etc. Sometimes one would think that if we had money, everything would proceed automatically. We praise God that for every rupee that we can raise, the brothers and sisters on the ground provide much more in hard physical labour. The believers and evangelists of Vijayanagaram do this with love, joy, and happiness.

The needs of fifty-plus assemblies can be daunting; though not all are large, many churches have two to three hundred members. We have to be aware that there is a shrinking window of secular freedom that can disappear overnight. Once we lose this freedom, it will be impossible to carry the Bible to the villages and spread the gospel. You must realise that for every town that has a church, there are many villages that the gospel team have not visited yet.

The burden of needs, the burden for fellowship, above all, the charge for the gospel are burdens of love that we carry willingly for one another. In times of needs, Fernandus

has always depended on the Lord. He along with his family and the Chelur assembly, have fallen repeatedly at the throne of grace. Our Saviour has shown repeatedly that the Lord moves in mysterious ways and uses His children from all over the world miraculously and wonderfully. We have a Lord who hears our prayers.

The Lord understands our needs and arranges support in so many wondrous ways. Sometimes the Lord provides for unexpected financial assistance. On other occasions, He sends people to help us. The Lord will often empower us to fight His battles with wonder-working power.

Chris Samuel was a bit of all three. He was possibly the youngest brother to come and labour with Fernandus in Andhra Pradesh. The only son to Brother Pappy Samuel, based out of Atlanta in the U.S. Born and raised in the US, Chris was a devoted believer, firmly rooted in the Word of God. Chris had a strong desire to spread the gospel and be useful to the ministry in any way that he could. Unlike most children born abroad, Chris knew Malayalam well; a talented musician; Chris would write songs, play instruments, and loved to work among the children. Indeed, The blessings of the Lord was on Chris, and he put his talents to good use.

When he came to Andhra Pradesh, he started working among the believers in outreach programs in Sidivalsa, Benchod, Sunaba, Chelur, and Titipilli. Chris had no

problem adapting to the rural conditions in the villages and was equally happy to adjust with the limited facilities there.

Chris saw an opportunity in the Bible school, which had been shut down due to lack of resources. He promised to go back to the States and then figure out a way to reopen the Bible school. Chris left for Delhi from Vijayanagaram, and from there flew to Kerala. At Erumely, he was ministering at the VBS when he caught a fever, and his condition started deteriorating rapidly. Though they rushed him to the hospital and provided all possible medical care, it was God's will to call Chris to His presence.

Life is measured by its contribution, not by its duration. On that blessed day, heaven will reveal the many things that Chris had done for the Lord. Though short, Chris lived his life well. We read about Methuselah or Jared, both of whom lived for nine hundred years and more, but with no record of having done anything for God. On the other hand, like Abel or Stephen, Chris had a short but eventful life lived in the richness of grace.

Brother Samuel Pappy (Babu) did not allow the tragedy of his son's death to overwhelm him. On the contrary, he used this opportunity to lean on Christ, to draw strength and channel his energy and will for God's work. Brother Samuel returned to India with further zeal and burden to do the Lord's work. Having studied at the Bible school, he was

an excellent teacher and had ministries going on in various states. After coming to Andhra Pradesh, he opened up the Chris Samuel Foundation and was an active participant and supporter in multiple efforts and ministries. Brother Samuel recognised that the fields of Andhra Pradesh were far and wide and there was much to be done. He became a frequent visitor and would go on to support the efforts in Andhra Pradesh.

Support and encouragement came from many channels and sources, Brother James Varghese, IAS, who was the principal secretary for the Kerala government at Thiruvananthapuram, visited and saw the various efforts. He expressed the desire to come and spend more time in the ministry after his retirement. It was his idea to further stress vocational training as a means of giving the villagers a source for their livelihood. Evangelist Colins T. Mathew accompanied Brother James from Padupil in Kasargode district in Kerala. Brother Mathews Philipose from Dallas was another supporter. Originally hailing from Pambadi, Kothala Assembly, Brother Mathews was instrumental in running the short-term Bible school for several more sessions. He would collect clothes and send them to Fernandus; this was a significant source of help for the Adivasi villages who would not have access to warm clothing during winter.

Brothers Samuel T. Sam, Simon Varkey from Niravath, Munnar, K.M. John, Saji Varghese Puthupally, Wilson Thomas, and Jacob Thomas, Mavelikara, Binu K.V., Joman Thomas used to come and take classes and help in running the bible training centre.

The late Brother K.V. Koshy from Mylapara was a frequent visitor. Despite his age, he had visited Fernandus in Andhra Pradesh on no less than five different occasions to participate and encourage the mission work. Professor Mathews Abraham accompanied Brother Koshy when he came in 2007 after which he returned three more times. Seeing the children running around with no formal education, the brothers suggested that Fernandus should open up a school. Brother Koshy agreed to sponsor two teachers with a monthly salary of Rs 2,000 per teacher. Four years later, the government opened up a school that has classes till the sixth standard; our teachers were absorbed there as government employees. Most of the children in this school are the children of believers.

Evangelist M.A. Joy and Evangelist P.V. Thambi are frequent visitors to Vijayanagaram. Brother once Joy brought twenty-five brothers and sisters from the Westfort Assembly in Thrissur as part of a mission trip. The assembly collects clothes and sends them to the churches here.

Fernandus had once mentioned that many believers wanted to get baptised. Brother M.A Joy insisted that he wanted to hear all their testimonies in detail and make sure that the believers wishing to get baptised doing this for the right reasons. He took the effort to impress upon them the blessings of getting baptised for the right causes and the consequences of getting baptised for the wrong reasons. Based on his classes, over eighty-three people got baptised. They are all happy and enthusiastic members of the Chelur assembly.

Running an outreach gospel evening is not an expensive affair in the villages of the Andhra Pradesh. Unlike the grand conventions of Kerala, an evening outreach program for about two to three hundred people can be organised for a fraction of the cost. Though these outreach programs are not pretentious are not grand events, they are beneficial, and many have come to the Lord through these gospel programs. Brother Simon Varkey from Niravath, Munnar was once ministering the gospel at a gathering in a village in Sidivalsa. Upon giving the altar call, the mission team rejoiced to see over fifty hands that were raised to express the willingness to be born again. These new believers were trained in the Word of God and soon undertook to testify the Lord in the waters of baptism. Today, there is an active church gathering there. Evangelist M.V. Babu, Mazhukeer, Evangelist P.G. James Thannithodu are brothers who participate at conventions here. Brother Binu Samuel comes to lead the children's camp. Evangelist A.N. Valsalam, Pullpally Wayand, who was also a classmate at the Chathanur Bible Institute was and still is a frequent visitor.

Brother K A George, an elder from India Gospel Assembly, New York, first heard about the mission work in Vijayanagaram in 2010. He wanted to know more and wanted to see for himself the mission work and progress, he went to Vijayanagaram for the first time in 2011, along with Brother Samuel T. Sam of Elanthur and since then has been a regular visitor and supporter. In 2017 when brother George was there, he found the vehicle that they were driving was no longer road worthy, so he purchased a new utility van for the mission work. In addition to the annual visits to help run bible classes and visit the various assemblies, Brother George was and continues to support the mission work with financial contributions towards the construction of church halls and in supporting the evangelists.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) says, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Let us praise and glorify God for the different people from so many walks of life that have laboured in the fields of Andhra Pradesh, that their labour may not go in vain. Right from Chris Samuel to Brother K.V. Koshy, both young and old, near and far, the Lord has inspired many people to act according to the greatness of His name.

We now know of the children’s ministries, the prayer fellowships, the conventions, the camps and outreach programs. There is something for everybody; efforts will not go waste. Let us praise God for the help received and pray for the fields are full, and the harvest is ready.

14

Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow

The Adivasis are backward socially, culturally, and economically. They have never specialised in a particular form of agriculture or type of crop. They farm whatever is convenient. Sometimes it's corn, in some areas it is ragi, or tobacco, or oats, or green gram (Moong Dal). Since the arable land is not cordoned off or protected, wild animals like wild boar and monkeys ravage the crops.

To make matters worse, domestic animals also keep eating the crops, and then there is precious little left behind for the farmer to eke out a living. The Adivasis are not heavy consumers of dairy products; hence, there isn't

much demand for milk. Since they don't consume much milk, they never focus on the need to have high yield cows. Furthermore, being isolated means that cooperative societies are not accessible, and they do not have any methods to store and process the milk for future use. The poor diet and limited crops combine to ensure most of the Adivasis are malnourished. They often suffer from health issues related to poor nutrition which further contributes to their state of backwardness.

The Adivasi rituals of marriages vary from tribe to tribe; the general process is quite amusing for us to see and very painful for the couple to undergo! Once a suitable alliance is found, or a groom identifies his bride, the couple "elopes" from the villages. The pre-appointed lookout then alerts the waiting villagers, who then gleefully chase down the couple and start beating them. The marriage is said to solemnised when the blood of the groom mixes with that of the bride! The villagers then escort the bruised and bleeding couple back to the village where they are now allowed to build a hut and stay together.

A village is marked as Christian if the village elder and all inhabitants are born again. The government allots land on which they may construct an assembly hall. The government also takes the lead in building roads that connect the villages. Our evangelists find it challenging to gain entry to

a village. A rigid social structure, restrictive village elders, a deep mistrust of outsiders are all contributory factors.

Even today, many villages are not accessible by road. Though the Adivasi villagers make the long trek to the city to find jobs, they all migrate back during harvest season. The harvest carries social and economic importance for the family. A successful harvest is all that stands between starvation or life. The harvested crop is stored in large bamboo barrels that are supposed to last till the next harvest—next year. The more we learn about these villages, the more significant the burden we have to spend time in prayer. We need to pray that doors may be opened and that we may be able to reflect the goodness of Christ in the good works that we do. Once the villagers become believers, you would be amazed at their zeal and commitment. You would see the real thirst that the villagers have to learn from the Word of God and how rapidly they grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge. You can see first-hand their joy in sharing the gospel with fellow villagers. Sometimes you can also witness the personal sacrifices and physical hardships they are willing to endure, all for the gospel.

Naxalites extremists live in the forests and the hills of Vijayanagaram. The activists are wary of anybody who comes from outside. They have witnessed the exploitations of the Adivasis by the very politicians, government, and

establishment that were set up to protect them. Initially, the Naxalites thought that Fernandus was one more person who would exploit the villagers. However, when they saw that Fernandus was teaching them hygiene, healthcare, and training the villagers to read and write, they backed down. The Naxalites no longer recognised Fernandus as a threat. Instead, they saw him as a kindred soul working for the betterment of the people. They did not mind Fernandus spreading gospel, teaching the Bible or holding medical camps.

Noorubarappad was a village that was hidden away deep in the jungle. There was no road access to the town and people could get there only on foot, often climbing steep and narrow tracks. Desperate to earn a living, a young woman from Noorubarappad decided to make the overnight trek to Vishakhapatnam to search for a job. Since the hand of the Lord was upon her, she walked straight to a Brethren believer's house where she got employment. Ruth got to know about our Lord from Naomi, similarly, this Adivasi lady heard the gospel from the family and became a born-again believer. Rechristened as Mary, she grew in Christ as she experienced the love and joy of the Lord and His salvation. At the onset of the harvest season, Mary left from Vishakhapatnam and went back to the mountains. In the two weeks, Mary was at home she was getting restless as she could not go for worship. What would her Lord think about her?

Unable to hold back any longer. Mary left on the ten-hour trek to the nearest town. Her objective? Worship her Lord! She decided to walk into the first assembly hall she saw. A long walk later, Mary saw a church and walked right in. Coincidentally, Fernandus was there as the local evangelist Brother Timothy was bedridden with a sprained back. Sister Mary spoke to Fernandus, and she invited Fernandus and the gospel team to go to Noorubarappad.

Fernandus and the gospel team left from Chelur at 7:00 AM and reached Noorubarappad at 7:00 PM. It was a long and tough trek. As people were climbing the mountains, they would get muscle cramps due to the strenuous climb. They would tie down the cramped muscle with a towel and continue climbing so that they would not lose time. Like the woman from Samaria, Mary went ahead and gathered all the villagers together. The villagers were waiting expectantly. A warm welcome was given to the gospel. The villagers lit up torches, and the ministry started in earnest that very night with songs, prayers, and preaching of the gospel. The visits to Noorubarappad grew in frequency as the gospel team started going to nearby villages also. Today, eight assemblies function in these far-flung and isolated communities. All because one family in Vishakhapatnam took in an Adivasi woman and showed her the way to the truth and light. God will honour such people both on earth and in heaven. Malachi 3:18 (NIV) says “*And*

you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not". What the Bible means by using the word "again" is that we will see the distinction on earth and in heaven also.

Today, these villages have electricity, the government has built roads there, and there are schools for children. All of this started because of the gospel and the desire to hear and share the good news. How accurate is the verse that says, *"Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life"* (Psalm 23:6 NIV). Truly Christ is the light of the world. If through the gospel, we can light up the hearts of a few, then Christ will take care of the rest also. At this point, we want to echo what Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:32 (NIV), *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"*

"For the Lord is good, and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." As mentioned earlier, the Lord blessed the Fernandus family with one more son. They named him Kiran. Like his elder brother, Alex, Kiran was brought up to love and serve the Lord. Kiran has finished studying at the ACA Bible Institute at Pathanamthitta.

Alex went on to complete his Bible study from Rehoboth at Thrissur, and from Pathanamthitta, Fernandus

and Usha wanted to find a suitable bride for Alex, preferably from Andhra Pradesh. They believed that their home was no longer Kerala, and for Alex to build roots in Andhra Pradesh, it would be better to find a bride from there. The Lord in His grace answered their prayers and helped them to find Mamta as a suitable bride for Alex. He has since been married to Mamta. Brother M.A. Joy was kind enough to conduct the wedding ceremony.

Since then the Lord has blessed Alex and Mamta with two children, and Alex now works as a full-time evangelist in Thunivalsa. Psalms 128:3 (NIV) says, “*your children will be like olive shoots around your table..*” Lord has honoured Usha and Fernandus by creating in their children the same love and desire to serve the Lord and continue to bring the gospel to the people.

When Fernandus became a believer and then went on to become an evangelist, his family cut him off from any form of a family inheritance. His father did not understand the calling that Fernandus had, and till his father came to the Lord, did not share the vision that Fernandus had. Once his father recognised that Fernandus was no longer a headstrong young man, but rather a mature man who worked for the Lord, his changed his stand and father wrote him back into the will. Fernandus was given about twenty-five cents (each cent of land is about 440 square feet of area, and 100 cents form an acre) of property.

Fernandus immediately divided the land into five small plots, and over some time, sold each parcel so that he could use the money for the ministry. He was able to run several camps in Andhra Pradesh, which in his opinion was far more valuable. In the villages where they were working, the Adivasis owned land. The Fernandus family did not feel deprived or that they were missing anything special because they did not own any property. On the contrary, they knew that the assets they were saving were not here on earth. Instead, they kept for that glorious day in heaven when they would meet their Saviour. However, when Alex was married, they were still living in a rented house.

Brother Sam was a frequent visitor. After returning from the States, he came to Chelur. Sam was tasked by a few believers in the States to fund Fernandus for his personal needs. They identified a plot of 26 cents of land near the Chelur assembly hall and registered it in his name. Fernandus remains thankful for this gift and hopes that this roof over his head is more than just a house, rather that it will be of use for the ministry.

15

Yea Though I Walk Through the Valley of ...

The various gospel ministries kept Fernandus busy throughout the years. In 2013, Fernandus got a few evangelists and the assembly members together for a camp at Noorubarappad. It was a four-day camp; they had to go well prepared. Organising a camp meant organising logistics and support activities on a large scale from a remote location.

Most of the camps are in Adivasi villages, which at best, are in impoverished conditions. We had outlined earlier the state of poverty in which these Adivasi villagers live. Fernandus believed conducting a camp in a village should

not be a financial or a logistical burden for the villagers. When Fernandus organised an event, he arranged for the villagers who were attending to have their main meals from there. The preparations included all kinds of supplies, including big utensils, serving plates, food, spices, coffee, mats, beds, pillows, and blankets for the camp members. Planning was crucial. Once you left the urban area, restocking would be next to impossible.

Upon reaching the camp, Fernandus found that he had forgotten to take his medicine for diabetes, hypertension, and cholesterol. There wasn't a medical shop nearby. Fernandus wasn't particularly perturbed. He would control his food, and things would revert to normal once he reached Chelur and started his medicines again.

The days sped by at the camp. It was indeed a time of great blessing and rejoicing to see new believers embrace the Word of God. What a joy to behold those who were blind but could see now. A typical camp covers a lot of doctrinal subjects as well as practical topics. In many ways, an event like this is like the harvest season. In a harvest season, the Adivasis would thresh and sequester enough wheat to last them for a year. Similarly, a camp provided enough guidance from the Word of God until the next event in the succeeding year.

Holding a camp would cost Fernandus a little more than a lakh of rupees. In the larger scheme of things, this was quite a profitable investment for God's work, an investment well made. Those who taught were happy, those who listened and participated were happy; those who organised the camp were delighted. Above all, heaven rejoices to see what manner of love the brothers have for one another.

They could see the transformation in the lifestyle of the Adivasis. They started living a Christ-filled family life, learning the importance of family prayer and no longer abusing drugs or alcohol. They would take care of their children and treat future generations as the treasure that they should be. There was a genuine thirst to learn the Word of God. Many brothers and sisters could neither read nor write, and they would commit the essential verses to memory. Those who came to camp would reach out to those who did not attend and teach them the portions covered. In this way, we would all see the many styles and forms in which the spiritual renewal of a village kept growing.

By the time Fernandus came home, he was feeling quite tired. Usually, everybody would be exhausted after a camp, but this time it was different for Fernandus. He broke into a cold sweat and soon after Fernandus collapsed and fell unconscious to the ground. The neighbours got together and rushed Fernandus to the nearest hospital. The

prognosis was bad; Fernandus had suffered from a heart attack. With no money in hand, Usha came back home and borrowed what little money the neighbours had. She was able to put together about Rs 8,000. After three days of restorative care, Fernandus was discharged. The doctor advised full rest till Fernandus recovered.

Once Fernandus reached home, he was almost bedridden. He did not have the strength to get up or to talk. Everybody at home was worried, not knowing what to do. That was when Brother E.T. Benny called from Shimoga. Brother Benny had visited Chelur a few years back and was calling to check on Fernandus. Upon hearing the latest development, he asked Usha to catch the next available train to Bangalore. He would meet Fernandus over there. Brother Benny would reach Bangalore before Fernandus did, and would make all the arrangements for the treatment.

They caught the next day's Prasanthi Express to Bangalore. Brother Benny was waiting for them at the railway station. He took them straight to the Baptist hospital where doctors attended to Fernandus immediately. They diagnosed Fernandus with having two major blocks. Stents were inserted, and other preventive treatments started immediately. The angioplasty surgery, stay, and medicines cost about three lakh rupees, which was handled entirely by Brother Benny.

Up until then, Fernandus had never taken anything for himself. He and his family would use the used clothes various believers from all over the world had donated. They never saved for themselves or an emergency. After all, the Lord provided and continues to provide. Their primary desire was to serve the Lord. The family praised the Lord for several things. First, for empowering believers with wealth. Then for granting the believers the willingness to share their wealth with poor evangelists who had nothing more than the clothes on their backs. Heaven recognises these sacrifices and will bless generations of each family who gives.

After returning from Bangalore, Fernandus bounced back with even more energy. Not willing to spare any effort, Fernandus kept searching among the mountains and forests for more villages hidden from the gospel. After a year, they discovered that he had one more blockage, and treatment was carried out at Tiruvalla Medical Mission (TMM) Hospital, Thiruvalla, Kerala. Many believers contributed to the expenses of the procedure. However, Fernandus was especially grateful to the governing board of the TMM that bears the costs of evangelists like him. *<Author's note: At the time of publishing Fernandus had suffered another heart attack and is recovering>*

16

Before Winter Comes

The previous pages have detailed the many activities in Chelur, Bubli, Sunaba, Thoripaddi, Thunivalsa and Nooravarappad. There are assemblies in over sixty other villages not mentioned here. If one were to detail how the Lord showered his abundant mercies, this book would need many more chapters.

There are so many people in Vijayanagaram district and nearby areas that continue in darkness, Jesus is the Light of the World. There is a need for our youth to pick up the mission call and be willing to carry this light into the darkness. The way forward is not easy; on the contrary, it is a tale of hardship, starvation, poverty, sacrifice, and tears.

Our churches have many young brothers and sisters with talents. Let us pray that they are moved by the Spirit to answer the call for missions and be soldiers for Christ, that they may use the skills that God has blessed them with to spread His gospel. Let us pray that the parents and grandparents will challenge our children and grandchildren to see what they can achieve for Christ.

A brother was boasting that he had gone for a pilgrimage to Jordan and Israel. He took pride in having walked in the footsteps of Jesus. A more pertinent question we have to ask ourselves is, "Have we gone where Jesus did not?" There are many mountains, villages, and forests in Andhra Pradesh where thousands and possibly millions of people live and die without hearing the name of Jesus. To conduct an outreach program or to sponsor a two-day camp, does not cost much. Instead, it demands the heartfelt prayer and efforts of many believers.

Remember, the most potent weapon that we have in our arsenal is not money, health, or influence; it is prayer!

We covet your prayers and your support for the various mission programs in Vijayanagaram area. Many people have come forward and expressed their desire to be baptised. However, there is an urgent need to set up assembly halls in these places. Without an assembly hall and a place for the believers to assemble, many people find it challenging

to come forward. If one family decides to “adopt” a church, they can manage the cost of building the assembly hall. If an assembly based in Kerala chooses, they can adopt many villages!

The fields of Andhra Pradesh are rich with possibilities. There is a large population that thirsts for the gospel and the spiritual fulfilment of knowing Jesus. To date, these villages are spiritually open and accessible to us. As roads get built and electricity and other modern conveniences get more accessible, the open doors of these villages will shrink till they become entirely shut. Telegu is very similar to Malayalam. It's quite easy to learn Telugu. If you have the desire, we can help with a translator until you can handle the language. You don't need to be an expert teacher since many of the believers are new to Christ. Teaching adults can often be similar to teaching Sunday school students. All you need is a structured and straightforward approach. The villagers are simple people. They have a thirst for the truth, and you can bring the truth to them. Once they realise the truth, the villagers will never abandon the truth either. The only question is who will step forward and carry the torch to the villages. Who will love these villagers as Christ has loved you?

A matriarchally dominated society characterises the Adivasis. The women have the upper hand. In most

instances, the women come forward, followed by the children, and then the males. If we sow the seeds of the gospel, society will change for the better. With education and the ability to read, you will also see a growth in their spiritual wisdom. These mothers and fathers will bring forth many missionaries!

The Lord told Peter to move his boat away from the shore so that he could cast his net and fish. In faith, we too need to move our boats further away from the security of the shores and move to the deeper portion. We also must learn to cast our nets in faith so that the Lord may fill it with fish! We too must leave the comfort and security of Kerala, the support of the known and move towards the unknown, places in Andhra Pradesh so that we too can cast our nets, so that we also can be fishers of men!

Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "Come before winter begins." Winter can come in many forms. Maybe it's the sarkar; maybe it's electricity and entertainment, perhaps it's the severe climate, but winter will come. When Jesus asks us, "Have you gone before winter has begun?" what will you say?

- The End -

Felicitations

Samuel T Sam

All the authors of Gods word right from the time of Moses onwards have given great importance to history. Recounting the instances of how God has worked among man has served to bring awareness and knowledge of Gods word. It has been a source of blessing and strength to succeeding generations.

Our reliance on technology makes us forget the past and focus on the present. We live in the moment. We fail to remember that the fields of harvest are large and the harvest is plenty.

So many fellow brethren evangelists work hard. They suffer in silence, they shed silent tears, not calling attention to themselves. Many starve, some are assaulted and punished for their dedication, all for the Lord. Regrettably, we are not aware of the selfless work our evangelists carry out in Kerala and beyond.

Fernandus is a such an evangelist- he'd much rather continue to strive for the Lord. He does not mind the obscurity, nor does he cares for recognition or acceptance. Just that he may have one more day to carry out the Lord's work.

I first came to know about his work in January 2006 when I read a pamphlet being distributed at the Kumbanad convention that outlined his work at Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh. I read with growing interest about the one hundred and forty people from a village that had been baptised and bought to the church, and this created the desire to understand the extent of the work. I got this opportunity in February when I

attended their family conference along with Evangelist K V Babu and Evangelist Gabriel. I got the chance to see the work that Fernandus was carrying out in Vijayangaram and praise God for the many blessing and the many souls that have come to the Lord.

Since 2006, I have had the chance to visit Vijayanagaram on many occasions and see that God had a clear plan when sending Fernandus to Andhra Pradesh. There are many thousands of people that have heard the gospel because of the tireless efforts of Fernandus. Since then, the mission work in Andhra Pradesh is one of my principal prayer points. There are more than 50 assemblies and more than 50 full-time evangelists labouring for the harvest there. The needs are many, yet the Lord provides in his own way and manner. The Lord is moving the hearts and minds of many to contribute and to act. The doors of Andhra Pradesh are open, yet they will swing shut, sooner or later, we should recognize and own up to the fact that only we are to blame if we do not act with speed to spread the gospel to as many as possible.

Let us pray that the Lord will enable Fernandus, his family and all the other believers in Andhra Pradesh to spread the word of God and the gospel with haste before winter comes. Let us pray that our Lord will strengthen our hands to support Fernandus. More so our minds so that we may be challenged to help in any way we can. I extend my warmest greetings to Evangelist Fernandus and his whole family.

In Christ,

Samuel T Sam

Elanthoor, Pathanmitha, Kerala

Prof. Mathews Abraham

When I look back on the many years, and the many instances that the Lord has blessed me since 1994 July to be part of the Lord's ministry, the most prominent are related to my experiences in Andhra Pradesh.

Our first visit to Andhra Pradesh was with my cousin, brother Samuel T Sam, Elanthoor and the late Brother K.V. Koshy, Mylapra. I was pensive as I did not know the language and did not know how I could be of use. Fernandus caught on to this straight away and burst out laughing when I shared my concern. He said all you have to do is say "Vandhanalu (Greetings)" I must admit, that I was able to forge many a strong relationship with this one word!

We started on our mission trip the very next day, visiting village after village, we are so happy to see so many believers. We would see churches that looked like upended umbrellas. The doorways would be only 4 feet high, so you had to crouch to get in. Yet inside it was filled with hundreds of joyful believers. They would be impoverished, yet they were joyful in the Lord. Using pots and bamboo sticks, they had made drums and other musical instruments, they would clap their hands and sing with such joy and zest that it would fill out hearts with gladness. I still sing with joy the many songs that brother Ram Rao taught me on my first visit there.

There are so many stories that I could fill a book, let me cease and instead recount a journey that we once undertook. We wanted to go to the brethren church in Sidivalsa, which is

about two thousand five hundred feet about sea level. We would be hard-pressed to say that the route to Sidivalsa was a proper road. We had to climb over rocks and in some places jump over small chasms to reach Sidivalsa. It was a long, tiring and risky journey. On our way, we could catch glimpses of villages we were passing by populated by menacing, half-naked and some cases, fully naked Adivasi tribals. Imagine our surprise to be greeted at Sidivalsa by happy, welcoming, full clothed Adivasis. We had a full fledged church hall built from woven grass. I cannot forget the warm and rousing welcome we got from the villagers of Sidivalsa!

We are witnesses to the transformative power of the gospel, we have seen first-hand the power that the gospel has to change a person from within. No doubt the Lord has blessed the continuous and hard work that brother Fernandus has carried out so that he could bring the gospel to the forgotten corners of Vijayanagaram. Many have received the gospel, their lives have changed, they dress well, their health has become better, they are no longer slaves to superstitions or old traditions. Though all these areas are under the influence of Naxalites, it is the hard work of brother Fernandus that has enabled access to these regions.

I have had the opportunity to visit and work in Andhra Pradesh on many occasions after that. Yet, with sorrow, I note that there are many “Gospel Traders” who for petty monetary gains take photographs of poor and badly clothed villagers and use this as an opportunity to get funding and build false churches. I know that the Lord will judge them appropriately when the time comes. Andhra Pradesh still seeks to welcome those who will serve the Lord willingly and in humility. However, let us not go expecting the comfort and convenience we find in Kerala.

Let us go prepared for hardship, sacrifice and hard work. Let us go ready to submit ourselves to the will of the Lord. Most importantly, Let us go!

Many of the instances that Brother Kunjumon Thotappaly has described here are events that I have direct knowledge of and have experienced first-hand. I want to use this opportunity to extend my congratulations and blessings for this book!

In Christ

Prof. Mathews Abraham

Kottarakara, Kerala, India

Charles John

I want to Praise the Lord for giving me a chance to write in this book about Fernandus who, in service to the Lord forsook his family, friends and community, instead braved the jungles and wilderness of Vijayanagaram to bring lost souls to Christ. Fernandus has set up over fifty churches and bought many to Christ. I have been to Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh on many occasions and have had the good fortune to participate in many ministries. Some beautiful moments are etched in my mind forever. This includes the baptism service for one hundred and forty believers that Evangelist P.V Thampi and myself conducted while it was raining heavily! The Lord's grace was present in everything we did, and I praise God for the chance that He has given to me to testify about the various mission activities that Fernandus carries out. I am sure that the Lord sees the hard work that Fernandus, his family, fellow evangelists and other believers carry out in Andhra Pradesh and will honour their efforts. May the Lord bless this missionary family who continues to strive hard for the Lord, for no work done for the Lord goes in vain. May the Lord also bless dear brother Kunjumon for taking the effort to write this book.

Yours in Christ,

Charles John

Ranni, Pathanamathita

Kerala, India

P. V. Thampi

Acts 11; 23 (NIV) *“When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts”* I can say without exaggeration, that my thoughts echoed that of Barnabas when I first went to Vijanagaram in Andhra Pradesh. It was a whirlwind of such intense activity and rejoicing! Souls were being saved by the hundreds. There were baptism services for groups of hundreds and many more, churches were being formed. So much was happening.

When I first reached Vijayanagaram, it was 2.30 AM, after exchanging greetings, Fernandus let us know that our day would start at 4.00 AM so we would need to hurry and get ready to move. We left at 4.00 AM for a two-hour journey that would take us to the base of a mountain. From there we had another two-hour steep trek upwards to reach the mission site. Our first mission was to conduct a baptism ceremony of 86 people. What a joyful and wonderful experience!

Since then, we have had so many baptisms, so many souls saved, so many churches set up. For sure, the fields are vast, and the harvest is plenty. The Lord has blessed the churches that there are many believers from the local communities who have stepped forward to be full-time evangelists.

There are yet many churches that need to be set up, there are many villages that have not yet heard the gospel, there are many that may come to Christ. The opportunity and the willingness is present, yet the one thing that hinders the gospel work is the lack of resources and support.

There are over fifty full-time evangelists who work in Vijayanagaram today. They live by faith alone, and they have many needs, let us pray and move our hearts to act that their needs are met.

I have worked directly with Fernandus and his family, I have seen for myself the work and the opportunity that exists in Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh. Through this book that Bro Kunjumon has written, I hope that many will be inspired to pray, contribute and support the gospel work there. For I truly believe that *“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

With all my blessings and prayers

P. V. Thampi

Quilon, Kerala, India

M. A. Joy

I take great pleasure in writing about dear brother Fernandus and how he was instrumental in setting up over fifty churches. I had often thought that I should write a book about the evangelization in Andhra Pradesh, in retrospect I understand why the Lord wanted me to wait, as the Lord has shown me that brother Kunjumon Thottapilly would do a much better job than I could!

I have visited brother Fernandus on five different occasions staying for several days and carefully observing the various gospel works that he has undertaking. I was a direct participant in many of the instances detailed in this book. I remember reading the whole manuscript of this book in a single day as I was so eager to relive the many beautiful and miraculous experiences mentioned here.

The story of Fernandus and Usha is a story of how quiet determination and dedication without fanfare bought about success for the Lord. You will read stories of how they faced up cannibalistic tribes, stories of how many thousands have been turned away from the path of eternal destruction, freed from slavery to alcohol, drugs and superstition, freed to enjoy the grace that only salvation brings.

I pray that this book will inspire many to swing into action, to pray, to support, to participate in the many mission activities.

With all my blessings and prayers

M. A. Joy

Trichur, Kerala, India

Simon Varkey

The Christian church is filled with many examples of so many people who have lived in dedication to the Lord. Some on account of their faith, some account of their sacrifices, some on account of their scholarly contributions. Here we find that brother Kunjumon Thottapilly has written out the fantastic life experiences of evangelist Fernandus and family.

We need to ask ourselves, what is the responsibility we bear to the church, what is the burden we carry for one another, I feel it boils down to freedom we provide. To free those who are slaves to sin, to make the blind see, to spread the gospel that makes such liberation possible. Apostle Paul's words are relevant Acts 20:24(NIV) *"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."* Brother Kunjumon has outlined brother Fernandus's efforts clearly and succinctly.

This book details many instances of struggles, sufferings, enthusiasm, dedication, faith, courage, submission, sacrifice, long-suffering, joy, happiness and a vision to lead many to Christ. I pray that this book may inspire readers from all over the world to be jolted into action and to submit themselves to the Lord for his ministry with renewed vigour.

May His name be glorified.

Simon Varkey

Niravath, Munnar,

Idukki, Kerala, India

AO Thomas

Considering my work in the Lord's ministry since 1960, it gives me much pleasure to do the actual work than write or talk about them. From YMEF camps to outreach activities in an around Pathanamthitta to mission programs in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Lord has indeed blessed all of us. The Lord has given me many opportunities to work alongside many believers and be instrumental in setting up many churches.

Though I am weak with age now, I want to point out to a time when I had just turned eighty, my cousin the late Evangelist T.K. Samuel's son Samuel T Sam and some brothers from the gulf had planned to go to Viajayanagaram. They wanted to see the gospel work that dear brother Fernandus was carrying out.

In the days that we were there, we saw with great joy and happiness the great and sincere efforts that brother Fernandus was putting in. Despite overwhelming circumstances and constraints of money and resources on every side, Fernandus was always cheerful and hopeful that the Lord will provide according to the need. Many Adivasi tribals got saved, In the time I was there I was able to dedicate a new baptism tank for the Lord. On the first day itself, we had baptised over forty people. We had visited many houses where we were able to see how the Lord was moving the hearts of many people from different faiths to come and worship the Lord. It gave us great joy to be part of this mission effort.

Dear brother Fernandus and his whole family have been involved in the mission field at every possible level. His children

are both involved in the ministry, and it gives me great pleasure to read and now to write about the mission efforts as I have been an eye witness to the mighty deeds of the Lord here! I praise God that the Lord has used Fernandus to spread His word in Andhra Pradesh. I praise God that He gave me also a chance to participate in the mission work. There is no doubt that the mission work deserves our prayers, our participation and our support, may the Lord empower all of us to join hands! It is a matter for praise that God has healed Fernandus recently and continues to use Him for His Glories sake. I also wish to felicitate brother Kunjumon for taking the efforts to write this book and let more people know about the mission work in Andhra Pradesh.

All Glory to God!

AO Thomas

Kottarakara, Kerala, India

Mathews Philipose

Evangelist P V Thampi, Kollam and brother Samuel T Sam, Elanthur are the two brothers who first brought news to me about the mission works done by Evangelist Fernandus in Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh. These brothers came to Dallas on two separate occasions and testified about the mission work at Chelur targeting the Adivasi tribals.

Brother Samuel T Sam has, on many occasions detailed the many challenges that the ministry faces there, how people don't have clothes or how they struggle for food. These testimonies have moved our hearts and challenged us to pray and support the outreach programs in as many ways as the Lord enables us. We praise God when we hear the many testimonies of Fernandus and Usha as they travel from mountain to mountain and from village to village, staying with the villagers and bringing them the gospel.

I have desired to visit these many churches and fellowship with the many new believers. Though I have met Fernandus, I have not yet had the opportunity to visit the many new churches. I pray that the Lord will give me a chance. When we hear of how more than 100 people get baptised at a time, we are both humbled and yet encouraged in our hearts. For sure, this may have been how the church was spreading in the early days!

When my neighbour and close friend brother Kunjumon wrote about the mission activities in Andhra Pradesh, it allows all of us to gain an insight into the hard work and the sacrifice that the many believers and evangelists undertake there.

For those of you who can't go to Andhra Pradesh, let us support in prayer. I pray that this book may challenge us to pray for Andhra Pradesh, to go there, to help the many churches, to bind us together and to be united in the love of Christ.

Your brother in Christ

Mathews Philipose

Dallas, USA

K A George

“Before Winter Comes” is a short biography of the Lord’s Servant Evangelist V P Fernandus written originally in Malayalam by Brother Kunjumon Thottappally translated and rewritten by Anil Tom Thomas, Kuwait. When I first heard about his name, I was puzzled as to whether Fernandus is Hispanic or a Malayali. Later I found out that he is a Malayali hailing from Erumeli in Kerala. I first heard about him in 2010; I was burdened to meet him at the earliest and in 2011, I decided to visit him and see for myself the work that is going on there in the tribal areas of Vijayanagaram in Andhra Pradesh. So with the help of Brother Samuel T Sam of Elanthur, I proceeded to Vijayanagaram and stayed with him and his family partaking in their hospitality. Subsequently, the Lord has enabled me to visit them almost every year. I have been able to participate in the joyous mission work, and He has sustained me to support with the much-needed finance.

As far as I know, Brother Fernandus and his dear wife Usha are very sincere, honest and straight forward people. Their passion in life is to spread the good news of the gospel to all. A praying couple, their most pressing burden is to go to the hills, mountains and forests and to look for tribal villages to share the gospel.

There is a genuine thirst among the tribal Adivasis to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ; they listen and take to heart the words of the gospel. Blessed with grace from the Lord, the words of Brother Fernandus are sown well in the hearts of these sincere people. Though the villagers live in abject poverty and

are handicapped by the fact that they cannot read or write in any language; it does not affect their loving and well-mannered nature, nor does it reduce their faith. As more and more villagers come to the Lord, there is much that has to be done. We have to support the new believers as much as we can by praying, by giving from our time, and with financial support so that they can have a place to gather, worship the Lord and fellowship together.

Let us be burdened to assist in any way that we can. We could toil when they shoulder to shoulder. We could support them financially to build a semi-permanent structure. We can and must pray, for each of us has a role to play.

I exhort you so that, before winter comes, let us work together, we have all the freedom to evangelise and work together for the glory of God.

I wish you all the best in life and pray for the mission ministry in Vijayanagaram.

K A George

India Gospel Assembly

New York

About the Author

Aniltom is from Kochi, Kerala and is based in Kuwait. He works as a management executive. More of self confessed reader than a writer, *Before Winter Comes* is his first effort. Feel free to write to him with your suggestions or feedback.

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