

# From Darkness to LIGHT

story by Sean Lawrence  
photos by Ed Compean, Terry Dryden, and GFA missionaries

## Gospel for Asia aids tsunami victims while sharing the love of Christ



Young victims of the tsunami.



Survivors were grief stricken.



Women mourned their loss.



Survivors patiently wait for clothes to be distributed by GFA volunteers. A GFA relief camp in Sri Lanka is set up to minister to tsunami victims with pure drinking water, food, clothing, medicine, temporary shelters, counseling, and sharing with those who have lost all hope the

promise of a new life that can be found in Jesus Christ.

*Gospel for Asia trains and sends national pastors to share the Gospel and plant Bible teaching churches in Asia.*

Pulrenraja sits on a brick wall and stares past people jockeying for their meals and a place to lay their heads. His mind isn't on survival like the others at this refugee camp; it is focused on what did not survive. Days earlier Pulrenraja had been an independent fisherman, able to provide for all his family needs. At 8:15 a.m. on December 26, Pulrenraja, his pregnant wife, and their young daughter were enjoying the birth of a new day in their quiet beachside village. Suddenly, everything changed.

With no warning, a wall of water higher than his thatched home forced its way through his house and on to the next, forever removing his family from this life and ungraciously dumping him, unconscious, in the branches of a coconut tree.

Rudely awakened hours later by a fall and a violent landing from the tree, Pulrenraja stood up and walked away from the unrecognizable skeletal remains of his village. Everything he had lived for was gone.

Several days and 62 miles later, Pulrenraja wandered into a refugee camp operated by Gospel for Asia (GFA), a Christian evangelical organization. Hungry and exhausted, he was fed by a team of GFA volunteers and provided a place to sleep.

*“To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Acts 26:18*



*A man searches through what remains of a demolished home. The brick home was torn into pieces by the deadly tsunami.*

Pulrenraja's story is not unique in Sri Lanka. Amidst the tragedy, GFA has had an unprecedented opportunity to share the Good News of new life in Jesus. Within hours of the tsunami, GFA had pastors and volunteers out in the communities lending aid.

"The needs since the tsunami have been overwhelming," stated GFA's National Director Lal Vanderwall. "People wandered around lonely, depressed, and shattered."

While the world has responded admirably and its gifts of food and shelter blanket the coastal towns, GFA has been given the privilege to share the peace that surpasses understanding that this nation so desperately needs to heal and survive.

"People want to share what has happened to them and what they've lost," continued Pastor Lal. "This communication has been a great point of contact to share the love of Christ. The spiritual needs of this country are great."



*K. P. Yohannan, founder and president of GFA, embraces a child with one hand and delivers an aid package with the other in a tsunami relief camp in Batticalau.*



*A truckload of relief goods arrives.*



*A girl feeds her sibling.*

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GFA National Director Lal Vanderwall

## Focus on God's Word

Gospel for Asia and its founder, K. P. Yohannan, have been part of the Calvary Chapel family for the past 20 years. GFA has become one of the mission arms of Calvary Chapel to reach those who have never heard the Gospel message. Hundreds of CC pastors have traveled to many Asian nations to teach in some of the 54 GFA Bible Colleges.

GFA's focus on the Word of God as the greatest healing remedy is impacting the nation of Sri Lanka as well as India and other nearby nations. Currently operating eight camps in Sri Lanka, which house over 5,000 people, GFA has used this unforeseen circumstance as a time to encourage spiritual renewal. Also, GFA has compassion ministries in South India and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Well over 1,000 GFA workers are involved in this non-stop outreach.

K. P. was en route from Chennai, India, to Germany when the disaster struck. He immediately became a contact for the Western media, informing the world of the extent of the devastation. Cell phone conversations with pastors who were in the midst of the tragedy gave him early access to the extent of the tsunami's destruction. Within days, K. P. flew to Sri Lanka to be with GFA relief teams and began relaying stories.

In one village there was a man who had previously incited a group of vigilantes to attack the GFA missionaries for sharing the Gospel. The vigilantes beat the missionaries, burned their literature, and chased them out of the village. When the tsunami struck, the same group of missionaries rushed to the scene and found their former antagonist. This time, he welcomed them. Later, he meekly stated, "I didn't know your Jesus loved me so much."

GFA Pastor Kishor had visited the village of a man named Ajit before the tsunami. Ajit had beaten and humiliated Kishor for sharing the Gospel. Soon after the devastation, Kishor returned. He was the first to reach Ajit, who desperately needed medical attention. Kishor carried Ajit to a medical facility and found a doctor for him. He stayed by Ajit's side, assuring him and holding his hands—the same hands that earlier had abused him.

A Buddhist woman lay in a refugee camp, weakened from her ordeal of survival. Having lost her entire family, she felt all hope was gone. "I don't want to eat," she told them. "I just want to die." After the missionaries comforted her with words from the Bible, however, she said, "Something is happening in my heart. Your Jesus has brought me peace."

K. P. has cried with the pastors, while at the same time realizing that the Lord has opened these regions to the saving grace of Christ. "When I first heard about this horrible tragedy and the millions of displaced people and their utter suffering, my heart broke," he recalled. "The Scripture in



*A woman with relief materials.*

Matthew 9:36 became so real. 'But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.' This tragedy is another opportunity for us to demonstrate the compassion of Christ."

GFA has been a resource for the victims, but it too has been affected by the tsunami. In Kalaru, a bustling squatters' village of over 600 families of fisherman and laborers, GFA had recently built a Bible college that housed 25 students. On the day after Christmas, the facility was vacant because of the holidays. When the tsunami struck, the village was decimated. The patchwork huts of scrap tin, branches, and plastic sheets were no defense against the waves. Almost instantly, the village and all of its occupants

were erased. A faded orange sari tangled in a twisted coconut branch was the only evidence that human life had ever existed in this beach town. The Bible college, the only brick and mortar structure in the village, was reduced to rubble, and its contents washed out to sea.

### Miraculous Escape

GFA Pastor Jaomaln and his congregation of 40 had begun their Sunday morning service the day after Christmas. A man screamed that water was surging into the village. Grabbing the children, everyone fled for safety. Today, the brick and concrete foundation is all that remains.

"We ran out and saw the water coming, and we were all able to run away," recalled Pastor Jaomaln. "We are grateful to God for His protection, and we plan to rebuild shortly." Three families from his fellowship lost their homes, and one neighbor and her baby drowned, but the rest of the small village was spared the destruction other coastal communities suffered.

Nearby, a modest beachside hotel had been filled with locals celebrating the holidays. There are no recorded survivors among the hotel's 600 guests. Lining the shore between the hotel's shattered walls and the ocean were 16 human-shaped sand mounds. The sandy graves were marked with wilted flowers, but

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K. P. Yohannan, founder, Gospel for Asia



*GFA relief camp workers and volunteers handed out essential relief items to hundreds affected by the tsunami. Another vital task is to make sure there is safe drinking water. The water supply has been contaminated in the worst way—through death. Without pure water to drink, even more people will die.*



*While searching for bodies, an earthmover becomes stuck.*



*K. P. Yohannan visits with children at a tsunami relief camp. Local officials in Sri Lanka have asked GFA to take on responsibility for 10,000 of the children orphaned in the tragedy.*

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Pastor Jaomaln



*Pastor Jaomaln holds a photograph taken of his family in front of his church. The church was later leveled by the tsunami.*

GFA Pastor Jaomaln and his congregation of 40 had begun their Sunday morning service the day after Christmas. A man screamed that water was surging into the village. Grabbing their children, the congregation ran for safety. The church building wasn't as fortunate—its brick and concrete foundation is all that remains.



*A man searches through clothing contributions. Many lost all material possessions to the killer wave.*

at the next high tide they were washed away, along with the buried remains.

Further south, over 10,000 fatalities have been recorded and 20,000 homes destroyed. Although the task of meeting all of these needs is overwhelming, GFA has seized the opportunity to serve this broken community as well.

In Arayampathy, a typical seaside town, GFA now operates two transitional homes for the displaced residents. They offer tents, food, and counseling on the grounds of a local school. This particular camp currently houses over 50 people, mostly new widows and their children.

J. Vijitha, the government social development officer overseeing the camps, praised the work of the Christians serving those in need. "Since the opening of these camps, many obstacles have been removed. The people here seem much happier and better taken care of than at the other camps." From its northeastern shores to the seaside

slums of Colombo, GFA is committed to the long-term commitment necessary for the country to recover.

"Nobody has been able to give an accurate assessment of the number of children orphaned, but we believe it is more than 10,000," said Pastor Lal Vanderwall. Local authorities have asked GFA to serve as guardians to these children. "We will continue to serve these people as long as is needed. When we depart these villages in which we are working, we desire to leave a permanent witness of Jesus, as well as a healthy church." ☞

### Gospel for Asia

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*A woman and her child sit in front of what is left of their home in Kadiranawutte City. GFA has brought aid and relief to displaced residents.*