



Ronnie's BIBLE

Addressed to
People Living with HIV/AIDS

R. Daniel Premkumar

Published by :

AIDS DESK

National Lutheran Health & Medical Board of UELCI



**The Lord will transform the body of our humiliation,
that it may be conformed to the body of his glory.**

(Philippians 3:21)

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Addressed to
People Living with HIV AIDS

By
R Daniel Premkumar

English

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UELCl, Chennai

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FOREWORD

There are many organizations helping PLHA's. The combined efforts of all these organizations cannot give any reasonable hope to those in this kind of distress. This has been experience of my colleagues Dr Daisy Dharmaraj, Rev Dr Daniel Premkumar and others who have day to day contact with the PLHAs. Our programs of prevention, care, support and rehabilitation in different parts of India, for the HIV affected attempt to give them a new life.

The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in India is astounding. HIV/AIDS is an incurable disease As the disease progresses many infections and complications set in and slowly lead to death of the infected person. The People Living with HIV/AIDS PLHA's are socially ostracized, will lose their job, will have no money for survival, let alone treatment and have no one to care for him. When this truth dawns on the HIV infected person there can only be one door that he can knock on- i.e. seek God's help.

Rev R Daniel Premkumar has perceived their spiritual needs and his experience while journeying with such people and the shared knowledge of others who have had similar experiences has resulted in this attempt to give them access to the comfort, counsel and hope provided by the Word of God.

Contd...

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Ronnie's Bible is an endeavor to convey this Word of comfort and strength to these hopelessly desperate people. In India which to day has the worlds largest number of HIV victims, many have not interpreted the Word as it speaks to PLHA and the like. Ronnie's Bible will make it more simple and appropriate for those who approach the Word for succour and comfort.

Pastors, counselors and social workers are also in need of biblical material to help them counsel the PLHAs. There is a point at which any counselor is lost for words and ideas on dealing with his patients. Ronnie's Bible will be a companion for them while they minister to the PLHAs. We hope that this book would reach many corners of the earth where PLHA live and empower them.

K M Shyamprasad

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The Story Behind Ronnie's Bible

HIV AIDS has been in India for more than two decades . Like many others, I knew of it simply as a serious disease, with no cure. 5 years ago I had a personal experience of burying two children belonging to my parish, who died of HIV AIDS. Even then, I did not realize that hundreds in the church itself were being infected by the disease everyday. Then I heard about this young, brilliant, handsome politician called Ronnie, who belonged to my parish but rarely attended the church. He was infected but did not want anyone to know about it. He thought that the disease will just go away. When his health started to fail, it was then, that my journey with him and his family began.

There was deep sorrow and undeclared silence in his home. Ronny expressed regrets about his past. He, for some reason did not take much care of his health, and died within 2 years of his diagnosis.

As my association with Ronnie was growing, I had the opportunity to visit a community based care and support project at a town called Chilakaluripet in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. There were hundreds of PLHA, of all ages and backgrounds, but mostly poor. Heart to heart talks with the infected persons and affected families, and exposure to care and support programs helped me to get the wider the picture concerning the disease.

With my background in Biblical Hermeneutics and my attempts of yester years in interpreting Scriptures from the point of view of the Poor and more recently from Dalit perspective, has helped me to Re-read the Bible through the eyes of PLHA. I have conducted innumerable Bible Studies and Pastors Training on Faith Response to HIV.

Bible is the only handy companion, the PLHA are certain to have with them till the end. As they grow weaker, the PLHA search the Scriptures for hope and comfort. Many

critical questions spring in their minds, they need answers, especially when there is little or no pastoral care accessible to them. Hence, Ronnie's Bible with a special focus on PLHA.

The selection of Biblical passages reflects guiding factors in the lives of PLHA. Wherever the very existence of human life came under threat; human worth and dignity decimated; bonds of human relations mutilated; situations in life where there is no glimmer of hope nor healing; where feeling of wretchedness clouds human spirit - these are the guiding factors in PLHA lives. The passages in the Bible that come very close to these challenges constitute Ronnie's Bible. Yes, much of history is omitted; much of wisdom, many victory stories, and many moving passages depicting promise are not included in Ronnie's Bible. This is so, because, history, the coming of Golden New Age etc have no relevance to the experience of PLHA. On the other hand some hidden away passages and cryptic verses that speak out the condition of PLHA are included in Ronnie's Bible.

Ronnie symbolically reflects the ever increasing number of PLHA in India and around the world. Ronnie, like Abel though "he died, through his faith he still speaks" (Hebrews 11. 4). So, you hear Ronnie speak loud and clear on behalf of all PLHA. Ronnie's responses after each passage, churns out of his frustration and earnings for healing. Pastor's explanation about faith in God in the midst of strife, has been garnered from the experiences of hundreds of PLHA in various stages of the disease. Hence, I hope, this Bible may become a treasure of sorts. It is our prayer that Ronnie's Bible should speak to many burdened by the disease, the affected families and loved ones, the civil society including the church and care givers.

Wherever relevant, and especially in the New Testament passages, I have also included the response of a Health Care Provider, as PLHA often turn to doctors and Para-medical workers for care and support and seek their counsel. In the passages cited, some verses are highlighted areas for easy and quick reading.

I thank my colleague and friend Dr. Daisy Dharmaraj, Director AIDS Desk without whose incisive observations culled through long years of committed service to the very sick among PLHA, this Bible would not have reached its present level of professional competence. This book, relates mainly to the infected and affected PLHA in India. The reflections of Sexual Minorities, are not included. Most passages are inclusive of those infected through occupational exposure and intravenous drug use as well.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Ronnie, whose association has personally prompted me to attempt this Bible. I thank his family for their generosity in permitting to share his life this way for the cause of fellow infected. I remember with gratitude the numerous PLHA friends who have opened their hearts to us, and gave us a deep insight into their feelings and concerns.

Dr K M Shyamprasad, Executive Director of National Lutheran Health & Medical Board of UELCI encouraged me at every step to go ahead and publish this Bible on behalf of AIDS desk, NLHMB, UELCI. It testifies to their deep commitment to the cause of making church respond meaningfully to PLHA. I thank the team at AIDS desk for all their support to me in this effort.

I will be thankful to those who would enlighten me of the gaps in this Bible. You are free to make your comments and criticisms. For the goal I had in mind is to provide an instrument of hope to those infected and affected, and provide inspiration and deeper insight to all those Health Care Providers, policy makers and many others dedicated to the cause of PLHA.

R Daniel Premkumar

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajanugraham Daniel Premkumar is a Presbyterian of Church of South India, with long years of service as Rural Pastor in Rayalaseema of Andhra Pradesh. He has a Ph D in Biblical Hermeneutics. He served the Bible Society of India briefly, as Editor of Common Language Telugu Bible. While he did a stint at the Ecumenical Christian Center, Whitefield, Bangalore he was exposed to national and international issues affecting the poor and the marginalized. Through long involvement in the struggles of the poor and especially the Dalits, he has gained rich experience in dealing with conflicts at personal, family, society. He has also gained deep insight into the vulnerability of People Living With HIV AIDS (PLHA) and the endless social onslaughts they face till they breathe last. He served as the Director for Department of Dalit and Adivasi Concerns at the Synod of Church of South India, Chennai. He has produced many publications and audio/video documentaries on related issues. He led a Dalit delegation to the UN Conference on Racism at Durban. He is widely traveled and has lectured in Europe, UK, US and Asia.

Rev. Dr. Premkumar has trained hundreds of pastors and students of theology on Biblical and Theological approach to HIV AIDS. He also has initiated a care and support intervention in church he serves at Madanapalle. He is now a Consultant on Ecumenical Relations in AIDS Desk of National Lutheran Health and Medical Board of UELCI. He is also completing a book on Biblical Resources for Pastors and Care Givers Engaged in Care and Support of PLHA due to be released God willing, on Ash Wednesday, 2007.

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