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### **Aids for AIDS!**

The world was given an iceberg awareness of the Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome when it mournfully declared the 1st of December as the World AIDS Day. The declaration needs to make us feel, think, change, act and live with a deepened awareness towards the crisis with a difference in our poises and perspectives. The dawn of this does not just come from books on AIDS but also from a committed desire to march towards it with a Christian response. Awareness precedes action.

Knowing the truth about AIDS is a desperate necessity for the many in today's Church who live in a world of dangerous innocence. Ignorance is not always bliss. Seeming tents could become tentacles. It should suffice to know that AIDS is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which severely weakens the body's defense system leaving the body vulnerable to infections which can have serious consequences to its health. This is transmitted by penetrative sex, vaginal or anal, with someone who has the HIV infection; by sharing

needles with someone with the virus; from blood transfusions; from mother to baby — during pregnancy and childbirth. Breastfeeding increases the risk of transmission. The illness is hard to bear with the threat of blindness, mental impairment, severe diarrhoea, loss of weight, drenching night sweats, itchy skin, brain tumours, cancers and death.

How ever could we as the Church exercise active spirituality towards AIDS and its victims? Our Christian response is the cry of the hour. So loudly can we hear the judgmental and condemning attitudes! John 8:1-11 has a lesson here for us. The passage could actually be called, “The story of the missing man.” Jesus loathed their double standards and self-opinionated hypocrisy. He said, “If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (Rom 3:23; Eph 2:1). When it comes to pointing the finger Jesus forbids us to put ourselves on the pedestal. He was the only Person on earth who had the right to condemn, yet He said, “Neither do I condemn you go now and leave your life of sin.” We either rush to make a moral statement tripping over judgmental attitudes or we rush to express God’s mercy and love falling into a deep hole where there is no longer a clear moral framework for living. The Jesus way is to hold infinite love and perfect standards in tension.

We are called to express care and love and to be helpful to them unconditionally. If someone is hurt in an accident we would rush out and help. Would we walk away just because we find out he is drunk and that’s why there has been an accident? Or would we preach an anti-drunkness sermon in the ambulance or in the ward?

However, we would continue to point out the dangers of drunken driving. It's the same here with the victims of AIDS who are often the lepers today. When our evangelistic message also has the balance of the social aspect by giving practical CARE to the victims, we become Christ's hands, His feet, His smile, His voice, His heart, His touch! The virus cannot be spread by social contact, hugging, shaking hands, sharing cups, towels, using toilets or by any close contact that doesn't involve the exchange of body fluids. I have counselled several victims of AIDS and also have lived with one such girl for over nine months, caring, eating and doing daily activities together. Being with her has given me a heart for the victims and has taught me a lot about what they really go through.

The worst pain the victims need to face is death, along with the wounds from the past — guilt, rejection, fear, anger, loss of family, friends, jobs, homes, their own identity and self-esteem. The list is long. Just being by their side and helping them face death could be a challenging ministry. They could be helped to die as Christian believers with the knowledge that in death is complete healing.

Giving ourselves to care for them is wonderful but we need also to "be wise as serpents," and guard our children and those we are involved with, from the dangers of the syndrome. We need to sink in solid education in our schools, colleges, homes and churches on Biblical sexuality and other protective measures where role models and values are taught and seen. The world needs to be taught that it's the waste of sex outside marriage that causes grief to God and to us. Let us also remember that real education and learning comes only when the 'doing' begins.

The question of solution to the problem of AIDS still yells a scary silence in its reply. There is no vaccine or cure for AIDS, unless God performs a healing miracle. When many are vulnerable to becoming innocent victims, there need not be a dreading of the infection. Make sure you use disposable needles and have the blood tested for AIDS if you need a transfusion. Above all, keep asking God for the power of the blood of Christ to give you ultimate protection.

The world gives its solutions which only deceives. “Practise safe sex” — is its answer. This is a bit like saying, “The answer to the gun problem is for everyone to buy and wear bullet-proof vests!” God’s solution of staying and living well within the boundaries of His Word is our only all-proof vest. The adolescents and the youth of today ought to take a conscious effort in keeping themselves pure sexually. Abstinence till marriage and remaining faithful to the spouse are the proven age-old solutions. A still further step of protection perhaps could be an AIDS test for both before marriage. This has to be made known to our generation. God’s forgiveness is always there but the consequences have to be faced.

They lie at our doorstep. One in 250 of all adults worldwide are HIV infected, up to one in three in some areas. 1.5 million in India have been tested and found to be positive. The responsibility, the challenge, is ours!

## Amazing Grace

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me,  
His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be,  
As long as life endures.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.*

— John Newton, 1725-1807

**(G)**  
**Counselling**  
**Skills**

