

M I S S I O N TM FRONTIERS

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People Group Theory





Frontier Ventures weaves together spiritual formation, innovation, and missiology in community with global leaders at the edges of mission. Such collaboration for the sake of the gospel nurtures new ways for least reached peoples to experience full life in Christ.

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A podcast seeking to better understand barriers in the way of gospel advance among unreached people groups and explore potential solutions to overcome them. The podcast includes interviews with a wide variety of people in many different mission-related roles.

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Clarity

By **SUE PATT**
A humble servant



Clarity is a beautiful thing. Humans love order, some more than others. We like to identify one thing as something specific and another thing as something else. Black and white is simple, clean, and easy to read. I notice my appreciation for sight when looking at the footage on my outdoor trail camera. At night I can't see colors, but in the absence of light, it's remarkable just how much activity I am able to see. Shades of grey are enough at night to see an amazing array of animals in my suburban yard, even though I can't see very far.

Contrast seeing at night with seeing in the daytime. Colors explode all around us. There is seemingly infinite gradation of green right outside my window contrasted against blue sky and puffy white clouds. Even with the familiarity of this expansive vista, I am awestruck.


I think People Group Theory is like this. There is beauty and grace in the simplicity of description of humans arranged by language, culture, and affinity. It's like seeing at night. This clarity allows us to observe how one people group is similar or different from another. In its simplicity, it gives us keen exposure to realities of strategic thinking about global evangelization, but seeing at night only goes so far.

Look at People Group Theory in real life and vibrant colors emerge, shaping and contrasting conversations in new and exciting directions. Can we live with polarities of night and day? Can a theory be useful and not enough? Might we in the Western expression of Christianity be unknowingly offensive

in how we talk about "the task" or "the unreached," as if people are a problem to be managed? It's time for respectful dialogue.

How do we talk about the beauty of people arranged in groups who either have access to the good news of Jesus or don't, when the very landscape of migration, internet access, globalization, and urbanization are changing the fabric of how people relate to each other? The sand is shifting underneath our feet. God does not change, but the way good news travels or might travel is changing very quickly. We don't need to be threatened by change. Change is the constant, even as God never changes.

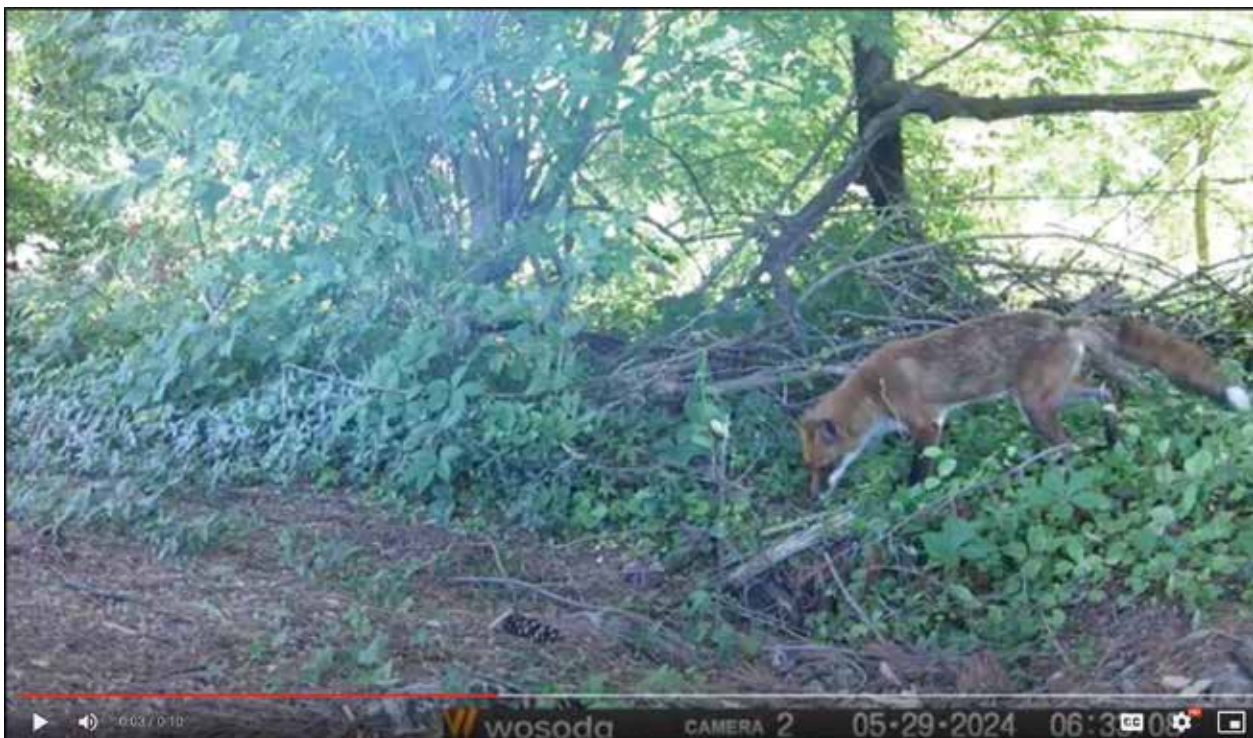
Polarity is like that. Things that seem like black and white opposites are more like shades of vibrant colors when observed through different light. Both are true at the same time, almost as an extension of thought.

So, continue the dialogue with brothers and sisters in your context through the thoughts collected in this issue of *Mission Frontiers*. What are the voices not represented in this issue? Surely, they are even more than the voices represented. Let's listen with curiosity instead of demanding to be heard. 

Details depend on *when* and *how* we view things.



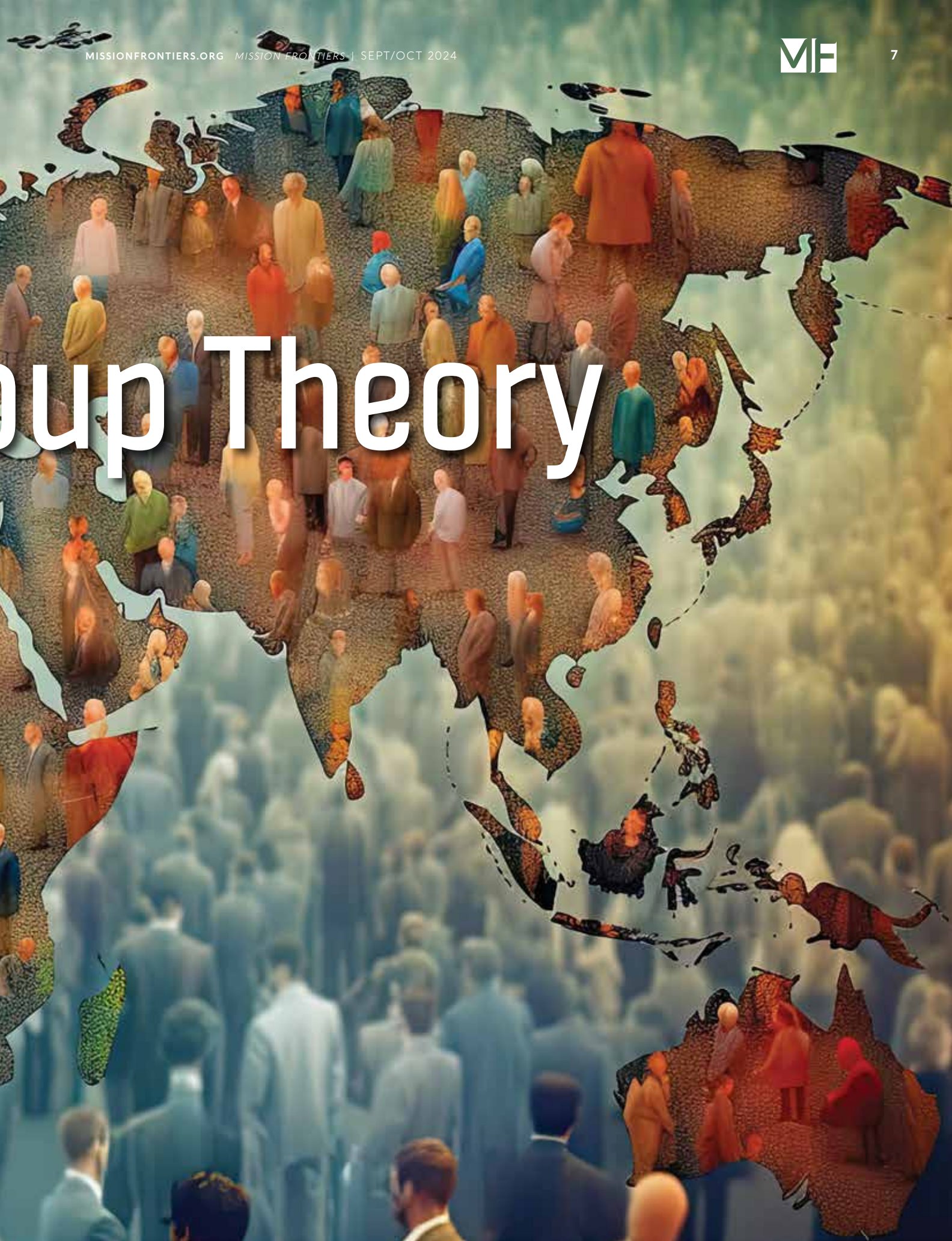
Same land and camera, night and day views. Photos supplied by author and used with permission.



People Gro



Group Theory



The Center of Global Missions Need

By TED ESLER, PhD

Ted Esler served in the Balkans during the 1990s. He held various leadership roles with Pioneers before being appointed the President of Missio Nexus in 2015. Ted has a PhD in Intercultural Studies (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2012).

The Shifting Center of Global Christianity

A 2004 paper by Todd Johnson and Sun Young Chung details an approach to understanding the changing nature of the global church.

They write,

Christians, at any given time in history, have definable geographic locations and a demographic or statistical centre. A single geographic point is here identified as the statistical “centre of gravity” of Christianity.¹

They plotted the growth of Christianity starting in AD 33 and projected where it is heading out to 2100.²

Map 1. Trajectory of the Statistical Center of Gravity of Global Christianity, AD 33–AD 2100



This map has had a profound and helpful impact on how we understand the growth of Christianity in what is called “the Global South” and a concurrent decline in

“the Global North.” First reported by David Barrett in 1970, this shift is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.³ Popularized by Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*, it has helped many people understand this important religious trend that is ongoing.⁴

The phrase “The Center of Gravity for Global Christianity” has also had a profound impact on missiology. It highlights the need for the increased sending of missionaries from the Global South. It forces us to consider the ramifications of a diminishing missionary force from the Global North. It influences our foundational understanding of missions, developed mostly from Western Christianity. It has informed our understanding of Jesus’ command to take the gospel to the nations.

Where the Church Is Not Is the Primary Concern for Missionaries

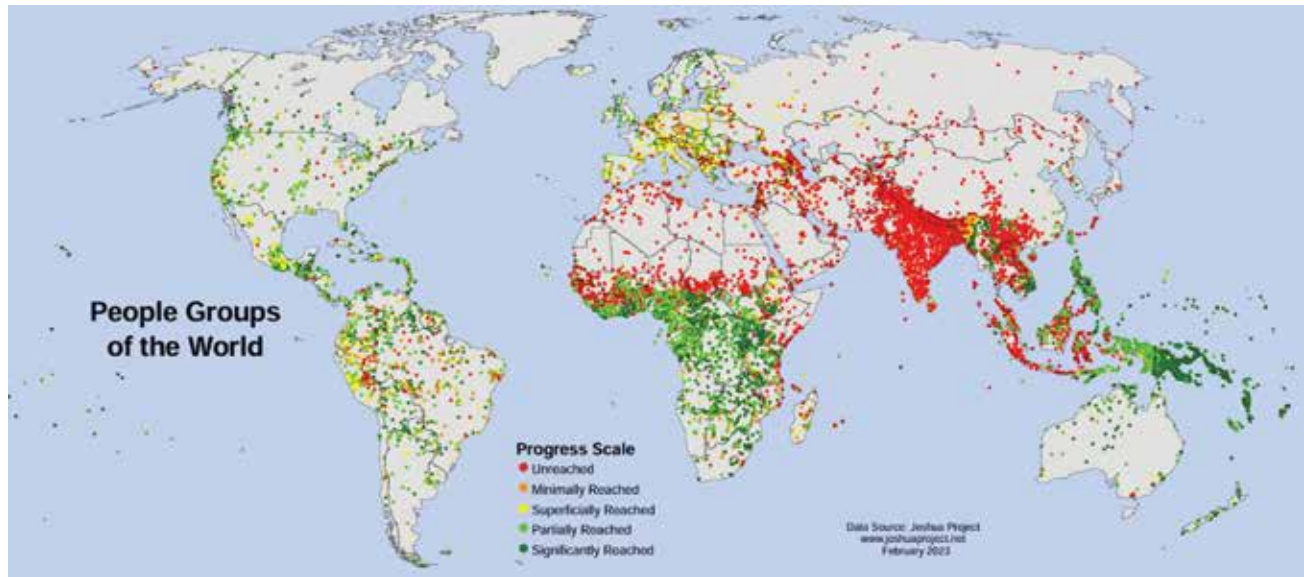
The shifting center of global Christianity focuses our attention on where the church *is*. It tells us where Christians currently live. It highlights the “supply side” of missionary work (i.e., the sources of people, money, prayer, and other resources to carry out the missionary task). Missionaries ask the opposite question. They ask, “Where are there no Christians?” They are more concerned about the “demand side” of the Great Commission task. These are the cultures in the world with the fewest Christians and the least access to the gospel.

1 Todd M. Johnson and Sun Young Chung, “Tracking Global Christianity’s Statistical Centre of Gravity, AD 33–AD 2100,” *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 369 (2004): 166–81.

2 Johnson and Chung, “Tracking Global Christianity’s Statistical Centre of Gravity.”

3 David B. Barrett, “AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa,” *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 233 (1970): 39–54.

4 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).



The Geographic Center of Unreached People Groups Weighted by Population

(Source Data: Joshua Project, 2023)

A more significant question for missionaries to consider (and, in fact, all Christians, since all are charged with the task of taking the gospel to the nations) is: “Where is the center of global missions need?”

The Center of Global Missions Need

By mapping the point on the earth where the most people live in unreached people groups (UPGs),⁵ we get a much better understanding of the remaining missionary task. Using a similar approach that Barrett employed, it is possible to create a “centroid map,” which highlights that point on the earth that represents the greatest number of UPGs, weighted by population.

The map above, from Joshua Project, highlights the status of all UPGs at present.⁶ Each dot represents the approximate location of a UPG.⁷

Using this same data, the following centroid map reveals the geographic location of global missions need.

The spot on the earth with the greatest missionary need is located in Gujarat Province, India, in the city of Kharaghoda.⁸



⁵ Ralph Winter, “The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism,” lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/0213.pdf; lausanne.org/content/the-highest-priority-cross-cultural-evangelism.

⁶ Joshua Project, Datasets found under Resources, accessed 12/11/2023, joshuaproject.net/resources/datasets.

⁷ Joshua Project, accessed 2/1/2024, joshuaproject.net/assets/media/maps/progress-scale-map-plain.pdf.

⁸ The mapping services were provided by Joshua Project.

Winter Coordinates

The data used for this map is readily available on the Joshua Project website. The downloadable database includes additional information, such as the status of Bible translation, primary religion, and many other attributes. Because there is more than just unreached people group data, this same concept can be applied to other attributes as well. For example, one might be interested in a centroid map that shows the coordinates of unreached people groups weighted by population filtered to show only Islamic cultures. We will call this set of geographic coordinates the “Winter Coordinates.” This recognizes Ralph Winter’s emphasis on UPGs and the need to highlight them to the global church. The following, for example, is a map showing the Winter Coordinates for all unreached Muslim people groups:

Here we find the centroid on the edges of Muksat, Oman.



**The Geographic Center of Muslim Unreached People Groups
Weighted by Population**

(Source Data: Joshua Project, 2023)

This same concept of a weighted centroid map works for all religious blocs, as noted in the map on p. 11.

Summary

The center of global missions need highlights for the global Church where we must spend our efforts in reaching the nations for Christ. There are limitations in this representation. Unlike Barrett’s original map, a lack of historical data does not allow us to map the Winter Coordinates over time. The data set used here is among the best available, taken from the Joshua Project. The map will only be as accurate as this data allows. The map does not show the nuances of progress that might be happening among these groups (e.g., it does not differentiate between engaged and unengaged people groups).⁹

Despite these limitations, the center of global missions need gives us a fairly accurate picture of where missionaries should focus a significant part of their efforts. It provides an alternative paradigm to the center of the global Church concept which has been influential for decades. Winter Coordinates might be applied to a host of missiological challenges, including mapping by religious bloc, types of ministries (e.g., Bible translation or training on church planting), frontiers peoples, and similar missiological concepts.

I suggest that whenever missiologists discuss the shifting center of the global church, they also highlight the center of global missions need. It puts the focus on the command of Christ to take the gospel to the nations. While the former concept is about us, the Church, the latter is about others and the need for the gospel to enter these cultures. ❏

⁹ Unengaged UPGs have no indigenous or foreign Christians among them proclaiming Christ with intent to birth and nurture multiple communities of Jesus-followers.



Winter Coordinates of Various Religious Blocs
(Source Data: Joshua Project, 2023)

JOSHUA PROJECT

The Joshua Project brings definition to the unfinished task of completing the Great Commission by identifying and highlighting the over 7,400 people groups of the world that have the least Christian presence in their midst. To do this, we:

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- Catalyze pioneer church planting among least reached peoples
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- Stimulate vision for missions involvement
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The Graying (and Browning) of Frontier Missiology

By **WARRICK FARAH**

Warrick Farah is editor of *Motus Dei* (2021) and coeditor of *Margins of Islam* (2018). He is a facilitator of the Motus Dei Network (www.MotusDei.Network) and a missiologist with One Collective.

As I write this, I'm sitting on a plane, reflecting on a conference I just attended, which was geared towards engaging unreached and unengaged Muslim people groups. Not my first conference on this important topic. Twenty years ago, I was the youngest in the room. But now, as a middle-aged, overweight man on Rogaine, I'm *still* one of the youngest in the room.

My balding head even has some gray hair now. My wonderful colleagues, who are committed to reaching the unreached, are also all graying. These observations aren't merely about hair color. They reflect what we might call the graying of frontier missiology.¹

Even the majority world unreached peoples advocates in the room are older and grayer. It is indeed thrilling to see so many Muslim background believers (MBBs) in these conversations as well. They will one day outnumber Westerners. The room is not just getting grayer; it is also getting browner, with fewer White people. So, our understanding of the unreached peoples concept needs both intergenerational *and* intercultural analysis.

Anomalies in the Frontier Missiology Discourse

I am still filled with a passion to “reach the unreached.” The telos of the *motus Dei* (Latin for “movement of God”) extends to all peoples. The great I AM is no mere tribal or national deity. The basis for our passion to see Jesus worshiped by ALL *ethne* is biblically clear

and compelling. It should break our collective heart to see this vision minimized in some corners of mission.

But today, where are the younger generations of believers in the unreached people group (UPG) rooms and conversations? Among Western evangelicals, in another 20 years, will there be *any* groups to embrace and champion the concept of unreached peoples? There are exceptions, of course, but these tend to prove the rule.

I'm not attempting to identify all the potential reasons for the apparent lack of buy-in from younger Western Christians. (Theological drift is part of the reason, but that is for another article.) I will also try not to be reductionistic. However, let me offer a couple thoughts.

In the West, Gen Z and Millennials are the most stressed out and anxious generation alive today. They have grown up in a fast-paced digital era characterized by constant connectivity and exposure to social media. This constant online presence can contribute to feelings of comparison, self-doubt,

¹ I believe I first heard this phrase from Brad Gill, editor of *IJFM*.



and FOMO (“fear of missing out”). They also have lived through several significant traumatic global events at key periods in their lives. While Gen X and Boomers want to thrive, Gen Z just wants to survive.

In light of this, let’s look at some of the language employed in frontier missiology:

Finishing the Task | Reaching the Unreached
| Changing the World | Fulfilling the Great
Commission | Saving People from Hell | Mobilizing
for the Frontlines | In the Trenches of Ministry |
Behind Enemy Lines | Storming the Gates of Hell

These slogans appeal to some generations. They provide a sense of responsible, manageable urgency for Boomers and Gen Xers. But for Millennials and Gen Z, the same urgency might simply add to their stress and anxiety. For Gen Z to be told that they need to rescue a mission in decline or to imply that they are responsible for the status of world evangelization seems counterproductive.²

Additionally, we might benefit from more holistic and self-critical perspectives on mission. We have scales for the progress of evangelization, but we might also include scales for the progress of transformation. For example, if we say that Arab Muslims are the least reached and least engaged people cluster in the world, then we might say that American evangelicals are the least-transformed people cluster in the world. Many younger American Christians and Majority World leaders are absolutely disillusioned by the moral and political compromise they see in the American church. To give our lives for the unreached while ignoring the problems “at home” looks like escapism and hypocrisy.

² Daniel Yang, “Beyond Growth and Decline,” *Outreachmagazine.Com* (blog), 2023, outreachmagazine.com/features/73902-beyond-growth-and-decline.html.

Intergenerational and Intercultural Re-posturing

So, the UPG discourse needs to re-theologize some of our posturing: not the concept but the language or framework we use to discuss it. This may help not only with mobilization but even with clarifying the UPG concept itself. Leslie Newbiggin was prescient in this regard:

I find it strange that conferences about mission and evangelism are often pervaded... by a kind of anxiety and guilt—as though it were a program that we have a responsibility to carry out and about which we’ve not been very successful. Isn’t it remarkable that according to the New Testament the whole thing begins with an enormous explosion of joy? The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising God! It seems to me, the resurrection of Jesus was a kind of nuclear explosion which sent out a radioactive cloud, not lethal, but life-giving, and the mission of the church is simply the continuing communication of that joy—joy in the Lord.³

Instead of an urgency of responsibility, perhaps we need an urgency of joy and love. Or instead of urgency, we can speak of an apostolic calmness or a non-anxious resolve.

Bible Project’s visual commentary on Genesis 1 points out that in contrast to the Babylonian and Egyptian creation myths, we have an all-powerful Royal Artist creating the cosmos—not from violence, but in order and peace and harmony.⁴ This kind of language matches the narrative aspirations of both Gen Z and the cultural values of much of Asia and Africa.

And through faith in Christ, the “new creation” is breaking into the present, including the “glory and honor of the nations” (Rev 21:26 NIV). Through our love and unity, the world will know (John 13:35). Jesus says, “I am making everything new” (Rev 21:5). He is healing “the nations” (Rev 22:2).

³ Leslie Newbiggin, *Signs amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003), 121.

⁴ Jon Collins and Tim Mackie, “Understand God’s Creation Story | Genesis 1 Commentary Video,” Bible Project, 2020, bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1/.

In light of this, we might brainstorm a few shifts that need to take place in our framework. I am not married to these proposals; they are simply suggestions hoping that others may offer improvements!

1. *From Closure Missiology to Holistic Disciple Making.* In the NT, the future coming of King Jesus inspires ethical considerations like integrity and justice, not simply a warning to complete our missional requirements. The Great Commission was a brilliant metaphor in its day, probably originating in the 1600s and popularized by Hudson Taylor two centuries later. But as Chris Wright summarizes, “The Great Commission is an expanding and self-replicating task, not a ticking clock for the end times.”⁵
2. *From Pathology to Inclusivity.* Jay Matenga remarks that mission is often framed as a people living in a state of pathology: they are broken, and we have the solution.⁶ Unconsciously, this implies a superior/inferior dynamic between “us” and “them.” Instead, a giftive⁷ mission metaphor creates hospitable space for people to explore being “grafted in” (Rom 11:25) to the covenantal people of God in Christ. In this way, planting people-specific churches is not seen as exclusive but inclusive in nature.
3. *From Missional to Movemental.* The missional conversation has transpired over the past 25 years in North America when the church has simultaneously lost 40 million members. Perhaps the best form of a missional church is a movemental church that multiplies in unexpected places.⁸
4. *From Unreached to Emerging.* The term “emerging” may be a more positive and dynamic term compared to “unreached.” It suggests that

5 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 35.

6 “The Wellbeing Imperative,” *Jay's World* (blog), 2023, jaymatenga.com/wellbeing-imperative/.

7 Frances S. Adeney and Terry Muck, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 328.

8 Wes Watkins, “From Missio Dei to Motus Dei: The Recovery of Movement,” *Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS)* (blog), 2024, abtslebanon.org/2024/05/23/from-missio-dei-to-motus-dei-the-recovery-of-movement.

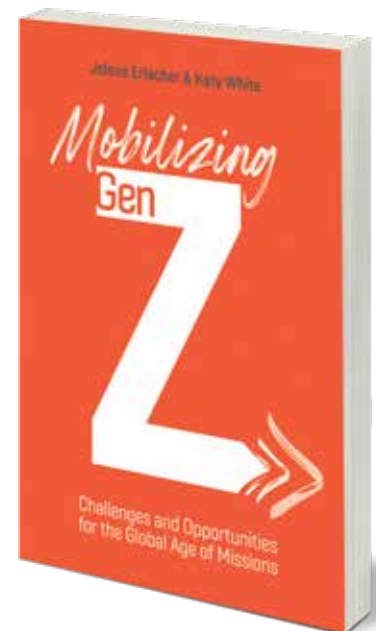
these peoples are in the process of God's sovereign activity rather than being static and neglected. It also implies potential and progress, which may equip others for more hopeful and proactive approaches to catalyzing movements.

Our Collective Challenge

At the moment of writing this, my 19-year-old son is in North Africa on a short-term trip. The ideas in this short article were field-tested with him and his peers as a way to retool our framework for mission to peoples who have precious few believers and local churches. By using biblical concepts that focus on hospitality, joy, healing, life, justice, and equipping, it might be possible to appeal to the aspirations and values of Millennials, Gen Z, and Majority World MBBs while providing a positive and less stressful framework for the *motus Dei*, which is to redeem the nations back to Jesus. In him, a sacrificial adventure of joy awaits. ❏

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People Groups and the Bible

The following article is a condensed and revised version of an original article published in *Missiology: An International Review* 49:3, (2021), entitled “The Universal Particularism of *Panta ta Ethne*: A Biblical Case for the Continued Viability of the People Group Concept in Mission.” Used with permission from Sage Publishing. Last published in *Mission Frontiers*, Jan/Feb 2022.

By **DAVE EARL DATEMA**

Dave Earl Datema (dave.datema@frontierventures.org) serves as Missiology Catalyst for Frontier Ventures. He has served in various roles within Frontier Ventures since 1999. Dave is married with four children and lives in Pasadena, CA.



Sometimes we hear that people groups are a recent invention of social science. In the following article I answer this critique by showing that, in fact, people groups are as old as Scripture itself.

Human Grouping in the Old Testament

The Old Testament portrays the people of the world with a diversity of terms that describe very large human groupings to relatively small sub groups or segments of them. The largest human grouping would be humankind without distinction, as in Genesis 1:26, “Let Us make man (אָדָם, *adam*) in Our image”¹ and 6:5, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man (*adam*) was great on the earth.” In these cases, *adam* refers to “humankind, mankind, a class of being created by God without regard to sex, with a focus as a class of creature, distinct from animals, plants, or even spiritual beings.”² Another example is in Genesis 11:1, “Now the whole earth (אֶרֶץ, *eretz*) used the same language and the same words.” This is an anthropomorphic use of *eretz* to refer to all humankind.

The next layer of human grouping found in the OT is the idea of nations or peoples. It is well known that גּוֹי (*goy*)

and אָמ (*am*) are the most common words for nations/peoples. In one dictionary, they are defined similarly as “a people group sharing a common ancestry and/or sociopolitical identity” with an addendum for *am*, “also used for groups of people smaller than a nation, such as the inhabitants of a city.” Note the phrase “people group” in the very definition and the variety of group size the word *am* covers. *Goy* indicates “a common sociopolitical identity that can be defined by ancestry, language, land, and government... as Israel’s national identity becomes more clear in the OT the majority of the occurrences use some form of the plural to refer to the surrounding non-Israelite nations.”³ Thus *goy* can be applied to human groupings defined by a diversity of affinities/boundaries (ancestry, language, land, government) and became synonymous with non-Israelite gentiles. In the Septuagint, *goy* is usually translated as ἔθνος (*ethnos*), while *am* is generally used to denote God’s people Israel and is usually translated as λαός (*laos*).⁴

The fact that language was a major defining element of nations and peoples can be seen in Daniel. Seven

3 M. Minard, “Gentiles,” in *The Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Mangum D., Brown D.R., Klippenstein R., et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014).

4 I note here other less common words used for non-Israelites, those outside the covenant YHWH made with Israel: יִרְכָּן (*nokri*) foreignness, זָר (*zar*) someone strange or foreign, לָרֶע (*arel*) uncircumcised, and גֵּר (*ger*) and בְּשׂוּת (*tosab*) sojourner or alien (Minard, “Gentiles”).

1 All verses of Scripture in NASB 1995 version.

2 J.A. Swanson (1997a), “132 I. אָדָם (’ā·dām),” *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 1997).

times reference is made to “peoples (*am*), nations (הַמָּצֵה, *ummah*), and men of every language (לְשׁוֹן, *lishan*)” (3:4, 7, 29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14). It would seem fair, in a very general sense, to equate the modern term “ethnolinguistic” to this level of grouping, especially since the OT is full of specific examples of such, both small (Kenites, Kenizzites, Jebusites, etc. of Gen 15:19–21) and large (Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians—Israel’s major enemies).

A third and smaller layer of human groupings can yet be found. In Genesis 12:3 we read, “And in you all the families (מִשְׁפָּחָה, *mishpachah*) of the earth will be blessed.” Although *mishpachah* has a wide range of meanings (people, kingdom, tribe, clan, family, group, genus, kind)⁵, the overwhelming majority of its occurrences in the OT are translated as “clans” (NIV, 253 of 296 occurrences) or “families” (NASB95, 289 of 303 occurrences).⁶ The word refers to “a family group larger than an individual household but smaller than an entire tribe.”⁷ Another example of such grouping is found in the account of Achan in Joshua 7:14–18, where God first chooses the tribes (שֵׁבֶט, *shebet*), then the families (*mishpachah*), then the households (בַּיִת, *bayit*), and finally Achan himself. The people of Israel in the Bible are thus presented in segmented groupings and the references to such (tribes, families, households) in the OT are numerous. A good example of these distinctions is found in the phrase “families (*mishpachah*) of the nations (*goy*)” in Psalm 22:27 and “families (*mishpachah*) of the peoples (*am*)” in Psalm 96:7.⁸ As early as Genesis 10:5, 20 and 31, the descendants of Noah’s sons are each described in terms of families (*mishpachah*), languages (*lishan*), lands (*eretz*), and nations (*goy*). In this case there is a mixture of terms representing smaller (*mishpachah*) and larger (*lishan, eretz, goy*) groups.⁹

5 J.A. Swanson (1997b), “5476 מִשְׁפָּחָה (miš-pā-hā(h)), in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*.

6 *Logos Bible Software 8.15* (n.d.) Bible Word Study: *mishpachah*. See especially the census of Israel in Numbers 26 (ex. v.7) and tribal land allotments in Joshua 13 (ex. v.15) and 15.

7 T. Blair, “Family,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook* Mangum.

8 Psalm 96 possesses three levels of description for human groupings in the first seven verses: all the earth (*eretz*), nations (*goy*) and peoples (*am*), and families (*mishpachah*).

9 Minard, “Gentiles.”

Human Grouping in the NT

The NT contains a similar diversity of words to describe humanity. The top layer once again consists of humanity as a whole, such as John 1:26, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (κόσμος, *kosmos*)!”¹⁰ Also Luke 2:1, “Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth (οἰκουμένη, *oikoumene*).” In both cases, the “world/earth” is a reference to all the people in the world.

The next layer of human grouping can be seen in the use of *ethnos*, nation or people, which is the NT equivalent of *goy*. Importantly, “in the majority of NT occurrences... it appears in the plural and takes on a more technical sense that is usually translated ‘Gentile,’¹¹ contrasting non-Jews with Jews.”¹² These first two layers of human grouping can be seen in Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world (*oikoumene*) as a testimony to all the nations (*ethnos*), and then the end will come.” Another word of note is *laos*, in significant ways the NT equivalent of *am*. While the singular form normally refers to the Jewish people, it is often used for non-Jews in the plural, as is the case in Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 11:9, 13:7, and 14:6, all of which refer, in differing order, to nations (*ethnos*), tribes (φυλή, *phyle*), peoples (*laos*), and tongues/languages (γλῶσσα, *glossa*).¹³ These phrases are used to describe the entire breadth of humanity in all its forms and varieties. The word *phyle* is used whenever the NT speaks of the tribes of Israel. In Revelation, it takes on an eschatological sense and “means generally *people* (as an ethnic collective).”¹⁴ As for *glossa*, in addition to its basic meaning for the tongue, “it could denote a particular language

10 Also Rom 5:12–13; 1 Cor 1:27–28; 2 Cor 5:19.

11 Similar to the OT (see footnote 2), the NT employs other less common words to describe the gentile world: ἔθνικός (*ethnikos*) a pagan or heathen person; ἀκροβυστία (*akrobystia*) the uncircumcised; Ἑλλήν (*Hellen*) of Greek descent or a non-Jew living in Graeco-Roman culture; ἐβόμαι (*sebomai*) devout non-Jew or God-fearer; προσήλυτος (*proselytos*) a proselyte or convert to Judaism; ξένος (*xenos*) a foreigner (Minard, “Gentiles”).

12 Minard, “Gentiles.”

13 Revelation is significantly dependent on Daniel, thus this grouping of words parallels that in Daniel referenced earlier.

14 H. Paulsen, φυλή, in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Balz H. and Schneider G. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1990).

Table 1: Terms Designating Human Grouping in Scripture


Group Types	Hebrew Terms Used	Greek Terms Used	Affinities/Boundaries	Modern Terms*
All Humanity	<i>adam,</i> <i>eretz</i>	<i>kosmos,</i> <i>oikoumene</i>	human	homo sapiens
Nations/Peoples Non-Israelites, Gentiles Tongues/Languages	<i>goy, am</i> <i>nokri</i> <i>zar</i> <i>arel</i> <i>ger</i> <i>tosab</i> <i>lishan</i>	<i>ethnos, laos</i> <i>ethnikos</i> <i>akrobystia</i> <i>Hellen</i> <i>sebomai</i> <i>proselytos</i> <i>xenos</i> <i>glossa</i>	ancestry, language, land, government	race, ethnicity, language, ethno-linguistic, nation-state, cultural blocs, mega-peoples, macro-peoples
Tribes	<i>shebet</i> <i>ummah</i>	<i>phyle</i>	kinship, lineage	tribe, socio-peoples, mini-peoples
Families/Clans	<i>mishpachah</i>	<i>patria,</i> <i>syngenes</i>	smaller kinship segment	micro-peoples, extended family
Households	<i>bayit</i>	<i>oikos</i>	smallest kinship segment	family

* These are only rough comparisons and by no means an attempt to suggest exact equivalence of concepts with the biblical terms. For instance, there seems to be no biblical equivalence of the modern idea of a nuclear family.

(Acts 2:4) and could thus be used as a distinguishing mark of a people group (Rev 7:9).¹⁵

The tribe, clan/families, household segments in the OT are not as clearly defined in the NT, not because they ceased to exist but because they simply were not as prominent in a nation subjugated under Roman rule. The tribe, clan, or extended family was usually designated by *πατριά* (*patria*), as in Luke 2:4, "Joseph also went up from Galilee ... because he was of the house and family (*patria*) of David." Similarly, *συγγενής* (*syngenes*) is used to describe the idea of extended family relatives, "And behold, even your relative (*syngenes*) Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age" (Luke 1:36). But the main social unit in the NT is the *οἶκος* (*oikos*), the house or household, an equivalent to the OT *bayit*. In Acts 16:31, the Philippian jailer is told, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household (*oikos*)." In Mark 6:4, these segments are put together, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives (*syngenes*) and in his own household (*oikos*)."¹⁶

The table above summarizes this overview of how human groups are described in the biblical record.

Biblical writers understood (1) the basic unity of all humankind, (2) human difference based on various and diverse affinities/boundaries that created separate nations/peoples (horizontal segmentation), and (3) segmentation within each nation/people based on kinship/lineage (vertical segmentation). I believe the overview of Scripture above shows that people groups are an ancient phenomenon and were not introduced by people group proponents in the twentieth century.¹⁷ People are always seen as members of such a variety of groups that many terms are needed to fully explain the subsets and segments. The Bible highlights this "groupness" in its universal treatment of humanity. Biblical authors understood these human groupings in all their variety and complexity; a mosaic of nations/peoples, languages, tribes, clans, and households. 

15 J. Lookadoo, "Body," in *The Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

16 Blair, "Family."

17 S. Hawthorne, "A Biblical Understanding of People Groups," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2020).

Response to Urbanization and Measuring the Remaining Task

By **DAVE EARL DATEMA**, Last published in *Mission Frontiers*, Sept/Oct 2021.

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Justin Long, in his article, “Urbanization and Measuring the Remaining Task” (*Mission Frontiers*, Sept/Oct 2021) has put his finger on what I believe is the number one problem related to current people group thinking. For decades, numerous voices have cast doubt on whether the people group paradigm can adequately describe human grouping in urban contexts. As centers of amalgamation, assimilation, and integration of ethnicities, languages, and cultures, cities create hybrid or hyphenated identities over time.

“Fusion cuisine” is one product of such blending, yet such fusion goes far beyond food. It takes place within people as distinct communities living side-by-side in densely populated areas interact with others daily. The traditional framework of people groups, in which peoples are seen as clearly distinct groups with clear lines of demarcation, does not work in cities in a similar way. So does urban reality doom the people group paradigm to irrelevance?

It depends on how you define people groups. Historically, there have been two primary ways of defining them, one narrow and simple, the other broad and complex. The simple definition is best known as the ethnolinguistic definition, meaning that the peoples of the world are categorized according to shared ethnicity and language. The advantage of the ethnolinguistic definition is that it is quantifiable. This is the standard way peoples have been categorized, not only by missionaries, but also by the United Nations, national governments, etc.¹

By contrast, the “official” definitions for people groups, hammered out by American evangelical mission leaders, have been much more complex. These definitions of people groups did not neglect ethnolinguistic realities

but also recognized other factors. As early as 1978, Ralph Winter was defining “hidden peoples” more broadly: “Any linguistic, cultural, or sociological group defined in terms of its primary affinity (not secondary or trivial affinities), which cannot be won by E-1 methods and drawn into an existing fellowship.”² Here the word “sociological” broadens the types of grouping possible far beyond ethnicity and language. The emphasis is on “primary affinity” and is not necessarily ethnolinguistic.

Then, in 1982, leaders gathered to agree on a standard definition of a people group:

A people group is a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these. For evangelistic purposes, it is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a Church Planting Movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.³

Notice that the first sentence includes much more than ethnicity and language as acceptable affinities. The second sentence, added at Winter’s impetus, puts the emphasis simply on “group” and emphasizes “barriers of understanding or acceptance.” In other words, a group is identified not only because it represents a new language (barrier of understanding) but also because it may represent other barriers created due to religion,

² Ralph D. Winter, *Penetrating the Last Frontiers* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1978) 42.

³ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 536.

¹ www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/.

class, caste, etc. (barrier of acceptance), perhaps even within one ethnolinguistic group. By this definition, people groups cannot be reduced to ethnicity and language.

Even after the establishment of the 1982 definition as an industry standard (which saw the demise of the phrase “hidden peoples”), and even though Winter helped create that newer definition, he felt that people groups were still being interpreted ethnolinguistically. So once again he attempted to change the focus with his description of “unimax peoples.” “A unimax people is the **maximum** sized group sufficiently **unified** to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where ‘unified’ refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the gospel.”⁴ Again, there is no reference to the type of affinity. Winter was less concerned about *how* groups held together and more concerned with *why* the gospel wasn’t getting to them, less concerned about *affinity* and more concerned about *access*, less concerned about *bonding* and more concerned about *barriers*.

The differences in these views of what constitutes a people group are important. Winter and Koch rightly asked, “What if an ethnolinguistic people is actually a cluster of unimax peoples, and while one of them is experiencing a church-planting explosion, other groups in the cluster have little or nothing happening within them?”⁵ Not satisfied with identification of ethnolinguistic affinity, they have pushed us to discover where and why the spread of the gospel may be hindered *within* a given ethnolinguistic group.

With that history in view, let’s return to the question: Does urban reality doom the people group paradigm to irrelevance?

If people groups are seen *exclusively* as ethnolinguistic groupings, then I believe they have indeed become somewhat irrelevant for urban contexts. I say “somewhat” because we need to remember that even with all the realities mentioned above, people in urban contexts can also remain very devoted to their home cultures. Not all people in urban environments mix in equal measure. Traditional norms often remain very strong, as illustrated by mother-tongue transfer to younger generations and marriage

within existing groups. It is not accurate to portray cities as bastions of indiscriminate and wholesale mixture.

However, given that caveat, it remains obvious that if we equate people groups with ethnolinguistic peoples, cities create problems too difficult to overcome. Rather than defending ethnolinguistic people groups in this way, I think we need to remind ourselves that the actual definitions hammered out decades ago allow for a more elastic, non-ethnolinguistic definition.

I believe that these classic people group definitions remain valid in urban settings. Under this paradigm, we are looking for groups (whatever their affinity) that appear to exist outside gospel witness. In most cases, this will be due to barriers of acceptance. Regardless of the fusion of peoples in urban settings, they are still forming into groups. That is what matters, not the particular and varied affinities they are grouped around. We don’t have to abandon people group thinking to understand urban life. But we do have to return to the earlier definitions to be reminded of the breadth of possibility human grouping takes.

Finally, this line of thinking can be taken too far. One of the weaknesses of the 1982 definition is that it allows for literally millions of human groupings encapsulated in “a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these.” While a purely ethnolinguistic focus is too limiting, a focus on every conceivable human grouping in the world is far too broad. I believe the ethnolinguistic focus has served us well, but when an issue like urban contexts limits its effect, we need to delve deeper, but not too deep.

Our goal is not to describe every human grouping on this planet. It is to notice when the gospel is not getting somewhere, and then to prayerfully and humbly seek God for the wisdom needed to discern the barriers as well as the bridges to that group. The complex realities of human grouping will always frustrate simple definition and people group databases. They can be discerned only by workers embedded in urban centers over many years. Today’s urban missionary needs to become expert in new forms of research, like social network analysis and become reacquainted with old forms of research, like prayer. It is hard to imagine a more exciting vocation!

⁴ Winter and Koch, 534–535.

⁵ Winter and Koch, 539.

Should We Prioritize Work among UPGs?

By **ELLIOT CLARK**

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For multiple decades, evangelical missiologists have emphasized the need to focus the church's missionary efforts on unreached people groups (UPGs). Ever since Lausanne '74 when Ralph Winter exposed the "hidden peoples" of the world and redefined the nations (*panta ta ethne*) along ethnolinguistic lines, missionaries and mission agencies have increasingly prioritized work among UPGs. This tectonic shift in global missiology, now 50 years on, has subsequently reshaped the landscape of evangelical missions.

For many, defining *panta ta ethne* as discrete people groups and designing strategies to reach them is simply presumed. However, in recent years, some have begun to question this approach. Alongside those offering a minority report, this article will argue the prevailing definition of *panta ta ethne* is exegetically and sociologically untenable, and thus missiological strategies based on that definition are inherently prone to error.

In what follows, I will begin by making some exegetical observations that call into question the practice of defining *panta ta ethne* along sociocultural lines. This groundwork is crucial, not least because all methodology is built on theology. I will then transition to mention some historical and sociological realities that further undermine the prevailing definition of UPGs. After those considerations, I'll conclude with some practical suggestions for contemporary missions. My aim is not merely to critique but to offer constructive proposals for a faithful way forward.

Exegetical Observations

I believe that understanding the *ethne* as ethnolinguistic or sociocultural groups is biblically unsustainable. Furthermore, recent calls to "finish the task" by identifying and prioritizing work among each and every one of those discreet groups misread Jesus' promise (Matt 24:14) and commission (Matt 28:18–20) to his first followers. Here are five reasons we should reconsider the prevailing sociocultural definition of *panta ta ethne*.

- 1. Throughout the Bible, the term *ethne* (nations) typically refers to gentiles or non-Jews.** This is true in both the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Exod 15:14; Num 14:14–16) as well as in the New Testament. In Matthew's Gospel specifically, the *ethne* are consistently gentiles, those outside the covenant people of Israel. Williams and Moss make this point and then suggest *panta ta ethne* in Matthew 28:19 is likely meant to include both Jews and gentiles, thus referring to "all of humanity."¹

¹ Jarvis J. Williams and Trey Moss, "Focus on 'All Nations' as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, & Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 132.



2. **Defining the *ethne* as sociocultural people groups prefers a modern anthropological definition over a biblical-theological one.** When Jesus and the apostles spoke of the *ethne*, their primary reference point would have been the Old Testament, specifically the table of nations in Genesis 10 and the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 (see Gal 3:8, 14), as well as Isaiah's prophecies about the servant of the Lord.² They weren't operating within the sociological categories of today when using the term. Thus, the prevailing definition of *ethne* is anachronistic.
3. **The term *pas/panta* (all) does not always mean "each and every" in the New Testament.** Even if we grant that *ethne* implies people groups, it doesn't follow that we should understand Jesus' promise in Matthew 24:14 to mean the gospel will be preached to each and every UPG. As Schreiner explains, "the word 'all' is not invariably used in a comprehensive sense." For example, Matthew says that "Jerusalem and *all Judea* and *all the region* about the Jordan" were going out to John (Matt 3:5, ESV). Thus, he cautions against reading *panta ta ethne* in a literalistic way or as a kind of "mathematical formula."³
4. **Jesus and the apostles, though speaking truthfully, weren't necessarily speaking with modern, scientific precision.** When we come to the account of Pentecost, Luke says that *panta ta ethne* were present to hear the gospel (Acts 2:5). This leaves us with a couple of interpretive options. Luke could have been speaking hyperbolically or colloquially. Or he could have been stating that *all nations* (perhaps according to a common Jewish understanding) were in fact represented in Jerusalem that day. But he certainly wasn't writing with the same scientific precision presumed by a UPG definition.
5. **The apostles' statements about the gospel's advance suggest they believed "all nations" heard the gospel in their lifetimes.** In addition to Luke's record of all the nations present at Pentecost, Paul says the gospel was bearing fruit "in the whole world" (Col 1:5); it had been preached "in all creation" (Col 1:23). God enabled him to proclaim the gospel so "all the gentiles" (*panta ta ethne*) might hear it (2 Tim 4:17). These and similarly expansive statements from Paul (Rom 1:8; 10:18) suggest he understood the promise of Matthew 24:14 had been fulfilled, at least in some way, in his lifetime.

If these observations are correct—in fact, if any one of them is correct—then it calls into question the definition of UPGs that drives much of missions strategy today. But it's not just that the accepted understanding of UPGs is biblically questionable; it's also historically and sociologically problematic.

We need workers focused on reaching language groups that won't be reached through shared majority languages.

² T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 677.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 811.

Sociological Considerations

Prioritizing work among UPGs has some basic real-world problems. As Darren Carlson and I have **suggested elsewhere** (scan the QR code), even if we tried to preach the gospel to each and every ethnolinguistic group, it would be practically impossible. Some groups, as defined by UPG proponents, have gone extinct, many before the gospel reached them. The same could be said for various languages.



Furthermore, defining UPGs as discreet entities employs an outdated anthropological model. Instead of an essentialist understanding of culture, we should recognize that so-called “people groups” are rarely fixed, clear, and distinct from one another due to a variety of historical and cultural factors.

Lee and Park argue that the common understanding of UPGs is at odds with contemporary sociology. More specifically, they criticize “essentialized conceptualizations” that don’t account for the “fluid and porous nature of social boundaries as well as the reality of globalization and hybridization of contexts.”⁴ In short, defining UPGs as discrete and self-contained entities is based on obsolete, simplistic, and often errant understandings of societies and cultures.

Practical Suggestions

What does this mean for our missiology? If identifying, isolating, and prioritizing work among UPGs according to the dominant missiological definition is both biblically untenable and sociologically unworkable, what should we do? My simple proposal is to emulate Paul’s example. What follows are four basic principles from his ministry that are pertinent to this discussion.

1. Aim for widespread and indiscriminate evangelism. As many have noted, Paul was motivated by his ambition to “preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (Rom 15:20). In line with that Pauline aim, I would say Ralph Winter was basically right to expose the problem of hidden peoples and forgotten places largely untouched

⁴ Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park, “Beyond People Group Thinking: A Critical Reevaluation of Unreached People Groups,” *Missiology* 46, no. 3 (2018): 214.



by the gospel. I wholeheartedly affirm the value of strategically directing missions efforts to such areas of recognized need. However, in my experience, when missionaries prioritize narrow UPG strategies, that can sometimes constrain the broader Pauline goal of widespread evangelism and winning “as many as possible” (1 Cor 9:19).

Let me give an example. Years ago, our family served with a team focused on reaching a specific UPG. Initially, however, we saw the most fruit from those within the majority language. In response, our leadership instructed us to avoid those new believers and seekers. In effect, they wanted us to prefer one group over another. More than just strategically imprudent, I found it biblically indefensible. And as an expression of partiality, I believe it was potentially sinful. Contrary to such a practice, I would encourage missionaries to spread the gospel indiscriminately among all groups.

2. Strive for maturity and faithfulness. Paul the missionary was concerned about far more than just the pioneer advance of the gospel.⁵ He disciplined believers to maturity (Col 1:28). He taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). He was constantly anxious for the churches in his care (2 Cor 11:28), and he vigorously defended them from false teachers. Paul then entrusted his gospel, and that same pattern of ministry, to faithful local leaders (2 Tim 2:2).

When such maturity and faithfulness are the goal, it challenges the metrics behind UPGs, including the arbitrary 2% threshold. Perhaps that number could indicate a movement’s viability and reproducibility,

⁵ See Elliot Clark, *Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).



but it says nothing of its biblical acuity and gospel fidelity. In other words, it tells us little about the quality of our work. Over the past few decades, an emphasis on UPGs has led missionaries and mission agencies to abandon “reached” fields prematurely, with devastating results. However, if we measure success by the holiness of our disciples and the health of our churches—and ultimately by our faithful stewardship of the gospel—we may avoid such errors.

- 3. Promote unity in Christ’s body.** Among the most striking missiological approaches of Paul was his dogged commitment to unity in the church among those from different social classes and various ethnic backgrounds. Sadly, focusing on UPGs can sometimes engender the exact opposite. Missionaries, following the Homogeneous Unit Principle, will often seek to stimulate the gospel’s spread through existing cultural groups. Such a practice promotes uniformity more than unity and can unintentionally accommodate sinful tendencies toward exclusion and discrimination.

Of course, there are peoples and places where linguistic or geographic barriers will require distinct congregations. But many times, missionaries foster divisions in the church where they don’t exist in society. Functionally, there’s no reason why groups that live together, school together, and work together cannot also worship together. Theologically, they must! Granted, building unity among diverse and even hostile groups can be extremely difficult. But this is worthy gospel work. Rather than advocating for segregation, missionaries should promote counter-cultural unity in the body.


- 4. Value shared-language ministry.** When we look at Paul—and the rest of the New Testament—we find a surprising willingness to operate in the shared language of Greek throughout the Roman Empire. Today, we have similar opportunities around the world. That’s not to minimize the necessity for many missionaries to engage in rigorous language study, nor is it meant to diminish “heart language” ministry. We need workers focused on reaching language groups that won’t be reached through shared majority languages. However, as we engage in those essential efforts, we shouldn’t overlook the amazing value of trade languages, including the ascendancy of English globally.

Shared languages can, in some contexts, foster unity and provide opportunities for gospel partnership. Where present, they can also give more immediate opportunities for evangelism and discipleship. Also, many trade languages, such as Russian or French, already have established theological vocabulary and published Christian resources. For these reasons and more, missionaries should consider the value of gospel ministry in the *lingua franca*.

Clearly, this is just a simple sketch of possible priorities for our gospel work as we seek to obey our Lord’s commission. Yet, that simplicity is part of my point. At the end of the day, I’m not convinced we need to spend more of our limited time, energy, and resources for a vision of people group ministry that the Bible never envisioned nor prescribed.

Does that mean we no longer conduct ethnographic studies, evaluate minority languages, record religious percentages, or adopt people groups? Not necessarily. But we should be careful when emphasizing UPGs that we don’t neglect the “weightier matters” of missions. Wherever we go, we should prioritize broad evangelism and deep discipleship, gospel unity and ministry partnerships, healthy churches and qualified leaders. Without these, our task remains unfinished.





THE END

Has Come

Why an Ethnolinguistic Reading of Matthew 24:14 is Extrabiblical

By **BRAD VAUGHN**

Brad Vaughn (PhD, SEBTS; fka “Jackson Wu”) served in East Asia for 15 years. He is a theologian, missiologist, and the author of several books, including *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes* (InterVarsity Press) and *One Gospel for All Nations* (William Carey Publishing).

Matthew 24:14 states, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (NRSV). This verse is often read as a directive for modern Christian missions to evangelize all ethnolinguistic groups with the purpose of hastening Christ’s second coming. (This view is integrally linked with popular understandings of “people group theory.”) However, an exegetical and contextual analysis of Matthew 24 within the framework of first-century events offers a different perspective, indicating that this prophecy was fulfilled within the lifetime of the early church.

The Context of Matthew 24

The chapter’s opening sets the context for interpreting Jesus’ meaning. Matthew 24:1–2 says,

As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

The discourse begins with Jesus prophesying the destruction of the temple. His statement that “not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down” is a direct prediction of what occurred in AD 70 when the Romans, led by Titus, dismantled the temple during the siege of Jerusalem.

Then, in verse 3, we read:

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

The disciples’ question in Matthew 24:3 links the destruction of the temple with signs of Jesus’ coming and the end of the age. This suggests an intertwining of the temple’s fall with broader eschatological events, as understood by the early Christians.

Indicators of First-Century Fulfillment

What about the rest of the chapter? The burden of proof falls on those who interpret Matthew 24 as primarily (if at all) referring to some final fulfillment in our future. Especially in light of 24:1–3, we have ample evidence to suggest that the chapter describes events that occurred in the first century.

1. False Christs and Prophets

Matthew 24:4–5, 11–24 warn of false messiahs and prophets who will deceive many. The first century saw numerous messianic figures, such as Theudas and the Egyptian prophet (described in Acts and by Josephus), who led people astray, fitting into the deception theme outlined by Jesus.

2. Wars and Rumors of Wars

Verses 6–7 speak of wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. The period leading up to AD 70 was marked by significant regional conflicts within the Roman Empire, including Jewish revolts and the broader geopolitical unrest in areas like Gaul and Britain.

3. Famines and Earthquakes

Verse 7 mentions famines and earthquakes. Acts and other historical sources like Tacitus and Suetonius record famines and natural disasters during this era, particularly under the reigns of Claudius and Nero.

4. Persecutions

Verses 9–10 predict persecutions against Jesus' followers, a reality well documented in the New Testament and historical accounts regarding the early Church's suffering under Rome.

5. The Abomination of Desolation

Verse 15 references the “abomination of desolation,” a term drawn from Daniel used here to likely signify the profane acts and sacrileges associated with the Roman siege of Jerusalem, including possibly the placement of idolatrous ensigns on the temple grounds.

6. Great Tribulation

Verses 21–22 describe a period of unparalleled tribulation, which can be correlated with the documented horrors and extensive destruction during the Jewish War, particularly in AD 70 when Jerusalem was sacked.

The Language of Matthew 24

How do we interpret the specific language found in Matthew 24, especially verse 14? First, what do the disciples mean by “your coming” and “the end of the age” (24:3)? As others have seen, these terms do not concern world-ending catastrophes, but rather major military upheavals that profoundly impacted the life of God's people.¹ Simply go read the prophets to see this standard way of speaking. The disciples' language echoes the prophetic language in Isaiah, where God's judgment against Egypt is depicted not as a literal descent on clouds but as a sovereign intervention into political and social affairs as punishment for idolatry (Isa 19:1).

In Matthew 24, the destruction of the temple and the “end of the age” are concurrent events, suggesting a monumental shift in God's earthly dealings. The obliteration of the temple concerns more than a physical space; it also is a pivotal moment in the kingdom's expansion and the divine mission. God is closing an age in which he dealt primarily with the nation of Israel; now the new covenant hastens in the gentiles. The church, consisting of believing Jews and gentiles, constitutes God's temple.

1 For instance, Paul Penley, “Have We Misunderstood the Great Commission? ‘The End’ Jesus Predicted in Matthew 24:14 Started a Whole New Era,” *Reenacting the Way* (blog), 14 May 2017, www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/great-commission-is-complete-as-jesus-predicted-in-matthew-24-14.

In addition, the phrase “in the whole world” deserves attention. Elsewhere in ancient literature, the Greek word (οἰκουμένη) here routinely refers to the Roman Empire.² In the New Testament, one such example is Acts 11:28, which says, “One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine *over all the world*; and this took place during the reign of Claudius.” Similarly, Paul's accusers assert, “For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews *throughout the world* and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5; cf. Acts 17:6; 19:27; Rev 3:10).

What about the phrase “as a testimony to all nations”? Paul Penley's response is clear and concise. He explains,

Acts 2:5 claims that Jews “from every nation under heaven” gathered in Jerusalem and heard the disciples proclaim the Gospel in their native languages. That's quite a universal claim if we read it with our globalized perspective. Jews from every nation under heaven heard the Gospel! If we read that claim without regard for the historical context, we would think Jews had come from China or from the Aztec nation or from the aboriginal peoples of what would become Australia. But such transportation wasn't possible in the first century, and no Jews lived among all the distinct ethnolinguistic tribes on planet Earth at the time.

Claiming that Jews “from every nation under heaven” gathered in Jerusalem is simply a figure of speech. It meant that Jews had come from all over the known world.³

Not only this, but biblical scholars have long noted that “nations” (ἔθνος) in Scripture consistently refers to gentiles (i.e., non-Jews).⁴ Certainly, ἔθνος (particularly the singular) can signify “a people group in an ethnographic sense denoting a group of people with common affinity and way of life”

2 Walter Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “οἰκουμένη.” rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

3 Paul Penley, “Have We Misunderstood the Great Commission?,” and BDAG, s.v. “οἰκουμένη.”

4 For example, see Jarvis J. Williams and Trey Moss, “Focus on ‘All Nations’ as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy,” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* ed. Scott Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 131–48.

(to include Israel).⁵ Still, in Matthew's Gospel, we don't see unambiguous examples where the plural ἔθνος refers to distinct sociolinguistic entities as opposed to gentiles more generally.

Whatever the case, even if we presuppose that ἔθνος in Matthew 24:14 speaks of sociolinguistic groups, we have no scriptural basis for demarcating one ethnic group from another (effectively making much "people group" strategy arbitrary or disconnected from any biblical foundation).⁶

Conclusion

If we want to understand the word "nations" in sociolinguistic terms, we are free to do so. However, we cannot appeal to the Bible to support that claim. To be clear, this article does not argue against some pragmatic uses of people group theory. My goal is more precise and biblically oriented. I've suggested that mission advocates ought not to use Matthew 24:14 to propagate people

⁵ Hans M. Weerstra, "Mission to the Nations: A Biblical Word Study of Ethnos," *IJFM* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 99.

⁶ Compare Darren Carlson and Elliot Clark, "The 3 Words That Changed Missions Strategy—and Why We Might Be Wrong," *The Gospel Coalition*, 11 September 2019, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/misleading-words-missions-strategy-unreached-people-groups.

group theory. We certainly cannot claim Jesus' words as a divine mandate for strategies and interpretations that depend on sociolinguistic definitions.

To accept the biblical evidence above does not necessarily mean we should throw out all efforts to reach "unreached people groups." When we discern the meaning of Matthew 24:14, we see people group strategies for what they are—pragmatic efforts to make the task of spreading the gospel more manageable and equitable so that all people might have a chance to accept Jesus as Lord. There's nothing wrong with that. The problem comes with ad hoc scriptural justifications and/or eisegesis by which we insert foreign ideas into the biblical text.


Scripture beckons us to break through sociolinguistic boundaries. This is why Revelation looks forward to the worship of Christ among "every tribe and people and language and nation" (Rev 5:9; 13:7). God will fulfill his promise to Abraham, "in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Acts 3:25; cf. Gen 22:18). These passages acknowledge God's comprehensive plan to save people across social groups; they do not however give us license to commit eisegesis by using contemporary social science to define biblical terms. ❏

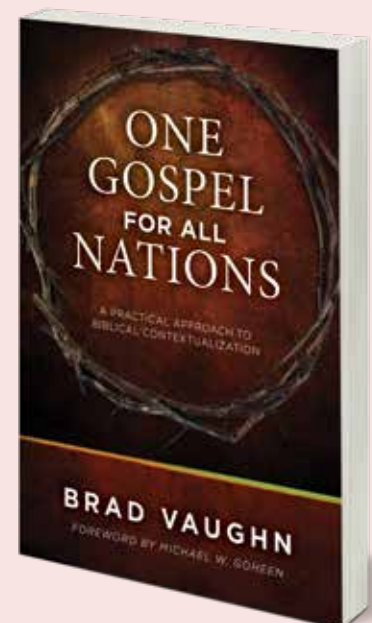
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Complex + Homogeneity among Urbanized UPGs

A Challenge and an Opportunity

By **CHRIS CLAYMAN**, from a paper presented at the 2022 Ralph Winter Lectureship.

Chris Clayman is the executive director of Joshua Project, an initiative that highlights peoples and places with the least access or response to the gospel so the Body of Christ can prioritize its prayer and missions efforts.



From birth, Kadijata breached cultural norms in her country. Her mother, a Fulbe Futa, a subset of the larger Fulani people cluster, married one of the “forest peoples” of Guinea, West Africa. The Fulbe Futa people looked down on the forest people, and her mother’s family begrudged her divergence from endogamy. Shortly after Kadijata was born in Guinea’s forest region, her family moved to Conakry, the country’s capital.

In the city, Kadijata’s Fulbe Futa side quickly predominated. Kadijata’s mother spoke to her in Pular, the Fulbe Futa language, and Fulani family members from across the country frequented her home. In contrast, to “set Kadijata up for success,” her father spoke to her only in French. Month-long summer vacations were spent in the Futa Jalon (the Fulani region) instead of the forest. At the age of eight, Kadijata’s father moved to Eastern Europe for work. From that point on, she saw her father only when he returned on vacations. The residential and linguistic choices of Kadijata’s family meant her father’s ethnic identity effectively had no influence on his daughter. As far back as Kadijata can remember, she was always a Fulbe Futa.

While Kadijata spoke Pular and French at home and school, she also learned the *lingua franca* of Conakry, called Susu after the dominant ethnic group in the city, as well as Maninka to converse with her friends from that ethnic group. Because her family were devout Muslims, she also attended an Islamic school on weekends to learn and memorize the Qur’an in Arabic.

Shortly after her dad moved to Eastern Europe, Kadijata’s mom spent years with her husband in Europe or her brother in East Africa, leaving various aunts and cousins to take care of Kadijata and her siblings in Conakry. The international work and travel of her extended family piqued Kadijata’s global interests. As a teenager, Kadijata became the second-best junior table tennis player in her country, and she traveled to China as a Junior Olympian. There, she befriended competitors from Sri Lanka and Ethiopia, and continued corresponding with them for years.

At the age of 21, Kadijata received a scholarship to study telecommunications in Eastern Europe. She learned the language quickly and finished the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in five years. Kadijata then moved to Paris to pursue a master’s degree and doctorate. Her plans were curtailed, however, when a relationship she formed with a fellow international student from Africa led to pregnancy. Kadijata’s conservative Islamic family felt shame over the ordeal, and she felt abandoned through their lack of support. Furthermore, her relationship with the baby’s father ended, leaving her as the sole provider for her baby daughter. She almost managed to complete her master’s degree, but the mounting pressure of single motherhood caused her to leave school and pursue a telecommunications career.

Kadijata earned a nice salary in Paris. She was promoted quickly through the company, frequently traveled France on business trips, and purchased a condo in southeast Paris. Her best friends were Caucasian

French co-workers and neighbors, Senegalese families in her neighborhood, and Algerian, Caribbean, and Asian colleagues. But none of those friends were Fulani. Kadijata was hurt by her people for the way they treated her after becoming pregnant. She threw herself into her work and quickly adopted a French lifestyle. When asked what people she belonged to during that time, Kadijata said, “I was French. To some people, I would identify as African or Guinean, but I was French.” Noticeably absent was an identification with the Fulbe Futa, from whom she had steadily distanced.

One of Kadijata’s co-workers was a Cambodian immigrant who had married a Muslim-background Christian pastor from Mali. Knowing about the West African Muslim culture, the co-worker was burdened to pray for Kadijata and share Jesus with her. At an opportune time, she gave Kadijata a recorded testimony in French of a West African imam who had turned to Christ. Kadijata knew a lot about the Qur’an, but she was unfamiliar with verses the former imam cited about Jesus’ followers being superior to those who reject faith to the day of resurrection (Al-Imran 3:55) or those having doubts being encouraged to ask Christians (i.e., those who have been reading the “before books,” Yunus 10:94). From her Islamic religious worldview, these verses gave her confidence to attend church and read the Bible. Soon after, she decided to follow Christ and was baptized.

Kadijata continued to be discipled in multi-ethnic French churches. For the next 13 years, she grew in faith, became a woman of prayer, and shared Jesus with others. Kadijata even wrote long notes to her family shortly before her baptism explaining why she followed Jesus. While her decision ostracized her even more from her family, several of her family members had moved to France and Italy, and she was able to continue relationship with some individuals. Her father, an influential man, became a follower of Christ as well, partly due to Kadijata’s witness. He then went on to share Jesus with many people back in Guinea; one of Kadijata’s sisters even came to Christ and is now married to a pastor.


Thirteen years after becoming a Christian, God called Kadijata to be a missionary in New York City. Through a variety of divine appointments, including an offer of free housing in Manhattan from a local church connection, Kadijata moved to New York and began learning English. One day, she observed a rally

of Hispanic and African Americans beleaguered by the drug and crime epidemic in their communities.

Moved by their cries, Kadijata began ministering among the homeless and drug addicts. She fed them, pointed them to social centers for counseling, shared the gospel, prayed for them, and started Bible studies. Meanwhile, Kadijata frequently passed by dozens of West African Muslim women in hair-braiding shops, the subway, and on the streets. A missionary family also formed a relationship with Kadijata. They were spreading a vision of reaching West African Muslims throughout the city. One day on the way to church, Kadijata met a Fulani cab driver who knew her family and revealed that dozens of her extended family members were in the city. Being estranged from many members of the family, Kadijata had no idea!

All these events set in motion God’s call for Kadijata to share Jesus with the Fulbe Futa and other West African Muslim women. As she began meeting the Fulbe Futa community, she realized that many women only spoke Pular. Even though Kadijata’s first language was Pular, she struggled talking about Jesus, sharing the Bible, or praying in her language. She was more comfortable talking about her faith in French and English. To remedy the cultural disconnect, Kadijata began reading and listening to the Bible, praying, and sharing Jesus in her mother tongue, which connected to her heart in fresh ways.

Kadijata had rarely heard of Christians from her people group, but she began discovering hundreds who came to faith in Christ in Africa and Europe. Through joining their social media groups, praying with them, and aiding their evangelism campaigns, she effectively joined a global Fulbe Futa Christian community. Kadijata’s family observed three decades of her life-transforming faith journey, and many have opened fellowship with her again.

Because of Kadijata’s strong character, Muslim family members call on her to give wisdom and counsel to life’s varied complications. Kadijata has come full circle. She desires nothing more than glorifying Christ with her life and being used to introduce her Fulani people to his kingdom. She’s a member of God’s family, and she’s also Fulbe Futa—with a French accent. No doubt, her story illuminates several observations that are applicable to other hybridized members of urban unreached people groups. 

Recognized, Relativized, Reconciled

Nuancing the People Groups Conversation

By **WERNER MISCHKE AND BUD HOUSTON**

Werner Mischke (werner@mission1.org) is VP of Mission ONE, which partners with the global Church to make communities more like the kingdom of God. His 2015 book, *The Global Gospel*, examines “honor-shame” in Scripture and mission.

Bud Houston (bhouston@globalgates.info) leads the Middle East North Africa team for Global Gates, focusing on multiplying disciples and churches among the unreached diaspora with a vision to impact their home countries.

Scripture speaks to three interrelated dynamics concerning people groups. People groups are (1) *recognized* in God’s global purpose, (2) *relativized* by sin and by the glory of Christ, and (3) *reconciled* in Christ to other hostile peoples.¹ Building on field-based stories, we propose ways to propel mission engagement in light of these dynamics.

People groups recognized in God’s global purpose

In Genesis 12:3, God promises Abram an astounding honor: “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (ESV). God’s promise is *particular* and *global*. Through Abram’s family, God will bless all kinship groups of the earth.

Two millennia later, the risen Christ instructs his followers, “Make disciples of all nations” (*panta ta ethne*) (Matt 28:19). Does *ethne* refer to gentiles *in general* or people groups *in particular*, hearkening back to Genesis 12:3? Dave Datema asserts:

Panta ta ethne in Matthew 28:19, whether translated as “all the Gentiles” or “all the nations,” was understood by both Matthew and his readers as a reference to both universality (everyone everywhere) and particularity (in all their diversity). ... *Panta ta ethne* is both/and, not either/or.²

We further see the diversity of people groups in Revelation.³ The vision is clear: *no people group is excluded or marginalized; none are hegemonic; all are honored*. These texts are hope-filled. We refer to them as *affirming* texts.⁴

1 This article is based on the forthcoming book *One New Humanity: Glory, Violence, and the Gospel of Peace* by Kristin Caynor and Werner Mischke (William Carey Publishing, 2025).

2 D.E. Datema, “The Universal Particularism of *Panta ta Ethne*: A Biblical Case for the Continued Viability of the People Group Concept in Mission,” *Missiology* 50, no. 2 (2022), 138–51.

3 See Steve Hawthorne, “A Biblical Understanding of People Groups,” *EMQ* 56, no. 4 (October–December 2000), 4–7.

4 See also Pss 67:3–4; 86:9; Isa 56:7; 66:18–23.

- “By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9).
- “A great multitude... from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages... before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9).
- “By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it... the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev 21:24–26).

Zaza Kurds recognized. The Zaza are an ethnolinguistic community within the larger Kurdish peoples of Turkey. They were mostly unrecognized for decades due to Turkey’s assimilationist policies. Their Zazaki language and culture were suppressed.

However, as the Zaza have asserted their unique identity in recent years, the global Church has taken notice. Missionaries were assigned. Scripture translation efforts began. Prayer movements were launched. By God’s grace, Zaza communities have responded to the gospel with new believers baptized and churches formed. The once-overlooked Zaza are now recognized as a distinct people for whom Christ died and to whom he called into his kingdom.

Why is *every-people-recognized* an aim of missions? As Steve Hawthorne says, “It matters that mission and church leaders recognize and respect every kind of group identity. ... People groups are important in mission primarily because of the value of each people group to the living God.”⁵

People groups relativized

The Bible not only gives witness to the *recognition* of people groups; it also *relativizes* all people groups. People groups are relativized by sin—and by the glory of Christ.

People groups are relativized by sin

Every form of humanity is under God’s judgment. The Bible speaks much about the sins of individuals. The Bible also

5 Hawthorne, “Biblical Understanding of People Groups,” 6.

Range of human groupings in the Bible critiqued or judged

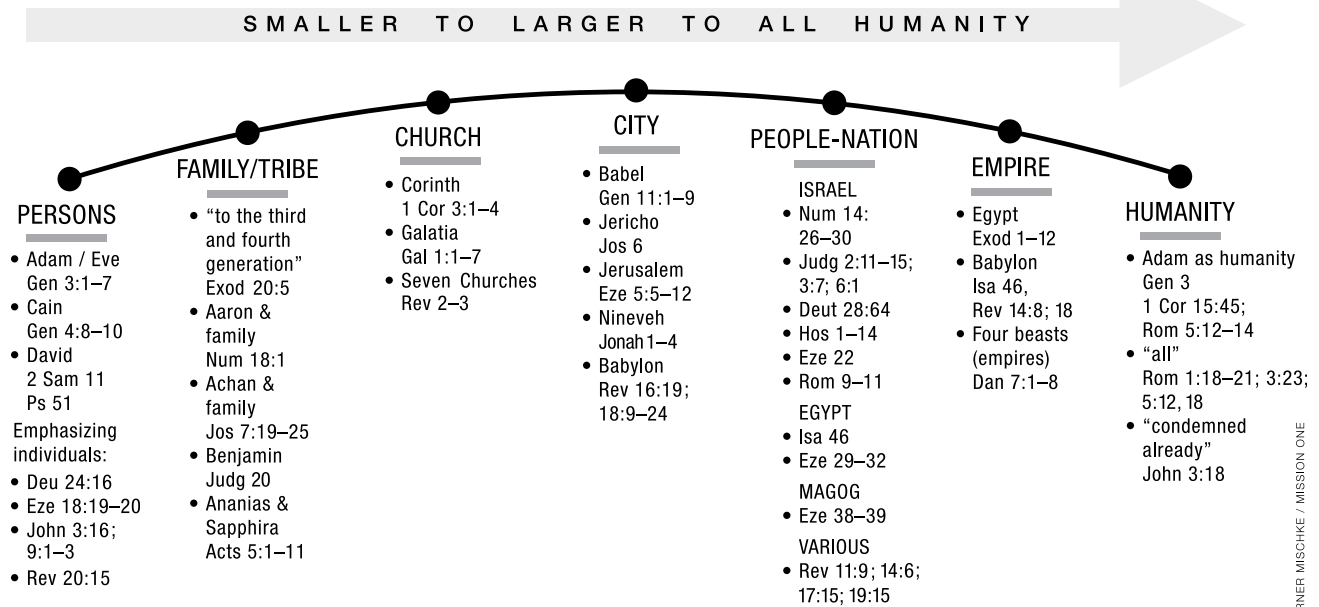


Fig. 1: Range of human groupings critiqued or judged by God

identifies sin in familial, civic, tribal, national, imperial, and cosmic contexts (shown in Figure 1).⁶

Sin exists among all types of persons and groups. The diagram begins with individuals, then moves to family and tribe, churches, cities, people groups, or nations, then empires, and lastly, all humanity.⁷

Of special interest to this article are Revelation 11:9, 14:6, 17:15, and 19:15. Let’s call them “critiquing” texts because they contain judgments of people groups. Other texts also critique peoples being *deceived* (Rev 18:23; 20:3,8).

It’s *because of sin* that people groups are under God’s judgment. Isn’t it also *because of sin* that massive numbers of peoples often migrate to distant lands? Natural and manmade disasters compel people to flee destitution, war, violence, and oppression in their homelands. Fleeing destitution in Moab, Ruth the Moabite follows Naomi to join God’s people in another land (Ruth 1–4). Fleeing persecution, the Church comprised of Jewish believers is

⁶ Angels sin (2 Pet 2:4); the devil sins (1 John 3:8); Babylon sins (Rev 18:4–5).

⁷ Much discussion about people groups overlooks the Bible’s *critique* of groups. God’s judgment does not diminish God’s valuing of every people; rather, it amplifies the moral responsibility and dignity of every people in God’s purpose as well as their potential for transformation in Christ. Regarding God’s judgment of the peoples as a blessing, see Pss 67:4; 96:13.

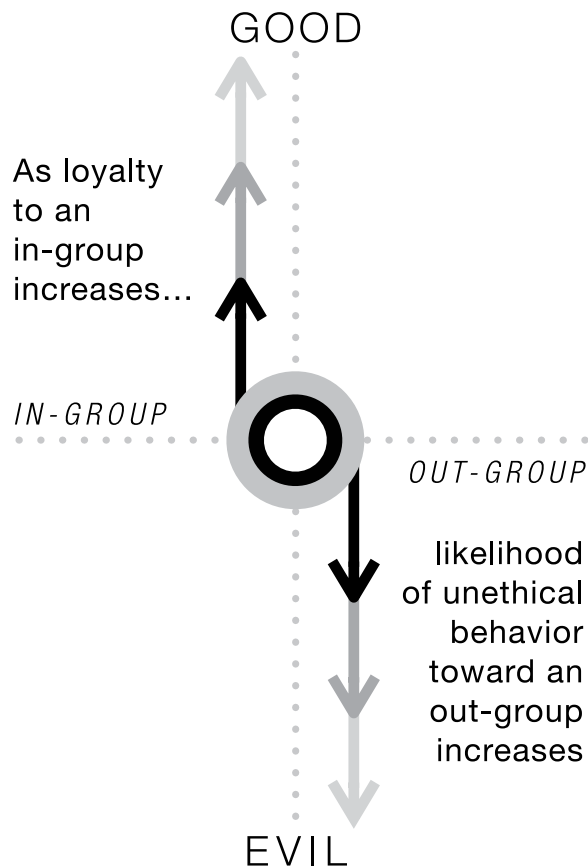
scattered to other lands; some interact with gentile peoples of whom many turn to the Lord (Acts 11:18–21).

Consider a contemporary example. Dag, a new Kurdish believer from an Iraqi village, gathered with believers in Nashville, his eyes bright with hope for true equality between all peoples. His journey has been fraught. He was expelled from religious instruction for questioning teachings that divided humanity into classes. Later, he was rejected for baptism by ancient Christian groups wary of Muslim converts.

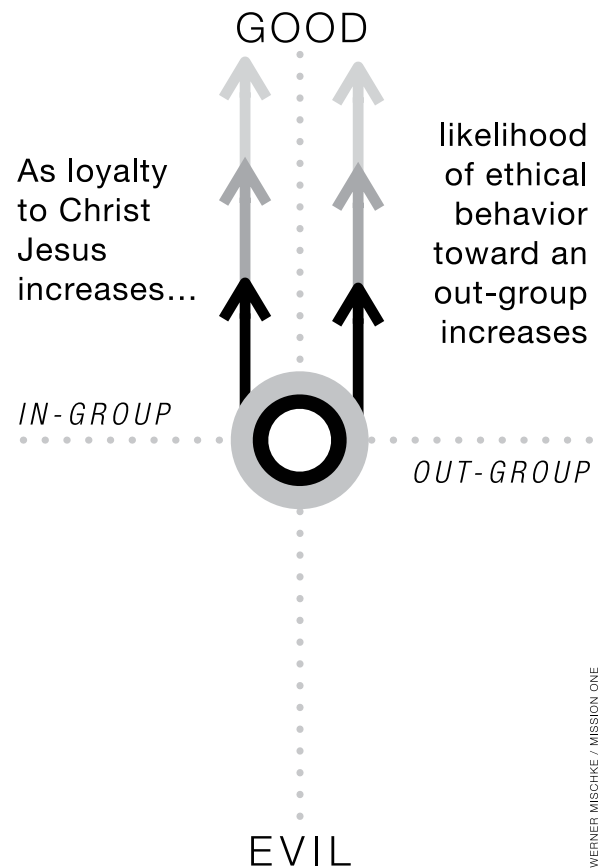
But Dag was driven by a revelation he found in the Bible: God shows no partiality between people. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven,” one verse reads. Dag ached for this reality in his homeland, where deep divisions run along ethnic and religious lines.

Undeterred, Dag traveled far to find a church to baptize and welcome him as an equal brother in Christ. On that journey, he had a dream warning of tragedy, which he heeded to save his friends’ lives. This sign convinced him that God was blessing his path. That day, Dag was baptized into the family of believers bound not by ethnicity but by faith in Jesus.

(A) Ethical Paradox of Group Loyalty



(B) Loyalty to Christ Subverts Unethical Group Loyalty



WERNER MISCHKE / MISSION ONE

Fig. 2: Loyalty to an in-group relative to an out-group vs. loyalty to Christ relative to an out-group

We are persons and peoples who move. We live in a world of globalization, urbanization, and migration.⁸ We adapt to other cultures, historical events, and technology. And God intervenes. We see this in ourselves. We can see this in the Bible, early Christianity, and around the world. Virtually all people group identities are on a spectrum between “fixed and fluid.”⁹

To whom do we belong? Multitudes grapple with this question, negotiating hybrid identities in new lands and digital spaces with permeable borders. *Relativizing* one’s own people group? It’s mostly not a question of *if*. The question is *when* and *to what degree*.

⁸ See Minh Ha Nguyen, “Globalization, Urbanization, Migration, and Rethinking the People Group Concept,” *EMQ* 56, no. 4 (October–December 2000), 32–35.

⁹ See Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

People groups are relativized by the glory of Christ

In Philippians 3, Paul relativizes his own people group. How so? First, Paul lists his sources of honor, including his tribal/national (i.e., people group) honor (vv. 5–6). Then come shocking words:

But whatever gain I had... I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:7–8).

I count them as rubbish. The excellence of knowing Christ is such that— *by comparison*—family, tribe, people group, education, or other identity factors are “as rubbish.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Regarding honor-shame dynamics in Phil 3:5–8, see Werner Mischke, “Six Ways the Bible Undermines Racism: (#3) “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” *CultureLearner*, July 2, 2020.

Are Paul's words about knowing Christ relevant to the discussion about people group theory? We propose a four-part answer to this question.

1. Paul considers himself an example. “Brothers, join in imitating me” and follow “the example you have in us” (Phil 3:17). Paul says, “Be like me.” This is for all believers: Knowing Christ relativizes all forms of traditional honor, including people group honor.

2. Paul's previous loyalty to his in-group fueled hostility to the out-group. Saul's loyalty to his people mutated into violence against an out-group (believers). Saul condones the stoning of Stephen, drags believers to prison, and threatens murder.¹¹

To his peers, Saul's in-group loyalty is considered ethical and good. They also approve of hostility toward the out-group (although unethical). This “ethical paradox of group loyalty”¹² may be described in pattern (A) of Fig. 2 on p. 31. As loyalty to an in-group increases, the likelihood of unethical behavior to an out-group increases.

Things change *dramatically* when Jesus appears to Saul (Acts 9:3–5). Saul becomes Paul the Christ-follower. Saul sees allegiance to the God of Abraham as allegiance to Christ. Jesus calls Paul to be an apostle to the very out-group (gentiles) he had previously shunned. Paul's transformation may be described in pattern (B). As loyalty to Christ increases, the likelihood of ethical behavior toward an out-group increases.

3. Paul's loyalty to his own people group was relativized by his loyalty to God's all-peoples promise. This did not mean Paul was *disloyal* to God's ancient people—quite the contrary. Paul wants to be accused for their sake (Rom 9:2). Paul plainly affirms his Jewishness (Rom 11:1).

Paul's passion for “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” relativized his people group honor. However, his people group honor and loyalty were relativized in another way: by his loyalty to God's all-peoples promise—serving the out-group (gentiles). Paul embodies God's promise to bless

¹¹ Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1.

¹² Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158. See also Reinhold Niebuhr: “The whole history of mankind bears testimony to the fact that the power which prevents anarchy in intragroup relations encourages anarchy in intergroup relations.” Niebuhr introduced the paradox of group loyalty in 1932 in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 16.

all the families of the earth.¹³ To Paul's previous peer group of Jewish religious leaders—those who didn't regard Christ as a messiah for all peoples—Paul was viewed as disloyal, a lawbreaker, and an outsider (thus, a target for violence).¹⁴ In this additional way, Paul's loyalty to his own people group was relativized by his loyalty to Christ.

4. Paul's passion for reaching all peoples hinges on his own people group being relativized. We propose a dual truth: The surpassing worth of knowing Christ relativizes Paul's relationship with his own people group, and this is exemplary for all believers. *Simultaneously*, Paul's passion for Christ being worshiped among all people groups is also exemplary (Rom 15:18–21). This continues to inspire believers globally toward reaching all the peoples. *Christ is all in all.*

We also observe the people groups *relativized* in Revelation 5 and 7, where, although they are recognized, their recognition is far eclipsed by Christ's glory. People groups are recognized *and relativized* in the beatific worship of the Lamb. Worthy... worthy... worthy is the Lamb!

Arab peoples relativized toward unity

Within Arab diaspora communities of Dallas-Fort Worth, believers are learning how Christ relativizes their ethnic identities. These Jesus-followers hail from numerous Arab countries and peoples—Jordanians, Algerians, Syrians, Egyptians, and more. “Before knowing Christ, our differences deeply divided us,” shares one believer.

Though still appreciating their rich Arab cultural heritages, an eagerness to exalt Christ above all creates an unexpected unity. Barriers break down as Jesus becomes their primary identity and loyalty. In the diaspora melting pot of the DFW

¹³ Rom 4:16–17; Gal 3:7–9; Eph 2:11–3:5.

¹⁴ Acts 22:30–23:15.



metropolx, the worth of knowing Christ is relativizing traditional ethnic divisions and forging a reconciled Arabic-speaking body of believers.

For diaspora populations, ethnic identity shifts from the rigid boundaries of the homeland context to a more malleable self-perception. In their country of origin, identities revolved tightly around tribe, family, or locality, but in the diaspora, these narrow self-definitions widen.

Broad associations like nation, language, and religion become flexible markers contingent on the social setting. At the cricket club, they are simply South Asians. At the mosque, they have their linguistic-religious identity, Urdu-speaking Muslims. At the workplace among Christian Americans, they are Pakistani-Americans. Adherents reconfigure their diaspora identities, being both *fixed and fluid*, to leverage diverse self-conceptions in new social environments.

People groups reconciled

The Bible gives witness to all people groups recognized, relativized, and reconciled. The Bible's storyline has Jesus reconciling all peoples, all nations, all things, indeed, the whole cosmos.¹⁵

Christ inaugurates a new reconciled way of being human.¹⁶ According to N. T. Wright, “[In Ephesians], after the opening statement of 1.10 ... (‘the fullness of times’), we find a crescendo of ‘now’ moments: *now*, in the Messiah Jesus, the gentiles have been brought near to the God of Israel; *now* the mystery of full gentile inclusion has been revealed; *now* the age-old mystery can be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (2:13; 3:6, 10).¹⁷

Persons and peoples “brought near by the blood” are reconciled to God. Jews and gentiles, once hostile, are now also reconciled to each other. Reconciliation is vertical and horizontal “through the cross... killing the hostility” (Eph 2:13–16). Jew and gentile reconciliation through Christ is the prototype for all people groups being reconciled.¹⁸ Christ is our peace. Christ makes peace. Christ preaches peace (Eph 2:14, 15, 17).¹⁹


Peacemaker as church planter

Yeva is an Armenian believer. She has devoted her life to seeing Christ reconcile the divided peoples of the Caucasus. Despite her family's past suffering at the hands of Turks and Kurds, an encounter with the Prince of Peace transformed Yeva's heart. “Christ has torn down the dividing walls of hostility.”

Now, Yeva plants churches among Turks, Kurds from Turkey, and Armenians. She trusts that in Christ's gospel of peace, their united fellowship will overcome ethnic barriers. As fractured groups gather in one spiritual family, Christ's reconciliation is melting centuries-long hostilities. Yeva believes these new churches, whether integrated or parallel, will end age-old hatreds.

Jesus relativizes other human loyalties, putting them into balance for human flourishing. Christ has created a new social way of being united in our humanity (Eph 2:15). All believers are “fellow citizens,” part of God's “household” (Eph 2:19).

Conclusion

Scripture presents three interrelated dynamics about people groups: they are *recognized*, *relativized*, and *reconciled*. People groups in the Bible are “fixed and fluid,” not unlike our world. We observe “fixity and fluidity” among people groups, in our own family histories and local contexts, major historical events, global trends, as well as in the task remaining. 

¹⁵ Rom 8:19–21; Eph 1:10; 2:13–16; Col 1:19–20; Rev 22:1–3.

¹⁶ Eph 2:15; 4:24; 2 Cor 5:17.

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 556–57, Kindle.

¹⁸ See Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles, and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul's Jewish Identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ See Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 197–201.

Crossing New Boundaries

Questions for Unreached People Groups Strategy

By **PETER T. LEE**

All Scripture references are from the NIV.

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When I first heard someone explain UPG, I was awakened to the reality that billions of people for many generations had not only been excluded from gospel witness but billions more could continue to be excluded if no one went across the cultural boundaries to enter their communities and share the gospel with them. The incredible need for cross-cultural evangelism globally was shocking but also inspiring to me. I quickly signed up for this training.

The training was long, intense, and intriguing. I learned the basic concept of cross-cultural evangelism and the reason it should be our highest priority, which Ralph Winter famously explained at the first Lausanne Congress in 1974.¹ At that time, I was a 20-something engineer who sensed a calling to serve as a cross-cultural missionary in the Middle East or North Africa but had no prior training in theology or missiology. As I went through this UPG training program, I learned about a Berber group in North Africa and began to put my focus on it. I was convinced that reaching unreached people groups was crucial in global mission. In the decades that followed, I served in North Africa and engaged in missiological research. As I learned more about realities of the mission fields, I began to have some questions about the entire UPG strategy and some of the ways it was practiced.

A glimpse of recent discussions on UPGs shows that most supporters of UPG thinking would see a static view of socioculturally defined people groups as problematic. Many seem to agree that the socio-cultural understanding of UPG needs to be updated in light of changing cultures and group boundaries under globalization, urbanization, and migration.² It is suggested that People Group Theory is an imperfect but effective tool to help mobilize the church in the way a map would help people get to a certain place without depicting the real streets and buildings accurately.³ The UPG concept was founded upon the Homogeneous

1 Ralph D. Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses* (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 213–41.

2 The October-December 2020 issue of *EMQ* (Vol. 56, Issue 4) provides recent discussions on UPG. This *EMQ* issue has very helpful and well written featured articles on the people group missiology.

3 Brad Gill, "A Church for Every People: A Retrospect on Mapping People," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December 2020): 43–45.

Unit Principle (HUP).⁴ While UPG missiology may not entirely align with the HUP concept, the link between them is undeniable and questions remain with parts of UPG missiology based on HUP.

In an article James Park and I co-authored, we raised some questions about the UPG paradigm, particularly three related issues—biblical interpretation of *panta ta ethne* in Matthew 28, sociocultural analysis of people groups, and the theological issue of planting homogeneous unit churches among the unreached.⁵ Among these three, I want to focus on a biblical theological issue with the UPG paradigm here.

What Did the Great Commission Mean to Jesus' Disciples?

Many who support UPG missiology take for granted that in Matthew 28:19–20 Jesus commands us to go and make disciples of *all* nations, (*including all unreached peoples.*) We should remember that the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is given to a group of Jewish disciples gathered on a mountain in the region of Galilee. It is notable that Jesus does not tell them to go and make disciples of all Galileans or Jews, but *panta ta ethne* or all the nations, all people including Jews and gentiles. How preposterous this command must have felt to a group of Jews gathered in Galilee!

It is an outrageous idea—not just because of its huge scope but the difficult social boundaries that Jesus was calling them to cross—that Jews needed to go across the boundary line to make disciples not only of fellow Jews but also the gentiles. For Jews to make disciples of gentiles would entail meeting, eating, and associating with gentiles. It would mean entering the homes of gentiles and having gentiles enter their homes. It would have been unsettling for them to think about becoming sisters and brothers, even a family in Christ with gentiles. And yet, throughout the history of Christianity, members of the Body of Christ went across various social boundaries and made disciples of all the people that they encountered, even traditional enemies.

⁴ For discussions on the link between HUP and UPG, see David E. Datema and Leonard N. Bartlotti, “The People Group Approach: A Historical Perspective,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December 2020): 8–11.

⁵ Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park, “Beyond People Group Thinking: A Critical Reevaluation of Unreached People Groups,” *Missiology* 46, no. 3 (July 2018): 212–25, doi.org/10.1177/0091829618774332.

Missional Reading of the Great Commission

Although it is not entirely conclusive, most New Testament scholars suggest that the first audience of Matthew’s Gospel might have been a Jewish-majority Christian community in a cosmopolitan city in the Roman Empire, perhaps in the region of Palestine, Syria, or Antioch. The message of the Great Commission and the Gospel of Matthew would not have been lost on these disciples who lived in proximity to the Greeks and the gentiles.

The Great Commission is comprehensive. It shows no human boundaries should keep anyone out from the kingdom of God; all are welcome. Now, Jesus’ disciples are to make this invitation to the kingdom to all people, even those with whom they did not want to associate. This is a core message of the Great Commission in Matthew we may have overlooked in our zeal for global missions. This command would certainly include our missionary practice of going to faraway places to reach “least reached” people who make up certain ethnolinguistic or social groups, but it does not mean that our churches could omit or neglect those nearby or even those in more reached groups. The primary focus of the Great Commission should be understood as the comprehensive inclusion of all kinds of people in God’s kingdom, especially the ones we do not want to include. After all, we don’t baptize people groups but individuals who make up *panta ta ethne*. This is not an individualistic reading of the passage that UPG thinkers have tried to counter; it is a holistic, missional reading in light of the reality of the local church in which not only those from my own people group but also those outside my group must be welcomed.

It is true that language and culture, not the desire to exclude people, are often the primary reason for local churches not embracing those from other cultural backgrounds. Korean immigrant churches in the Chicago area are good examples. It is interesting, however, that Jesus’ disciples were commanded to make disciples of *panta ta ethne* even though they were Jews gathered up in Galilee. Was it just overseas, another country, or another ethnolinguistic group that they needed to evangelize and disciple? Or were they to incorporate *panta ta ethne* in everything they did locally, globally, and everywhere in between?

This understanding of the Great Commission brings new implications for us today. The gospel proclamation as outlined in the Great Commission starts “here,” not just “over there.” Certainly, as we go and make disciples, some of us will go to Samaria (Acts 8) and Antioch (Acts 11) and cross those traditional cultural and social boundaries. New communities of faith in varying shapes will form. As we obey Jesus’ command, the Spirit may set apart certain persons for a specific mission, like Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus (Acts 13). This is the organic way the Holy Spirit has led the Church in mission for 2,000 years. For some reason, we seem to have lost much of this organic, communal focus in our global missionary practice in favor of a greater emphasis on efficiency, results, and achievements, the kind of values worshiped by the modern world. Of course, these are not necessarily evil; biblical stewardship requires us to manage God-given resources well. However, we need to be careful that the motives behind our missionary strategies remain faithful to biblical principles and not swayed by worldly values.

Will Frontier Missions Identify and Cross New Boundaries?

The late Latin American evangelical scholar and leader, C. René Padilla, wrote the following words in 1982:


The missiology that the church needs today is not one that conceives the People of God as a quotation taken from the surrounding society, but one that conceives it as ‘an embodied question-mark’ that challenges the values of the world.⁶

He calls out the proponents of the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) for not challenging people’s mono-cultural comfort in order to grow churches. To him, this type of church planting strategy was not in line with biblical teaching. He argues that our New Testament vision for the Church should be in line with the gospel that challenges, not just employs, social and cultural tendencies. His warning is still relevant today. We need more churches that are “embodied question marks,” not simply “quotation marks” of the worldly values we must counter. Those of us who are involved in frontier missions need to continue to reflect biblically and discern if our mission strategy might have unintended consequences on Christian mission and the Church.

⁶ C. René Padilla, “The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 1 (January 1982): 30.

It is true that the UPG paradigm has motivated and encouraged the global Church to send numerous workers to serve among many millions of people who have not had an opportunity to hear the gospel. It awakened generations of Christians, including me, to the reality of those without access to the gospel witness, and inspired many to dedicate their lives to reaching them. However, it has also provided a somewhat narrow and limited interpretation of the biblical view of *panta ta ethnē* and Matthew 28. It could inadvertently create and perpetuate ethno-cultural stereotypes. Rather than challenging the prejudice of group boundaries, some might utilize them, thereby potentially leading to disciples who are blind to those human boundaries that Scripture challenges.

We need to be careful that the motives behind our missionary strategies remain faithful to biblical principles and not swayed by worldly values.

A remaining question for those of us involved in frontier missions is whether we will continue to identify those human boundaries in the world that we did not see before. Will we continue to recognize and go across new cultural and social boundaries that prevent people from hearing the gospel in a culturally sensitive way? In some situations, we may be faced with questions of whether only to cross the boundary with the gospel or actually to challenge the boundary itself with the gospel. Things will not look so black-and-white in a complex world; we often need to discern shades of grey when it comes to working with these boundaries, whether ethnic, cultural, social, class, language, gender, etc. What gives me hope is that there is subversive power in the gospel that not only propels us to go across boundaries; it often challenges these very boundaries, especially in situations of conflict and tension. In some contexts, especially increasingly urbanizing societies, if we do not challenge the human boundaries that separate certain people from a new group of disciples, we might not get a second chance to challenge them later. Even if a frontier missions strategy helps get churches started and growing more rapidly within a certain social group, what kind of churches will they become if they do not question the values of the world that could corrupt their biblical vision for the church? This may be an important question that we need to consider in the years to come. 



24:14 Goal: Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (16 months)

Many Small Victories

What's Really Happening in Movements

By **ROGER CHARLES**

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A long, dark line runs up the corner of my house; from a distance, it looks like a power cable going up the wall. But a closer look reveals that the black line is a thick trail of ants, carrying food from the field up into a corner of my attic! Many Christians who have heard of church planting movements or disciple making movements misunderstand at a deep level what those movements really consist of. They read descriptive summaries, perhaps including large numbers of disciples and churches, and they envision something large, something powerful. When we hear of a church of 5,000 members, we think of a big auditorium on a big campus. But movements generally consist of clusters of house churches, with some lay elders overseeing a dozen or so home groups. They are much more like the trail of ants than a 220-volt power main. Although small, they are alive. And they are getting a job done.

In most movements to Christ around the world today, nothing really large ever happens in one place at one time. Movements involve ordinary people talking with other ordinary people—caring about what they care about, connecting with their group, and then connecting their group to God's Word. Movements employ a handful of ministry patterns so simple that other regular people can easily imitate them and persist in doing them even while suffering persecution.

When we read Joshua 10 and 11, describing Joshua's many victories in the land of Canaan, we can easily get the impression of one total victory following directly on the heels of another. But Joshua 11:18 gives a quick peek behind the scenes to glimpse many years of a more complex reality: "Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time." This wasn't a quick string of one-day battles; the Lord has briefly summarized a *long* process. And while most of the narrative describes

Joshua as the prime actor leading Israel's battles, five verses specify the more diverse reality: "Joshua and all Israel with him" (Josh 10:29a, 31a, 34a, 36a, 38a NIV). The text does present a series of big wins, but a closer look reveals that those big wins consisted of many small victories, by all the families of all the tribes.

A disciple making movement doesn't become a movement because a famous preacher comes into town to speak to 500 people or 2,000 people. A movement grows when a couple of neighbors, who often hang out together anyway, gather to discuss a Bible passage together. And then another, and another. When friends make a habit of sharing their problems with one another and discussing them in the light of God's Holy Books, they gain some momentum in the right direction. They might meet for six months or a year before somebody outside the group gets interested enough to start a similar group. But what if a few of those little groups multiply in a year, and that happens in five, then 10, then 100 places? If in 100 places one group becomes two groups, which become four groups, that suddenly equals 400 groups. If each gathering averages just five attendees, 400 groups of five people equals 2,000 people: a significant total.

Movements consist of Jesus doing family-sized things with groups of friends in many places at once. And those family members care enough about a neighbor or another family member to do the same simple thing again. Not many people can lead a group of 100 or even a group of 50. But if a process is very simple, anybody can do it. Everyone can talk to two or three friends. Simple things multiply easily. A person doesn't have to be a great leader to talk to a few relatives, or to start a couple of new groups among neighbors. Anybody could do that.

Anybody is doing that. Every week we hear about another neighborhood where somebody went in and said, “Do you want to have a group like ours?”

People say, “Sure. Can I join your group?”

“No, sorry, our group is already full. But I can help you start your own group if you can pull some friends together.” In that way, they might start two or three new groups in a month, with no one pressuring anyone. People like to join something local and interesting.

How movements grow

We need to understand how movements grow, both wider and deeper. The everyday growth just described takes a movement deeper within a particular group. As Donald McGavran observed, the gospel tends to spread best within a homogeneous group. People normally communicate with and trust people like themselves. But we have seen many modern movements grow beyond this communication barrier. While they spread most rapidly within specific segments of society, the message also jumps to spread widely among other distinct groups. We call that jump-over fruit, which happens most commonly in one of four ways: Gifted Men/Women, Miracles, Marriage, and Migration.

The Lord gives gifts to his people, as described in Ephesians 4:11–13. The first gift listed is that of an apostle: a special gift for sharing the gospel in new areas and among different groups. Those with such gifts bridge the gap between the way their own group thinks and the way another group thinks. They overcome barriers of language, culture, ethnicity, and/or geography to get something started and lay a foundation for others to continue the harvest.

Sometimes a miraculous event happens, and many people suddenly come to faith. A crippled woman gets healed, a boy gets delivered from a demon, or an old man has a dream, and many lives are touched. Those stories easily get gossiped across neighborhoods and can stir up sudden interest in Jesus. Sometimes gifted people or special acts of God help a movement start in a new spot, then once the first fruit has taken root, it spreads like a vine, and generation after generation of new fruit can grow.

However, jump-over fruit also happens in two ordinary ways, through marriage and migration. When someone marries across the boundaries between “us” and “them,”

God may open a door for the gospel to slip through a cultural barrier. At other times, the gospel spreads through migration. A believer may find a new job in a new place. Or a sharp student from a backwoods region goes off to college, where Jesus awaits. Then he or she takes the news back home, and the first fruits start growing in a new ethnic group.

All four of these common kinds of jump-over fruit are relatively small: one miracle, one woman’s marriage, one worker’s job change, and one gifted person sharing one more time. But they model something others can copy. They replicate an easy meeting pattern, nudged along by the Holy Spirit through a small booklet of Bible verses or an app on a phone. The new circle of relationships presents an opportunity for the gospel to spread from “us” to “them.” When a more mature disciple maintains a strong relationship with the person who has entered a new sphere of influence, they can pray for that small circle and mentor them to multiply new circles in the new context. Even new believers can pass on the treasure from God’s Word: God’s good answers to life’s hard questions. Each small victory has the potential to become a bigger victory.

In everyday life, most people in a huge movement don’t think they’re part of something huge. They just know they’ve entered a new way of life and have the privilege of sharing that life with a few others. They certainly don’t see themselves as part of a big giant machine. They just share good stuff with a few friends: “Hey, can I tell you this great story I heard about one of the prophets?” Inside the movement, these small victories continue to happen. As long as the daily bread of biblical truth and life-on-life maturing continues, the battles with sin and Satan can be won, and the good news keeps spreading. The victories consist of growing new life in Christ even more than the number of new disciples.



A different picture

In some church models, success means hundreds or thousands of people gathering. People say, “That guy’s such a great preacher, I’d drive all the way across town to hear him preach every week.” By contrast, a small victory involves asking a friend, “What did you learn last week about Jesus?” or “Is there anything I can do for you this week?” A little love, a little truth, and a little faith grow day after day. These small

victories consist of people studying God’s Word, considering its application for their lives, putting it into practice, and talking with others about it. Small victories like these happen every day throughout a movement.

People want to join other families that keep getting healthier, to become part of a team that keeps encouraging their neighbors. The kingdom of heaven means people follow the patterns of the King, living by the King’s rules with the King’s people and power. New disciples learn kingdom patterns by studying Scripture and watching “older brothers and sisters” in the kingdom.

These patterns in day-to-day life help ensure that God’s Word stays at the center. Disciples listen to God’s Spirit and concretely display real love for hurting people around them. When Jesus’s disciples do these things again and again, they win small victories—in dozens, hundreds, and eventually thousands of neighborhoods. My neighbor walked into my home yesterday and shared about a movement he monitors where substantial societal change is happening. Transformed lives have always been the cutting edge of the church’s witness. Outsiders notice the small victories and some of them want to join. This displays the priesthood of all believers in action: Every member of God’s kingdom can welcome new people to come and see the King.

Jesus offers a positive, healthy, abundant life, amid a dark world. A movement doesn’t happen because of good advertising, good branding, or big media campaigns. It happens because of the everyday life “advertisement” of believers’ openness to interact with a few people and

let them see the King at work in their lives. It happens through the work of God’s Spirit—in both the joys and the sorrows of the disciples’ lives.

A fresh perspective


I’ve trained teams of experienced field workers, who have served for years hoping something big would happen, but most see very little. When I showed them how a group of simple housewives were starting groups, that started groups, that started more groups, it inspired hope. They realized “If we only need little victories like that to start a movement, maybe we could do this.” Once they aimed to start something that other people could do on their own, things began to change. After about a year of slow but steady growth, six or eight groups of five became more fruitful than in any previous year. And the year after that brought even more growth!

A paradigm shift occurs when college-trained pastors realize: “We can release housewives to do this. We can release carpenters and bricklayers to do this. We can have teenagers do this.” As long as they stay centered on God’s Word and are looking outward to share with the lost, the movement grows. Many organizations in our country have now realized this and are experiencing slow but steady multiplication.

Conclusion

Some chapters of Joshua describe great victories, actually summarizing many years’ worth of small victories. We can only imagine the thousands of regular guys who got up every morning to go do hand-to-hand combat once more. They faced countless small fights which, added all together, turned into something big.

We may find it convenient and exciting to share summaries of many new disciples coming to faith and many churches being planted in a movement. But those descriptions can mislead if we don’t clarify that the actual progress consists of many small and often hard-earned victories. Real progress happens through any number of ordinary disciples applying simple kingdom patterns that easily multiply. Jesus calls us to do small kingdom things, with mustard-seed-sized faith.

That kind of description can convey a more accurate, more believable, and more *doable*, narrative of God’s work in movements. The big picture is true and worth knowing, but we need to join and live out the adventure of many small victories. 



Ancient Monastic Advice for Modern Cross-Cultural Workers

By ANDREW RICHEY

Andrew Richey is a spiritual director who has spent the majority of his adult life involved in cross-cultural ministry. He is the founder of Way Station Spiritual Development and the co-founder of the Second Half Collaborative.

The monastic impulse first expressed itself within Christianity around the third century, as intrepid characters such as Paul of Thebes and Antony the Great shifted to the Egyptian desert in pursuit of the ascetic life. These “desert fathers” inspired thousands, both men and women, to follow suit, leading to the establishment of numerous spiritual communities that became the model and inspiration for virtually all forms of Christian monasticism that were to come.

I was first introduced to the desert dwellers by means of their teachings and wisdom collected in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.¹ Truthfully, it was a rough introduction. I found most of their “words of wisdom” to be quite befuddling and their way of life rather unappealing. But as I slowly worked my way through the *Sayings*, I was finally able to pinpoint why this was the case, that is, why their adopted lifestyle and its resultant viewpoints seemed so very foreign to me as a modern-day cross-cultural worker. The bottom line was that our lives were oriented around differing chief priorities.

Since as early as I can remember, I was confronted with and motivated by the following call: “The message of Christ hasn’t gone out enough. Something radical must be done!” And so I’ve spent the majority of my adult life in the “unreached, unengaged” world, attempting to get the gospel out. **My chief priority: Gospel out.**

The ancient monastics, on the other hand, seemed to be responding to a different call: “The message of Christ hasn’t gone in enough. Something radical must be done!” And so they spent their lives in the desert, attempting to get the gospel in. **Their chief priority: Gospel in.**

For the desert dwellers, it was all about genuine transformation. It was “Christ in me” or bust!—whereas most of my life has been focused on “Get Christ out there” or bust, with my own character formation hopefully taking place as a happy byproduct. One can easily predict how that has worked out: lots of frustration at a hoped-for byproduct never making its appearance.

What advice, then, might the ancient monastics have for cross-cultural workers like me? I have a feeling they might say something like, “Good on you for wanting to get the gospel out, but let’s not forget that your first task is to get the gospel in. Nurture your inner life. Focus on your own transformation. Then, with Christ formed in you, yes, go to the nations. Yes, offer the gift of your transformed/transforming self. And, yes, offer the gift of companionship to others on their journeys of transformation. And though this may sound harsh, we desert dwellers are called to point out that you have precious little to offer the nations if the only version of faith you know is one that leaves you basically unchanged. For faith without transformation isn’t much of a gospel at all.”

Perhaps a fitting conclusion would be to quote Father Ammonas directly on this score:

Do not suppose that because the righteous were in the midst of men it was among men they had achieved their righteousness. Rather, *having first practiced much quiet*, they then received the power of God dwelling in them, and *then God sent them into the midst of men*, having acquired every virtue, so that they might act as God’s provisioners and cure men of their infirmities.² 📖

1 See Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Colleveville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984).

2 Ammonas, *Epistle 12*, quoted in Christopher A. Hall, *Worshipping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 228–229 (emphasis added).



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Relationship Building Is Not the Goal

By CYNTHIA ANDERSON

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“This missionary is amazing!” My friend’s words piqued my interest. The woman he referred to had worked for several years in a devoutly Muslim community. I leaned in closer, wanting to hear exactly what was happening. “She has built such good relationships here. Everyone knows her!”

I listened further, curious to know how many had come to Christ through this amazing field worker. “She has hosted events on Christmas, Easter, and other times in the year. The people here love to come.” This was all good. I was encouraged to know that this unreached community had such an active and committed field worker.

As I continued to listen and ask questions, I was saddened, however, to discover a common reality playing itself out yet again in this unreached community. Only a few women had come to know Jesus. I dug a bit deeper, probing with further questions. Soon, I understood that although there were many great relationships, few spiritual conversations took place. ESL programs, events, and many positive things were happening, yet the gospel message was not proclaimed. The community was still unreached and likely to remain so unless changes took place.

Jesus Never Focused Only on Relationship Building

I admit it. My natural preference is to build strong relationships before bringing up the gospel. It’s far more comfortable to avoid the risk of rejection that comes when we begin to share about Jesus with those who don’t yet know him. I hold a firm commitment, however, to follow Jesus’ pattern of ministry. This is true, even when it’s not comfortable. I deeply desire, like most reading this, to be like him. I want to do what he did.

As I search the Gospels, I find times when Jesus had longer conversations with people like the woman at the

well or the rich young ruler. At one point or another, those conversations always turned to the kingdom. I see no evidence, though, that Jesus first built a relationship for a few weeks, months, or years before he engaged in kingdom conversations. Though he was often indirect, asking questions and telling stories for those who had *ears to hear*, he never only built relationships.

Moving from Good Contacts to Good Conversations

Coaching my friend who worked with the above-mentioned missionary, I encouraged him to write out a list of the people with whom they had good relationships. I asked him to make a “relational chart.” Who do they know, and who are the others connected to that person? As he drew that out on paper and we discussed it, I saw they had many excellent opportunities. It was a great beginning to making disciples there, if they now took the next steps.

“What you need to do now is find out which of these people are spiritually open,” I told him. There is a difference between being *relationally* open and being *spiritually* open. Some of these people are relationally open to you but haven’t shown signs of being spiritually open. The only way to discover if someone is spiritually open is to have a spiritual conversation.

The fear of engaging in God conversations with those you’ve built relationships with is a major hindrance to the release of a disciple making movement. We must overcome our fear and be willing to lose relationships when we proclaim the gospel message.

The goal is not to have good relationships in a community. The goal is to make and multiply disciples of Jesus. Let’s not become confused about our purpose or delay too long in pursuing our true goal.

Some Relationships Need to End

Dr. Henry Cloud, author of the well-known *Boundaries* book, wrote another powerful book called *Necessary Endings*. It is not directly written to address disciple making and church planting but includes principles that have impacted many aspects of my life. The basic premise is that we must make tough and courageous decisions, allowing some things to end so that new and more fruitful things can emerge.

While there is indeed a risk to the relationship when you enter into a spiritual conversation with someone, there is also the possibility that they may be open and receptive. You don't know what will happen until you have the conversation. If it causes distance in the relationship or a rejection, at least you have gained valuable information. It will inform your prayers and can tell you whether you need to move on to look for others who are more open.

You have limited time and resources to invest in kingdom work. Even if you are a full-time worker, you have only 24 hours a day and many other demands on your time. You cannot afford to invest years of your life in building relationships with those who are not spiritually open when thousands of other unreached people wait to hear the good news.

This may sound a bit harsh and not very relational, especially to those with more pastoral giftings. Our time, however, is something we must steward carefully. It's one of our most valuable commodities. Please don't misunderstand. I'm not saying we shouldn't invest in relationships or love people simply because they are our neighbors. I'm not saying that the only reason we build relationships is to convert people. We must be extravagant with our love and build genuine relationships with those who don't know Christ. We don't talk to people only so we can make them Christians. They will sense that from a mile away!

But if we truly love someone, we will share the good news of Jesus with them. If we are true friends, we will talk to them about the most important person in our lives, the one who transforms us into new people.

Delaying a spiritual conversation with someone is evidence of both a lack of love and a lack of faith. Start by praying daily for your list of unsaved contacts. Pray

with consistency and faith that God is at work in them. Then, step into an opening that comes to speak to them about Jesus. You might initiate a conversation with a question like, "What's the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to you?" Or perhaps, "If God could do a miracle for you, what would it be?"

If you have noticed resistance to spiritual matters or Christianity, ask questions that express your curiosity. You could say something like, "I noticed when I bring up issues of faith, you seem a bit uncomfortable. I'd love to understand more about why that is. What's your story? Did you have a bad experience with a Christian before?" Be a good listener and pray fervently that their hearts will become open and soft to the message of Jesus' love.

Share Stories Freely as Jesus Did

Someone recently told me, "You are a good storyteller!" I was grateful for her compliment but responded, "I haven't always been. It's a skill you can learn." Jesus was a masterful storyteller. Wherever he went, he told stories and asked questions. Our goal should be to become like him, sharing stories that people can relate to, and communicating spiritual truth that piques their interest to hear more.

One of the best stories we can share is our own story of transformation. It's an important skill to learn and become comfortable using. In the training we run, we equip everyone to share their transformation story in three minutes or less. You begin by sharing what your life was like before Christ. I usually ask people to choose three main characteristics. Then you learn to share how you came to know Jesus, using non-religious and relatable language people can understand. Lastly, you share what is now different in your life. At the end, ask a question. "Do you have a story like this?" Or "Would you be interested to hear more about this sometime?"

When sharing this kind of story with someone, you find out if they are spiritually open. If they show interest, take the next step to invite them to read the Bible together. Make these conversations natural and conversational, not preachy. Don't get in a rush to get them to pray a prayer of salvation. Take your time, but begin to talk of spiritual things.

God may also highlight a story in your mind to share with someone. A few weeks ago, I was in California staying in a hotel and met a man named Oscar. He was waiting tables at the breakfast buffet. I had spoken to him several times before, affirming him, and thanking him for his service. One morning, I went on a prayer walk. I prayed for him. God put it on my heart to share with him the story of Joseph. Returning to the hotel, I walked up to him and another man he was talking to.

“Hi Oscar! How’s it going?” I said. “This may sound a little weird, but I was praying for you just now and felt like I was supposed to share a story with you from the Bible. Would that be okay?”

He said, “Sure.” I then asked if he had ever heard the story of Joseph. Neither he nor the other elderly man standing beside him had heard it before. I shared the story briefly. They both were interested in it, showing surprise at the story’s twists and turns. At the end, I said, “I think you are a bit like Joseph, Oscar. God sees your hard work. If you will obey and follow him, he will lift you from these jobs and promote you into other positions.” I don’t often get prophetic words for others, but I deeply sensed I should give him that word of encouragement. Since I was leaving the next day, I gave him a card for the church I was training at.

A story. A word of encouragement, calling forth into his destiny in God. I found out that Oscar was spiritually open, not closed. He was someone who had *ears to hear*.

Overcome Fear and Step Out in Faith

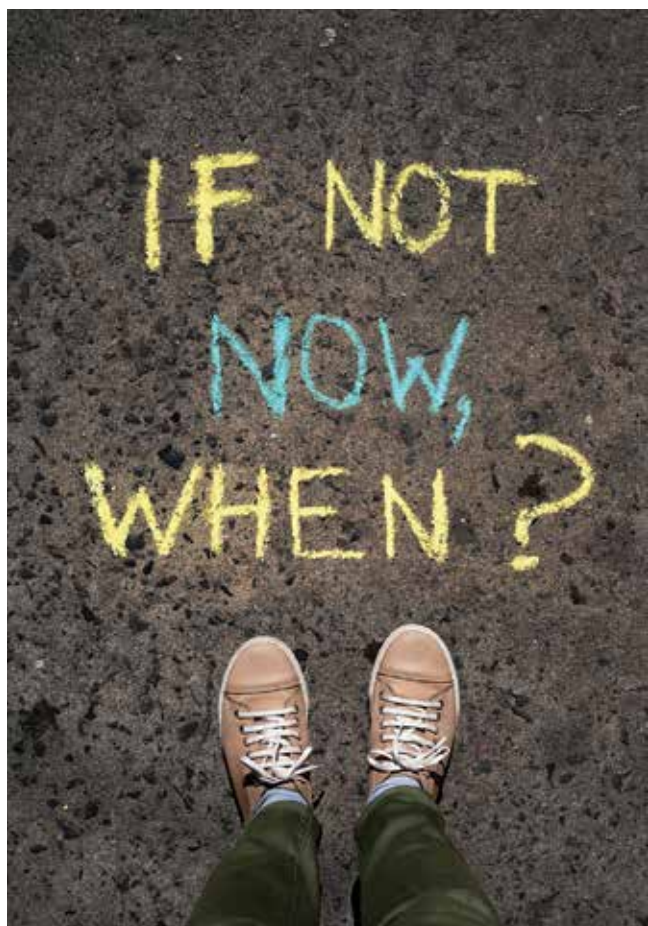
The woman I mentioned at the beginning of this article is indeed an amazing missionary. She is working hard and building great relationships. I hope she will also take bold and courageous steps to begin to share the gospel with others. Some people might reject her, even becoming enemies, but some will receive Jesus. No one will receive him if she and her team aren’t willing to lose some relationships in the process of bolder proclamation.

In recent months, several in that community have moved to other parts of the country without getting to hear about Jesus. They met Christians who were friendly and who built relationships but never shared the hope that was within them. Perhaps that will have some effect, perhaps not. With 42% of the world living among unreached peoples, we can’t afford to build friendships with lost people yet never share the message of Jesus.

We should heed Paul’s admonition,

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Tim 4:1–5, NIV).

Our goal is not to make many contacts for contacts’ sake; it’s to make disciples of Jesus. Let’s overcome our fear of loss or rejection and be willing to initiate gospel conversations with those who desperately need to hear of his great love. 📌



Greetings Short-Termers...

By GREG H. PARSONS

Written to two college students going on a short-term mission from my local church.

Greg H. Parsons and his wife have been on staff with Frontier Ventures since 1982. They live in Southern California.

I thought I'd take a moment to write out a few thoughts before you leave for Africa. I know you will have some orientation, so much of this will likely be covered before you land. I remember well my first time traveling outside the U.S. way back in 1980. I was headed the opposite direction to Southeast Asia, and it was a very instructive and shaping time for me.

This leads to my first point: **This ministry trip will involve ministry, but the greatest impact will likely be on you.** It will help to broaden and deepen your walk with the Lord and your view of the world. You will probably experience some shock when you land. As you interact with the average person from the local culture, you will see that they are concerned about different issues than we are back home. It is similar to what two African brothers, now in the U.K., noted about prayer, "Our being located in the West

[now] means that an overwhelming majority of the things we prayed for back home in Africa are taken care of: food, shelter, education..." I never thought about it that way.

The countries you are each going to are each about 50% "Christian." But anywhere we go in the world (including here), we need to remember that **being a "Christian" does not necessarily mean what we think.** For many, it is a cultural idea—they grew up going to church. You will meet many "serious" believers and will learn a lot from all kinds of people.

This speaks to the way we look at the world and what is our priority, which is a great thing to reflect on during your whole summer. I strongly encourage you to **keep a journal.** (OK, it can be electronic, and you can dictate it if you want.) You will look back on this time as something very formative for your life, walk, ministry, and future choices. I've found that reading my old journals helps me see how God has been working in my life.

That points to another reality: **You are rich.** In the eyes of virtually every non-Westerner you meet, you are rich. Naturally, that colors almost all the interaction you will have with local people. You will need to grapple with this as you serve and minister with people in the church or project or hospital. You will worship with fellow believers, eat in their homes, and see the disparity. This will also shape your perspective for the rest of your lives—at least I hope it does!

During my first trip to Indonesia, a cross-cultural worker said that when he went to the local post office, it might take over an hour to get stamps or mail a package. So, he'd buy a bunch of stamps like most of us do here in the U.S. But, he noted, for the local people, they would go, stand in the same lines and buy one—just what they needed for that day.

But it also means that you need to be careful. You will have the desire to give more than ever before. I remember giving in a church that summer in Asia, and I was probably the only one who put a paper bill in the offering! It was likely just a few dollars at most, but everyone else put in coins. The cross-cultural workers who guide you can give you input on this. My advice is to be very careful, reflect and pray, rather than being impulsive. Ask the Lord for wisdom about this and the many other things you will face.

In fact, you will likely learn to depend on the Holy Spirit more than you ever have, and that will be a *good* thing, even in the difficulties. A friend of mine, who has served

in very difficult and (in his case) very dangerous situations, has a pattern of praying, sometimes quickly in the moment, “What do you want me to *know*?” and “What do you want me to *do*?” What he was asking was, “Lord, should I know something about this situation, person, and is there something you want me to do or say or not do?” That can be hard, especially if you, like most of us, are still learning to listen to the Lord. But press into him to hear him clearly. Pray boldly for people and situations, even if quietly or silently. Expect him to speak and act through you.

He will speak through his Word too, as you know, and from others around you. So listen well.

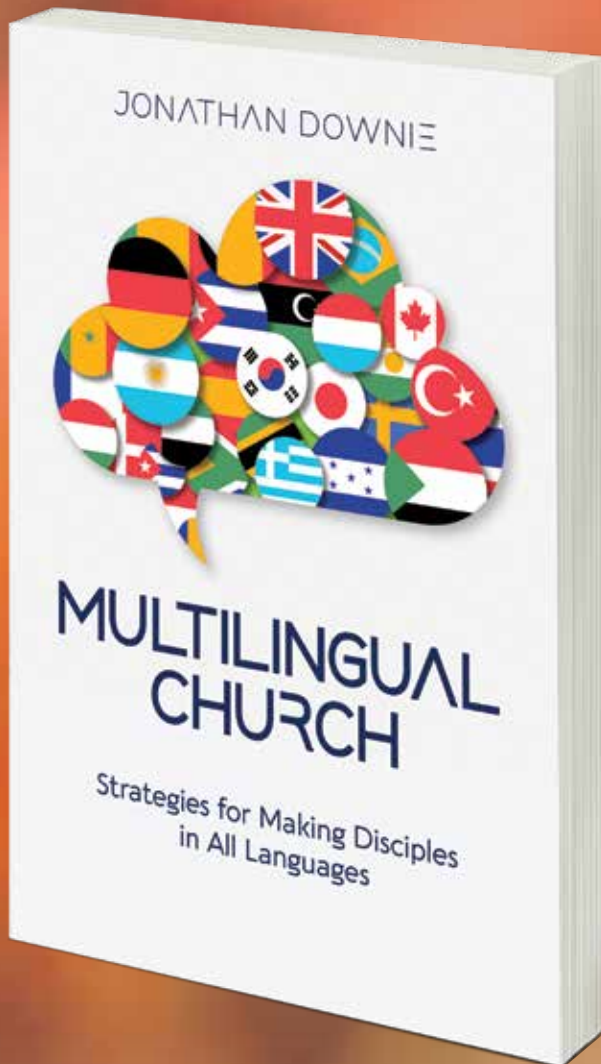
Please keep our fellowship here updated on your time. We want to lift you up in prayer, and as I noted in our commissioning service for you both, we are your community. We have sent you out, we want (and need) to be part of that. Tell us how we can be part of what is happening there as we pray.

God's Grace to you,
Elder (Uncle) Greg ▣▣



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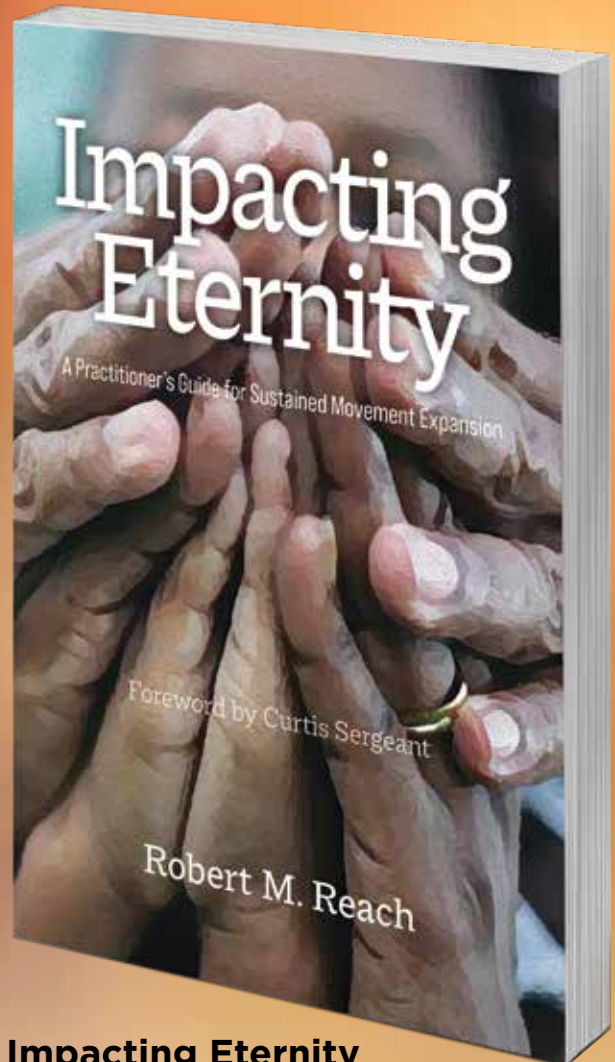
Multilingual Church
Strategies for Making Disciples in All Languages

Jonathan Downie

In a world where communities thrive with diverse languages, why should our churches lag behind? As migration increases and technology, like livestreaming, becomes commonplace, the need for multilingual churches is more pressing than ever. Still, many churches and mission organizations struggle with one-size-fits-all language solutions, while others desperately seek guidance to embrace multilingualism.

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Impacting Eternity
A Practitioner's Guide for Sustained Movement Expansion

Robert M. Reach

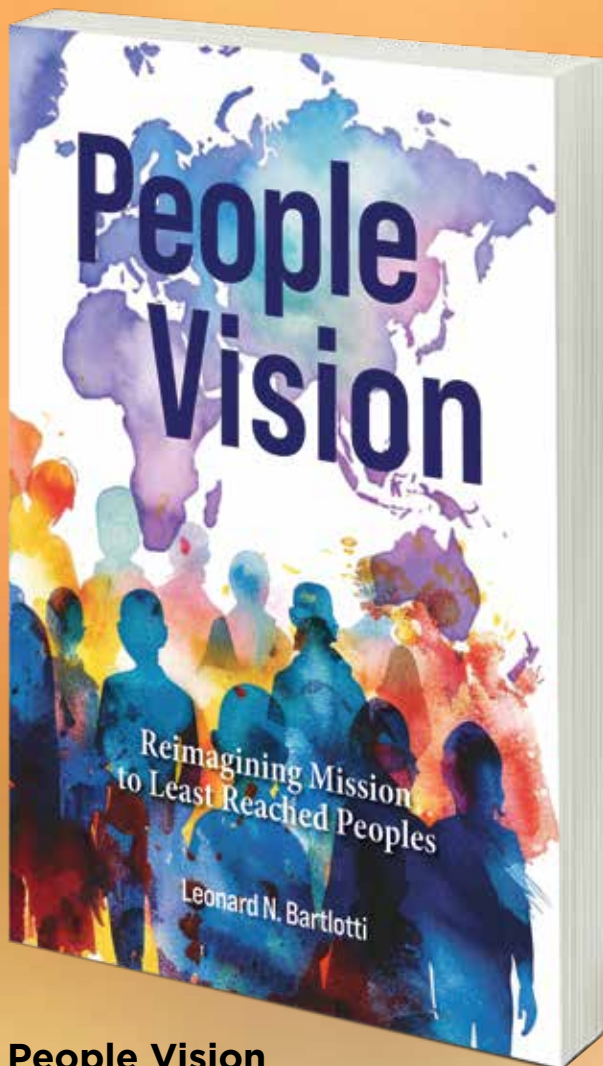
Impacting Eternity builds on multidimensional research performed over a period of years. Robert Reach gives seven concrete, root principles that bear kingdom fruit. This is not merely information that might work; it has proven effective in the trenches of movement life resulting in miraculous growth. Reach has found that his 5-5-5 methodology is very effective, but instead of promoting it, he helps readers think about the underlying leadership dynamics that spark and sustain a movement.

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to Least Reached Peoples

Leonard N. Bartlotti

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A Third of Us
What it Takes to Reach the Unreached

Marvin J. Newell

Today, over three billion people, a third of humanity, have yet to hear the good news of Jesus. Of all the many injustices in the world, this is the worst, because of the eternal consequences. A third of anything is significant—especially this third.

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Scripture references are from the *English Standard Version* (ESV). Images in this guide (marked with an asterisk *) come from the International Mission Board (IMB). We thank the IMB for their exquisite images, taken by workers in the field.

■ 1 Muslim Baghban in Pakistan

The Muslim Baghban people are spread far and wide, and as a result, they might speak any of eight languages. You can find them in both the rural and urban parts of India and Pakistan. All Baghban are Muslims.

But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

- Pray that today's people group to learn and understand that the Bible comes from the mouth and mind of the one, true God.
- Pray that God will open Baghban hearts to the gospel and will raise up His ambassadors to tell them of Jesus.
- Pray that God will reveal Himself in dreams and visions and send believers who can explain those dreams and visions to them.
- Pray for a Disciple Making Movement among the Baghban people in Pakistan.

■ 2 Azeri in Moldova

The homeland of the Azeris was first conquered by the Persians in the sixth century B.C. Islam was introduced into the area during the seventh century A.D. and has been practiced there ever since. A small number of them live in what is now Moldova. Islam has been part of the Azeri identity for centuries. That will not change without the Holy Spirit doing what no man can do.

The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. (Matthew 4:16)

- Pray for this people group to see the light of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for dedicated, Holy Spirit-anointed workers to go to the Azeris wherever they live.
- Pray for spiritual hunger and discernment among these Shia Muslims.
- Pray for a Disciple Making Movement among Azeris.

■ 3 Khalka Mongol in Mongolia

In the thirteenth century, Genghis Khan formed the largest empire in world history by uniting all the nomadic Mongol tribes. The Khalkha Mongols consider themselves the direct descendants of Genghis Khan, and they believe they are the true keepers of Mongol culture. They consider their language, Halh, to be the "real" Mongolian language. Many are nomads. The Khalkha Mongols were traditionally shamanists but were introduced to Buddhism in the 16th century.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)

- Pray that this people group to recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy and come to Christ for the riches of His forgiveness.
- Pray for the Mongols to be open to hearing and receiving the gospel message.
- Ask God to send dedicated workers to preach and demonstrate his power among the Khalka Mongols.

■ 4 Balkan Egyptian in Montenegro

The Balkan Egyptians are closely associated with the Ashkali people. They speak the same language in the countries where they live, and they also practice the same culture and traditions. Thousands left the Balkans for Western Europe during the wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia, and others were deported.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matthew 5:14)

- Pray for this people group to become a light to the world reflecting the goodness and grace of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for Balkan Egyptians in Montenegro to call out to Almighty God to redeem them from their sins. Pray for a movement to Christ to flourish among them.
- Pray for God to speak to the hearts of members of this people group through the many wonders of nature in this beautiful part of the world.



■ 5 Imazighen Berber in Morocco

Imazighen or Amazigh (singular) is the original ethnic group of the Maghreb region in North Africa, also known as the Berbers. These unique people continued to maintain their traditions even after the invasion by Arabs, who brought Islam. There are some who are making an active effort to achieve recognition of the “Moroccan Amazigh identity,” but others are happy to live and mix with Arabs.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16)

- Pray that the Lord gives this people group the discernment to recognize false prophets and the grace to know the true Prophet, Priest and King, Jesus Christ.
- Pray for Imazighen believers to have the love and boldness to share Christ with their families.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of Imazighen people.

■ 6 Rif Berber in Morocco

The word “Rif” is an Arabic word meaning “the edge of cultivated area.” The Northern Shilha of Algeria and Morocco, known as the “Rif Berbers,” have numerous tribes of tough and hardened people eking out an existence on the harsh, uninviting slopes of the Rif Mountains. Berbers are indigenous to Morocco and other North African countries.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

- Pray for believers in today's people group to be courageous in their witness for Christ and fear God, not men.
- Pray for an abundant harvest this year from the Rif Berbers as a sign of God's caring heart and power.
- Pray for the Rif Berbers to have hearts that are willing to seek and find Jesus Christ.
- Pray for fruitful efforts to make disciples and plant churches among Rif Berbers.

■ 7 Makuwa in Mozambique

The Makuwa tend towards extremely conservative and suspicious attitudes. They tend to keep to themselves and rarely form friendships with outsiders or other ethnic groups. Although they have an animistic worldview including ancestor worship and divination, the Makuwa root themselves deeply in Islamic tradition; however, many remain unfamiliar with the details of Islamic doctrine.

At that time Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. (Matthew 11:25)

- Pray for this people group to humble themselves and come to trust in Christ as little children.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to divinely inspire the handful of Makuwa churches to find a way to reach the hearts of the Makuwa people.
- Pray for teachers and pastors to be available to instruct new believers in the ways of the Lord, leading them to spiritual maturity.

■ 8 Makonde in Mozambique

The Makonde like to carve household objects, figures and masks, and their traditional religious practices are an animistic form of ancestor worship. While this practice still continues, today the Makonde of Mozambique mainly subscribe to Islam, at least nominally. While a number of Catholic Christians exist among the Makonde, there are few Evangelicals.

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matthew 13:8)

- Pray that today's people group would become fertile soil and produces much fruit for God and His kingdom.
- Pray these Christ followers would become mature enough in the faith to represent Christ well and to make a positive impact.
- Pray for an improved literacy rate among this tribe.
- Pray for Makonde disciples who will make more disciples who will make even more disciples.

■ 9 Rakhine in Myanmar

Centuries ago, the most feared pirates and sailors in the Bay of Bengal terrorized communities along the seacoast and far up the river channels of what is now Bangladesh. They were called "maghs" or pirates. They now speak the Arakanese language, and are known as the Arakanese or Rakhine, from the Arakan region of Myanmar.

Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find. And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. (Matthew 22:9-10)

- Pray that many in today's people group to accept the Lord's invitation to become part of His kingdom and join His great feast at the end of the age.
- Pray for trained storytellers to use the JESUS Film and other stories to share the gospel.
- Pray for the few believers among this people and for pastors to teach the Scriptures accurately and faithfully to them.



■ 10 Kaman in Myanmar

The Kaman converted to Islam over six centuries ago but they share the customs and cultures of Buddhist Rakhines. They believe that Allah is the supreme God of the universe, but on a day-by-day basis, they depend on spiritual forces. The Kaman need help from those who will insist they receive fair and humane treatment. Mission workers can bring the good news that God sees their needs.

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25:21)

- Pray that many in this people group become good and faithful servants of the Master and celebrate with Him in the coming kingdom.
- Pray that the Church would gain entry to minister within Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and stand alongside the Kaman.
- Pray that God's Spirit would use their difficult situations to bring about a people movement to Christ.

■ 11 Hindu Dagi in India

Musical farmers? That is the Dagi people. Their traditional occupation was to play musical instruments at festivals and celebrations, but many of them are now farmers. Economically they are not doing well, partially because they have a low literacy rate.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel. (Mark 1:14-15)

- Pray for this people group to get the opportunity to hear a clear presentation of the good news.
- Pray for God's Spirit to move them to repent and believe in Christ.
- Pray for Dagi elders and patriarchs to see and understand that Jesus Christ has power over all spirit beings, and he can provide them with life to the full.
- Pray for a Disciple Making Movement among the Dagi people to redefine them as a community.

■ 12 Nubri in Nepal

In Nepal's Nubri Valley, a beautiful yet harsh setting, the Nubri herd animals, make beer, grow wheat, welcome a few tourists, seek out a location for their cell phone signals, and celebrate their traditional Buddhist festivals. Each village has a temple and the lamas do rituals to bless houses and fields, heal the sick and appease local mountain spirits with offerings. Up to 70 percent of their young people are being sent to Kathmandu and India for education.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, If you will, you can make me clean. Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. (Mark 1:40-41)

- Pray for this people group to feel the healing touch of Christ and be cleansed from their sins.
- Pray for spiritual hunger that would lead the Nubri people to the foot of the cross and the empty grave.



■ 13 Yakthumba Limbu in Nepal

Many of the Yakthumba Limbu men are in military service and leave their families for long periods. Consequently, women have much responsibility and influence within their families, although they are patrilineal (line of descent is traced through males) in structure. Ministry to women and children may be welcomed in the absence of husbands/fathers. Introduction to Christian fellowship and values may open doors to the good news of eternal life provided by almighty God for Yathumba Limbu in Nepal.

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace! Be still! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39)

- Pray that the Lord brings His peace that passes all understanding into the hearts of this people group.
- Ask the Lord to bring forth vigorous Limbu churches that will plant others for the glory of His name.

■ 14 Dutch Jewish in the Netherlands

Because of the uniqueness of their history and culture, all Jews have a strong sense of identity. Persecution of and discrimination against the Jews have been the historical reasons for their settlements around the world. Yet they are relatively safe in most European countries like the Netherlands. Outreach in Jewish communities that shows empathy for their struggles as well as connecting the teachings of the New Testament to the Abrahamic Covenant might open their eyes to see Jesus.

And he did not permit him but said to him, Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. (Mark 5:19)

- Pray for those who have been blessed among today's people group to boldly and lovingly tell others of God's abundant mercy.
- Ask the Lord to send forth loving Christians to work among the Jewish communities.
- Pray for a movement to Christ within Netherland's Jewish community.

■ 15 Muslim Bahna in Pakistan

The Bahna trace their roots to Persia and modern-day Afghanistan. Though they used to process cotton, the advancement of technology has led them to abandon that work in favor of agriculture, manufacturing, and trade. Many Muslim Bahna left India and relocated to Pakistan, mainly in the Sindh Province.

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. (Mark 7:37)

- Pray that this people group comes to understand that the wisdom, power and goodness of God are found only in Jesus Christ.
- Pray that the Bahna would hear the gospel in impactful ways and have ears to hear God speak to them.
- Pray that Disciple Making Movements would be started in Bahna communities and grow mightily.

■ 16 Kanarese in New Zealand

Many states in India have their own language and Karnataka is no exception. The Kanarese are Kannada speakers who blend in well with other South Asians who have migrated to New Zealand. Such South Asians in New Zealand are seeking abundant life from sources that cannot offer it. Only Jesus Christ offers abundant life.

And he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, You are the Christ. (Mark 8:29)

- Pray that this people would believe and proclaim, like Peter, that Jesus Christ is their Savior and Lord.
- Pray for spiritual hunger to come to the Kanarese and other Hindu South Asian people groups in New Zealand.
- Pray for believers to lovingly reach out to the Kanarese in New Zealand. Pray for reproducing disciples among them.

■ 17 Jat Gil (Sikh) in India

A name that crops up time and again in Bollywood is the surname Shergill. A number of Shergills are prominent in India's entertainment industry. The Shergill name comes from the Gil Jat clan, mostly from India's Punjab State.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37)

- Pray for today's people group to come to realize that all the spiritual riches of life and true wisdom are found in Jesus Christ alone.
- Pray for God to anoint and appoint workers to create relevant, culturally sensitive Christ-centered radio, TV and films that will be appropriate for the Gil Jats of India.
- Pray for the Gil Jats, even those who work in the entertainment industry, to see their need for Jesus Christ.



■ 18 Zarma in Niger

The Zarma are farmers who use simple tools; they do not have access to modern farming equipment. They live in the Sahel Desert which makes farming very difficult. Some are fishermen, businessmen or teachers. Though Islam was introduced to them by outsiders, the Zarma have embraced it as their own.

For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise. (Mark 9:31)

- Pray for today's people group would comprehend that Jesus died for their sins and rose again demonstrating His power over sin and death.
- Pray for the Lord to thrust out workers to the Zarma people in Niger.
- Pray for the Lord to show Himself loving and powerful by providing adequate rain for the Zarma people, who live in a dry land.
- Pray for spiritual hunger and openness to the teachings and ways of Jesus Christ.

■ 19 Wodaabe Fulani in Niger

The Fulani have several subgroups, one of which is the Wodaabe people. The Wodaabe people are noted for their art and their unique traditions, such as beauty contests for the men.

But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. (Mark 10:14-15)

- Pray that this people group humbles themselves and comes to God with child-like trust and thereby enter into His kingdom.
- Pray that the few Wodaabe who follow Christ would be filled with the fruit and the power of the Holy Spirit so they can lead others to the cross.
- Pray for the Lord to thrust out workers who are willing to brave the harsh lifestyle of Niger's Wodaabe people.
- Pray for Wodaabe people to become disciples of Christ who will make disciples of others.



■ 20 Manga Kanuri in Nigeria

The Kanuri have been Muslims since the eleventh century. Though they blend their form of Islam with their ancient beliefs, Islam is their identity. It will be difficult to present Christ to them in such a way they won't see it as a threat to their identity. Throughout Africa, people love music and dance. If the gospel message is presented musically, the Manga Kanuri might find it acceptable.

And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. (Mark 10:51)

- Pray for the Lord to heal the spiritual blindness of today's people group.
- Pray that these people see and recognize Jesus for who He truly is, the Light and Savior of the world.
- Pray that God would grant favor to mission agencies currently focusing on the Kanuri.
- Ask the Lord to raise up a movement of Manga Kanuri disciples making more disciples.

■ 21 Baangi in Nigeria

Nigerian followers of Christ from other tribes can reach the Baangi tribe with the good news. The Lela and the Dakakari live close by and they already have a Christian presence.

Jesus said to them, Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? (Mark 12:24)

- Pray that this people group hungers for and learns the Scriptures.
- Pray that these people begin to experience the miraculous power of God.
- Pray for the Lord to raise up workers from among the Lela and the Dakakari tribes to reach out to these Muslims.
- Pray that workers would not stop until there is a powerful movement to Christ that would bless them spiritually and socially.
- Pray for workers to find "persons of peace" who will give them the opportunity to speak into this people group.

■ 22 Bole in Nigeria

The Bole are known for their hard work, educational advantage, and connections. The region where the Bole people reside includes the terrorist group Boko Haram. The presence of terrorist groups in the home area of the Bole brings an extra measure of danger and difficulty in taking the gospel to the Bole people. The presence of terrorist groups can potentially be an impetus for the Bole to seek the Lord's protection and blessing.

And he said to them, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (Luke 10:2)

- Pray for an abundance of Holy Spirit-led workers to disciple this people group.
- Pray for peace throughout the homeland of the Bole tribe, as well as all of northeastern Nigeria.
- Pray also that gospel recordings (which are available in this language) would be widely circulated.

■ 23 Norwegian Jewish in Norway

Norway is home to a small Jewish population. Jews in European countries associate Christianity with persecution since much of the persecution through the centuries was church sanctioned.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, (Luke 24:45)

- Pray that the minds of this people group will be opened to understand God's word by the Spirit Himself.
- Pray that the few Jewish background believers in Europe would be filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Ask the Lord to soften the hearts of the Jewish people in Norway towards Christ so they might hear and receive the message of salvation.
- Pray that God would grant Jewish believers favor as they share their faith in Christ with Jewish people.



■ 24 Omani Arab in Oman

Omani Arabs were among the first people in the Middle East to accept Islam. They are averse to change in general, especially when they think it could threaten cultural traditions. The Omani Arabs are strongly committed to Islam. To follow Jesus in this environment would be difficult, as it would break their traditions of "puritanism."

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

- Pray for the Lord is to help today's people group to understand that apart from Him they can do nothing of spiritual and eternal value.
- Pray that a strong movement to Jesus would bring whole Omani families and communities into a rich experience of God's blessings.

■ 25 Awan in Pakistan

Many Awan serve in the Pakistani military. Violence and feuds are common in north Pakistan, where the Awan live. Many resources are available in the Awan's primary language of Western Punjabi, including the New Testament and the JESUS Film.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

- Pray that today's people group looks to the Lamb of God, Jesus, to have their sins taken away.
- Pray for peace in the area where the Awan live.
- Pray that Awan would be led by the Spirit to listen to radio programs and connect to Christian resources on the internet.
- Pray for the Lord to do miracles and raise up a body of believers among the Awan of Pakistan.

■ 26 Muslim Kumhar in Pakistan

Though they are traditionally potters, many Kumhars in Pakistan are now landowners. They have two different communities; one group is made up of local Pakistani Kumhars and the other migrated from India.

Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

- Pray that many in this people group are born again and enter into the Kingdom of God.
- Pray that God would give Muslim Kumhar dreams & visions leading them to salvation and abundant life.
- Pray that gospel materials on the internet would lead many Kumhar people to Christ.
- Pray for entire Kumhar families to have the chance to hear and respond to the only Savior.

■ 27 Muslim Mochi in Pakistan

If you were to purchase any sort of saddle or leather shoes in Nepal, northern India or Pakistan, chances are good that it was put together by a Mochi. The name "Mochi" comes from the Sanskrit mochika and the Hindi word mojna which mean "to fold." Pakistan is a Muslim culture heavily influenced by Hinduism. Educational standards are low for Mochi people.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. (John 4:23)

- Pray that this people group soon begins to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Mochi people have enough resources in their language to understand the gospel.
- Pray their hearts would be drawn to them.
- Pray for the Lord to raise up and thrust out disciples to go to the Mochi people.

■ 28 Jalbani Baloch in Pakistan

Baloch Jalbani people are traditionally farmers and shepherds. Agriculture is limited because of the harsh climate. Baloch Jalbani people have been isolated due to harsh climate, the difficulty of the mountainous terrain, and their former reputation as bandits.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

- Pray that today's people group listens to God's message and believes in the good news of their salvation.
- Pray for Holy Spirit-led workers to go to every Baloch subgroup and lead them into movements to Christ.
- Pray for Baloch elders to have dreams of the risen Christ that will lead them to open the doors of their community to hear about His provision for the penalty of their sins.

■ 29 Palestinian Arab in the West Bank

Palestinians are predominantly adherents of Sunni Islam with a minority Christian community. The Holy Land, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is also the birthplace of the Palestinian Church. Turmoil in Israel and the West Bank / Gaza makes Christian witness to the Palestinians challenging, but turmoil sometimes makes people more open to change.

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

- Pray that this people group hungers for God & begins to feed spiritually on the Bread of life, Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the Palestinians to increasingly experience peace, with political stability and improving economic conditions.
- Pray for a movement to Christ that will transform Palestinian society, bringing them economic and spiritual prosperity.

■ 30 Jabal Nafusah in Libya

Lying southwest of Tripoli, the rocky Jebel Nefusa Plateau rises to an elevation of about 3,000 feet. A unique aspect of Nafusah villages is the famous troglodyte houses. These are underground homes carved vertically or horizontally into the soft limestone and marls (a mixture of clay, sand and limestone). Libya is currently experiencing much turmoil and the dangers are many.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (John 7:37-38)

- Pray for this people group to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the overflowing, gracious love of God.
- Pray for a stable and effective government that will be able to protect the people and provide stability in the country.
- Pray for an abundance of vibrant Christ followers among the Jabal Nafusah people of Libya.

OCTOBER

■ 1 Yazidi in Germany

The Yazidis are ethnic Kurds who hold to a hybrid religion that Muslims mistakenly believe involves devil worship. For that reason, many have fled to safe countries like Germany. Yazidis are sometimes hostile to any attempt to convert from their religious beliefs. Leaders have stepped in at times to try to prevent the preaching of the gospel to members of the group.

And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him. (John 8:29)

- Pray for today's people group to begin to please God by trusting in and obeying His Son.
- Pray for true peace among these displaced and traumatized people. A handful of Yazidi have come to faith in Christ.
- Pray they would be free to practice their faith, as the Yazidi have historically persecuted and even stoned to death those who convert.

■ 2 Pajonal Asheninka in Peru

The Pajonal Asheninka of Peru experience cultural dislocation due to the rubber industry, epidemics and terrorists. There are four or five churches, and they have the New Testament in their language. They live in small family units in communities numbering about 100 persons each. They engage in small-scale agriculture of maize and manioc as well as hunting and gathering. Coffee is their only cash crop.

Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. (John 8:58)

- Pray for this people group to understand that Jesus is not just another human prophet but is the eternal God.
- Pray that animists would experience power in the gospel, and that biblical teachings would not become blended with their old religion.
- Pray the people would remain united with minimal disruption.





Keith Bacongco

Keith Bacongco, flickr.com

3 Maguindanao in the Philippines

The traditional Maguindanao pattern of settlement has been slowly altered by the building of roads that do not follow the natural course of the waterways. Large towns have sprung up along these highways, becoming new centers of commerce. Muslim religious leaders and teachers preside over religious life. They teach schoolboys to read and memorize the Koran.

He answered, Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. (John 9:25)

- Pray that the Lord removes the spiritual blindness of today's people group and they begin to see God's truth revealed in Jesus Christ.
- Ask the Lord to raise up a strong church among the Maguindanao that will be a blessing to their community.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of the Maguindanao people for the gospel. Pray for a Disciple Making Movement.

4 Moro Joloano Tausug in the Philippines

The Tausug are the most dominant of the Muslim groups in the southern Philippines. The name Tausug means "people of the sea current." The ideal marriage among the Tausug is still one arranged by the parents, although now young people may select their own mates. First and second cousins are favored as spouses. The Tausug believe that after death a person goes to hell, although eventually he or she can reach heaven.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

- Pray that today's people group would receive God's Spirit and become empowered to tell others about the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
- Pray that God would use Tausug believers as bold witnesses to their own people leading to an unstoppable church planting movement.

5 Maranao in the Philippines

The word Maranao means "people of the lake." The people are famous for their artwork, sophisticated weaving, wood and metal craft, and epic literature. Small communities of Maranaos, mostly traders, live in all major towns of the Philippines. They are the descendants of Muslim Malays.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

- Pray for this people group to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to proclaim the greatness of God.
- Pray the Lord would reveal Himself to the Maranao people.
- Pray for them to experience a movement to Christ that will bless them economically and spiritually.

6 Polish Jewish in Poland

Polish Jewry constitute fewer than 1% of its people, yet they have played a significant role in Polish history, usually as scapegoats. Indeed, during World War II, Nazis sent Jews to Poland to die in death camps and pogroms continued after the war. Memory of pogroms, the Holocaust and anti-Semitism are the major obstacles to reaching the Polish Jew in Poland, a country labeled as Christian.

You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' (Acts 2:28)

- Pray the Lord makes known to today's people group the true path of life.
- Pray they learn to rejoice in God's presence.
- Pray that Messianic Jewish witness would be well received, and that Christian witness would be seen as an act of love.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger among Polish Jews that will lead the way to thousands accepting their Messiah.

7 Portuguese-speaking Jewish in Poland

The word Sephard was the name used by Jews in medieval times for the Iberian Peninsula. Sephardim Jews, then, are the descendants of the Jews who lived in Spain or Portugal prior to expulsion in 1492 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Sephardim also have a distinctive language called Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, which is a dialect of Castilian Spanish with Hebrew and Turkish elements.



And all the people saw him walking and praising God. (Acts 3:9)

- Pray for the Lord to do signs and wonders among today's people group.
- Pray they trust in God and give Him the glory.
- Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth loving Christians to work among this Jewish community.
- Pray for an unstoppable movement to Christ.

■ 8 Andi in Russia

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19). Clearly, the Andi people of the mountains of Dagestan would not agree with this statement. Blood vengeance is one of their enshrined values, and cycles of violence, feuds and revenge have continued in their communities for generations. These people live in a remote, mountainous part of the world and they are automatically hostile to outsiders.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

- Pray for today's people group to come to understand that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ and in no other religion.
- Pray that many from the Andi people would embrace the only Savior and be happily surprised by joy and peace!
- Pray for a people movement to Christ among the Andi people.

■ 9 Muhamasheen in Qatar

Akhdam (or Muhamasheen) people mostly live in big city slums in extreme poverty. Men work as street sweepers, and women collect cans and bottles and beg. Sometimes people who have known only severe poverty cannot see past their circumstances to a better future. There is a need for every kind of practical help for this poverty-stricken, unreached people group. Followers of Christ can help them with both physical and spiritual needs.

But Peter and John answered them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. (Acts 4:19-20)

- Pray for this people group to listen to and to obey God.

- Pray that they hear God's message and tell others about His marvelous works. Pray for many to seek and find Almighty God, leading to a movement toward Christ.
- Pray for many Muhamasheen families to be blessed spiritually and financially as they allow Jesus to transform their community.

■ 10 Romanian Jewish in Romania

There is a Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, which publishes a newspaper. Reluctance to follow Christ is largely because of historic antisemitism on the part of traditional Christians. Emigration is reducing the number of Jews in Romania.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30)

- Pray for boldness and love among the workers who go to today's people group.
- Pray the church in Romania would seek to win Jews in hopes of starting a movement to Christ.
- Pray that the church in Romania would publicly apologize for its anti-Semitism.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to create in Romanian Jews such a desire for truth that a people movement results.
- Pray that Jewish leaders would be more open to the gospel and its advocates.

■ 11 Nogai in Romania

The Nogai Tatar are part of a very small population of Tatar people living in Romania. Larger groups are scattered across Russia. Today, virtually all of the Nogai profess to be Sunni Muslim. Islam is part of their identity. To them, following Christ means switching to a foreign religious system.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (Acts 5:41)

- Pray that believers in this people group are willing to endure persecution for the name of Christ.
- Ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers to live and work among the Nogai Tatar of Romania.
- Pray for their hearts to be receptive to Jesus Christ.
- Pray for a massive movement to Christ among the Nogai Tatar people of Romania.

12 Botlikh in Russia

The Botlikh people have had some close calls with the gospel! According to estimates, less than one in 500 of them have responded to God's invitation to salvation and are evangelical believers. While that might seem like a small number, it is much greater and holds far more potential for church growth than an absolute zero. However, the vast majority of the Botlikh people believe in a "folk" version of Islam.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, Do you understand what you are reading? (Acts 8:30)

- Pray that the Lord gives today's people group a desire to hear and to understand God's words.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to put this people group on the hearts of those equipped to accomplish the task of Bible translation for them.
- Pray for a Disciple Making Movement to flourish among the Botlikh people this decade.

13 Kaitag in Russia

Some Kaitag towns are built so high in the mountains that they can seldom be reached except by helicopter! Kaitags follow a Sufi form of Islam combined with local tradition. Some seek protection from evil forces by wearing charms and a few use a form of black magic. They are known for their unusual, embroidered textile art form. They are loyal and friendly, and they love music.

Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:12)

- Pray for many from this people group to be amazed at what Christ can do to bless their families and communities.
- Pray that God would work in the hearts of Russian believers and thrust them out to reach the Kaitag people.
- Pray for a Disciple Making Movement.



Jose Luis Cernadas iglesias, flickr.com

14 Kumyk in Russia

The Kumyk are historically a proud people, respected in Dagestan for their literary, artistic and economic accomplishments. This pride, however, is tempered by disillusionment stemming from the destabilizing elements of violence. Islam spread among the Kumyk people of Caucasian Dagestan in the eighth to twelfth centuries. Prior to that time, both Christianity and traditional religion were widespread. They worshiped Tengri and various spirits and demons. Islam is an overlay to these beliefs which remain today.

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. (Acts 13:47)

- Pray that the believers in today's people group become God's light to their own group and to the nations of the world.
- Pray for a movement to Christ among the Kumyk people that will spread to other Muslim peoples in the Caucasus region.
- Pray for an eagerness for spiritual nourishment that only comes from submission to Jesus Christ.

15 Khvarshi in Russia

The Khvarshi people living in the southwest mountains of Dagestan in Russia have lived a hard life for decades. From 1944-1957, the Soviets forcibly relocated them out of their mountain homeland and into the lowlands of Chechnya. In the years following, they were allowed to return, but those who did found their villages in ruins. Though some houses have been rebuilt, many ruins remain.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us. (Acts 16:9)

- Pray that the Lord sends messengers to this people group to tell them the good news about Jesus.
- Pray that the Khvarshi would find peace, refreshment, and even economic recovery from the God whose name is Jehovah Jireh, the provider.
- Pray for a movement to Christ among the Khvarshi people.

16 Akhvakh in Russia

The literature calls them Akhvakh, they call themselves Atluatii or Ashvado, the Russian government classifies them as Avars, but God calls them lost people in need of a Savior. The Akhvakh are almost entirely folk Muslims who seek out shamans and use the Koran like a talisman.

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

- Pray for today's people group to repent of their sins and to believe in the God of the Bible.
- Pray for the two or three believers in one family, for their protection and growth in faith and witness.
- Pray for Christian linguist-teachers to translate the Bible, collect local lore and teach literacy to the people in their heart language.

17 Uyghur in Kazakhstan

The Uyghur people of northwest China have been in the news in recent years. Thousands have been placed in "reeducation camps" by the Chinese government. Some Uyghurs from China have been able to escape Chinese oppression and relocate to Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, the Uyghurs are permitted to practice Islam and live out their Turkic culture.

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. (Acts 19:20)

- Pray that the word of the Lord spreads and prevails in this people group.
- Pray that the Lord would call missionaries to go to Kazakhstan and share Christ with the Uyghurs.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to anoint the gospel as it goes forth via radio. Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of Uyghurs.



Serge Thellier, flickr.com

18 Nigerian Fulani in Cameroon

Scattered mostly in Nigeria and Cameroon, the semi-nomadic Nigerian Fulani people fiercely reject anything they perceive as contrary to their lifestyle of roaming with their cattle herds. This includes education and permanent homes. They are widely regarded as troublesome impediments to the large cattle ranchers. Their inability to read and intense independence have placed them on unequal footing with those who have education and power.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

- Pray that today's people group would experience God's wonderful grace and begin to tell others about Him.
- Pray the Fulani would be able to care adequately for their families and be led to be better prepared for the rapidly changing conditions of the 21st century.
- Pray for a Disciple Making Movement.

19 Shahari in Saudi Arabia

Speakers of the Shehri language reside in southwest Oman, on the border with Yemen, which is a mountainous area. Historically, this area was the largest producer of frankincense in the world. The people are said to be increasingly bilingual in Dhofari Arabic, and the Ethnologue lists Shehri as a threatened language. A small number live in Saudi Arabia.

To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:18)

- Pray for God to send spiritual light and truth to this people group.
- Pray for Disciple Making Movements among them, with the hope that new believers will return to their nomadic roots and share Christ with others in Saudi Arabia.
- Pray for the youth of these tribes to be able to make needed adjustments to a rapidly changing world.

■ **20 Hijazi Arab in Saudi Arabia**

Arabia once had a large Christian population, but they were expelled when Islam gained control 1,300 years ago. Today, Saudi Arabs see themselves as preservers of the Islamic faith. The Hijazi Arabs speak one of the variants of the Arabic language.

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen. (Acts 28:28)

- Pray for this people group to hear and to accept the message of God’s salvation.
- Pray that the religious zeal of the Hijazi Arabs would soon be redirected toward serving Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to establish His Church among them.
- Pray for the Lord to send dreams and visions to Hijazi Arab elders, so they will be ready to accept Christ on His terms.

■ **21 Pulaar Fulani in Senegal**

Most Pulaar Fulani call Senegal home. As rural people, they excel at farming, fishing and animal husbandry. They divide society into four main social classes, each with twelve castes. The Pulaar proudly acknowledge themselves as the first black Africans to convert to Islam although spiritism and magic play a significant role in daily life. They also believe themselves to be defenders of the Muslim faith.

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give new believers among today’s people group victory their spiritual battles.
- Pray for discipling that leads to maturity for Pulaar Fulani believers and for rapid multiplication of home groups that leads to a strong movement to Christ.



John Atherton, flickr.com

■ **22 Wolof in Senegal**

The Wolof people are the dominant group in Senegal. They are known for their well-dressed women. The Wolof follow a complex code of behavior that is based on their social status.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (Ephesians 1:3)

- Thank the Lord that He is giving His spiritual blessings to this people group. The Wolof generally have not been open to the gospel.
- Pray this would change. Christian believers living to the south of Senegal may have access to the Wolof.
- Pray they be given a heart to attempt this.
- Pray for the few Christian believers among the Wolof, that they would grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Pray they would represent him faithfully.

■ **23 Serbian-speaking Jewish in Serbia**

Serbian Jews have been recognized throughout their history in Serbia for their participation in various wars in this region. Their lives remained stable in times between wars, but during the Holocaust they were placed into prison camps where they were used as forced labor. Today, some are involved in political and national affairs. Jewish people often don’t give Jesus a chance because of abuse by Christians.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saint. (Ephesians 1:17-18)

- Pray for spiritual wisdom and light for the leaders of today’s people group.
- Pray for loving ambassadors of Christ to go to them.
- Pray for a movement to Jesus Christ among Serbian Jews in Serbia.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give Serbian-speaking Jews hearts that are soft toward their messiah.

■ 24 Susu in Sierra Leone

The Susu tend to live where there are many marshes and waterways. They often favor marriages between cousins, and they live as an extended family group. The Susu combine their Islamic faith with traditional beliefs. They believe that ghosts, spirits and gods all inhabit the same land, and that witches have the power to change into animals and cause harm to their villages.

That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (Ephesians 3:16-17)

- Make this your prayer for today's people group.
- Pray that God would release the people from bondage to spirits and that they would recognize Jesus as the One with the power to give them freedom from wicked spirits.
- Pray for improved health care and good schools for the Susu people in Sierra Leone.

■ 25 Madurese Bawean in Singapore

The Madurese Bawean people come from Indonesia in search of a better life in prosperous Singapore. Those who live and work in Singapore send money back to relatives in Indonesia who struggle economically. The Madurese Bawean are Sunni Muslim.

That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:26-27)

- Pray for an emerging, spotless and pure church among this people group.
- Pray for the Bawean who work in Singapore to make authentic Christian friends who will share their lives and faith with them.
- Pray God would raise up disciples among those who work in Singapore through strong believers.
- Pray they would return to their island home with the gospel.
- Pray for the Baweans to become "Bereans" who study and apply God's word and share it with others.

■ 26 Slovak-speaking Jewish in Slovakia

Through the centuries most Slovakian Jews moved to cities and acquired skills as artisans, merchants and shopkeepers. Jewish people in Slovakia need the opportunity to understand the perfect justice of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who loves them and laid down His life for them. Their spirituality is largely inward-looking. They seldom discuss spiritual matters with outsiders.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11)

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give His armor to the believers among today's people group.
- Pray that when Slovakian Jews hear the gospel, they would respond with heart-felt obedience.
- Pray for a mighty movement of this people group starting within families and growing into strong Bible teaching fellowships filled with disciples who will reach others.

■ 27 Shihuh in Oman

The land in which the Shihuh live is rocky and arid, with very little vegetation. Their stone houses are called bayt al qufl, which means "cave house", since they are partly underground. Until about the early 1970s, the tribe was isolated from the outside world. They did not trust outsiders, and it was common for visitors at that time to have stones thrown at them by tribesmen. Nowadays, the Shihuh are no longer hostile to outsiders, but neither are they particularly friendly.

...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:11)

- Pray for righteous character for those who find the Lord among this people group.
- Pray for sufficient rainfall to provide for livestock and to grow grain needed for food.



Ismail Salad Osman Hajji dirir, unsplash.com

■ 28 Jiiddo in Somalia

The Jiiddo are said to be a sub-group of the large Digil people group in Somalia. The dress of both men and women closely resembles a Roman toga and is typically white or gray in color. The Jiiddo are virtually all Muslim. Although they are quite orthodox in their religious practices, few have a deep understanding of their faith.

Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; (Colossians 1:11-12)

- May new believers among this people group walk in joy and love in the Holy Spirit.
- Pray Jiiddo Muslims of Somalia will not gain satisfaction from their religion.
- Pray they will begin to desire to know the creator God in a personal way and will come to understand this is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ.

■ 29 Garre in Somalia

Although the Somali are all Sunni Muslim and share a common cultural heritage, they are divided by language distinctions and clan conflicts. One of these is the Garre sub-tribe. Most Garre are nomadic herdsmen, seasonally migrating with their camels, sheep, and goats. They live in portable huts made of bent saplings covered with animal skins or woven mats.

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

- Pray for new believers in this people group to have Holy Spirit-led words to say to their elders as they explain their new faith.
- Pray for the Lord to give the Garre people healthy livestock as a testimony of His goodness and love.
- Pray for the Garre people to be blessed physically and spiritually by the Lord's people.
- Pray for the Lord to thrust out His children to the Garre people and empower them to win souls.

■ 30 Tunni in Somalia

The Tunni are in southern Somalia, between the Juba and Shebelle Rivers. This region has the richest agricultural land in the country. The Tunni are primarily farmers. They live in round huts with mud walls and cone-shaped grass roofs. The Tunni are completely Muslim. Somalia is a harsh land, and the Tunni people are strongly committed to the Islamic faith. There are no known Christians among them.

So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:12)

- Make this your prayer for today's people group.
- Pray for peace in Somalia, that all peoples of the country may be blessed.
- Pray for a stable, effective government.
- Pray for workers to go to the Tunni community, leading to an unstoppable movement to Christ.

■ 31 Bhojpuri Bihari in South Africa

The world is truly a melting pot of peoples. Migration is common. Such is the case of the Bhojpuri Bihari. During and soon after colonial days, a large number of people from the Bihar Province of British India moved about to work as indentured laborers. Some went to South Africa, where they found employment and were able to establish themselves by working on sugar cane, cocoa, rice and rubber plantations. Today, they are most likely to be businessmen.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

- Make this your prayer for this people group.
- Pray for a people movement to Jesus Christ among the Bihari of South Africa.
- Pray for the Lord to thrust out loving workers to them.

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