

The Priority of Reaching Every Unengaged People Group

I. THE CHALLENGE

One of the key challenges of the Great Commission is to finish the task of making disciples of all nations or people groups. It's the continual process of finding out who it is in the world that still hasn't been reached. One of the objectives of this conference is to look at where the Church is not and then decide what we're going to do about it.

It is absolutely essential to focus on those people groups who currently have no access to the Gospel. They are groups of people who, if they wanted to know the truth, would have no opportunity.

II. THE PROMISES

The Scripture has two promises for us:

- A. The Gospel will be preached everywhere! We will be a part of it or God will do it without us. He'll give dreams to the whole world - not just to Muslims. But, everybody is going to meet Him in some way.
- B. The second promise of Scripture says that people from every tribe and nation and people and language will one day bow before Him. Because the Lord promises it, we know it is going to happen.

III. THE DEFINITIONS

Many of us started thinking about people groups in 1974 when Dr. Ralph Winter delivered his landmark talk at the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism in which he pointed out that the "nations" referred to in Revelation were actually people groups. Recently, refinements on unreached people groups have introduced the concept of Unengaged, Unreached People Groups. What is an Unengaged Group? It is a group that has absolutely no access to the Gospel message. Outside of nature and divine revelation, if a person wanted to know the Gospel, he couldn't get access to it. There are not even radio broadcasts with the Gospel coming into these groups.

IV. OUR PROGRESS

Let's take a look at the progress in reaching these groups since 1974 when Ralph Winter talked to us.

There are about 12,000 ethno-linguistic groups. The total would be close to 16,000 if you count the ethno-cultural groups of India and South Asia. But, let's stick to the ethno-linguistic groups for the moment. Since 1974, about 6,000 of them have been reached – that is, there are at least 2% of the populations of these groups that are believers. That leaves 6,000 yet to be reached. Of those, there is a church planting effort underway in 2,500 of them. So, that leaves approximately 3,500 groups that are still unreached and still unengaged with the Gospel.

But, look what has happened in just the last four years. In November of 2005, there were 555 million

people and 639 Unengaged, Unreached People Groups with over 100,000 in population. Between November 2005 and March 2010, the Church engaged 418 of these groups with 4,007 full-time and part-time workers. This is absolutely staggering! God is at work, and He is calling people in every country to be part of getting to these untouched groups.

But, the big question is: “How much longer will we wait until we go to those groups that are still unengaged?” Here’s the global challenge:

- 632 people groups over 50,000 217 million
- 2,892 people groups with less than 50,000 32 million
- 3,524 Unengaged, Unreached People Groups 249 million

You have in your Handbook the list of these 632 groups, and we will look at them in just a few minutes.

Here’s my prayer during this session: That you will say, “Okay, we’ll try to go to one of these groups.” This may not be your primary calling, but the scriptures say we are all to be engaged in being witnesses for our Lord to the most remote parts of the earth. We all have a specific calling from the Lord, but all of us can help out with the priorities of the whole body of Christ. The truth is that we have had 2,000 years to be obedient to go everywhere, and we still haven’t done it. We need to change that -- starting right now.

V. WHY HAVEN’T THESE GROUPS BEEN REACHED?

First of all, these groups are in some of the most remote, difficult places. There is heavy opposition from non-Christian radicals. Mission boards do not have any more people to send. We think, “Surely, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptists has somebody who could go.” But, they have said, “We’re out of people. There are no more to go.” The really sad thing for these groups is that there is nobody willing to try. I can’t understand that. It’s not fair. I don’t think God ever asks us to be successful. He only ever asks us to be faithful. So, I think we have to at least try.

I really believe that one of the biggest reasons these groups are not reached is that people just don’t know. They’re unaware that these groups exist. Many of us have thought that with 100,000 missionaries throughout the world, we must be reaching everybody. But, we are not.

Sometimes we’ve had a fear of failure. Maybe that’s the thing that hangs us up more than anything else. We are just afraid to fail. Or, we assume that somebody else is going to do it.

VI. A NEW PERSPECTIVE

I believe today, that we have to have a new perspective. We need a repentant spirit. We need the eyes of faith. The Scripture says that, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” We tend to say, “I have to see it to believe it.” And the eyes of faith say, “I have to believe it in order to see it.”

Do you think that God is strong enough to use your church, your organization, to get to some of these people? Yes He is! Of course He is! So what’s the problem? It’s our lack of will, our lack of information, or applying the resources God has already given us to where the task is most urgent.

A. The Perspective of Moses

Somebody said Moses would have never led the children out of Egypt if he’d had to solve the problem

of the Red Sea first. Now think about that. Imagine yourself as Moses and you're thinking, "I don't think this is a good idea. We're going to get to the Red Sea. We have no boats." We would have never started. It's our job to make the decision. It's God's job to solve the problem.

If He leads you to take one of these groups, it will be a big challenge. My own church in Southern California has taken three groups in Sudan and after three years of working, do you know what's happened? Nothing. We have seven other groups where good things are happening and new churches have been planted. But, in those groups, nothing is happening. Why? We don't know what the answer is. We're trying, but there is not one known Christian in a million and a half people that are in these three groups – not one known believer. And, there is tremendous antagonism to the Gospel. Wherever the believers turn, it's a tough road. But, we're going to stay with it as long as it takes. This is not a summer project kind of thing. This is not a trip where we take the choir to sing. These are tough places or somebody would have already reached them. But remember – it's God's job to solve the problem and I believe He will – all across Sudan.

B. The Necessity of Committing to God's Vision for You

We need a new vision, a new perspective, and we need a commitment to follow God's leading, no matter where that is. There was a fisherman one day who was out fishing. He'd cast the line out and pull in a huge fish and then he'd throw it back in. He'd catch a little, tiny fish and put it in his basket. Then he'd catch another big one and throw it back in.

Someone finally said, "What are you doing? Why do you keep throwing the big ones back in?" And he said, "Because my frying pan is only this big." (about 4 inches wide) We laugh at that fisherman. But, sometimes that is us. Perhaps the biggest vision, the biggest idea that God ever gave you – you threw back in because you didn't think you could do it.

So, begin to dream those kinds of dreams. That's what God says is going to happen in the latter days. Young men are going to dream dreams and old men are going to have visions. I don't know which category you fit into, but one of those is something that God wants to use.

C. We Need to Believe that God Will Make a Way

Let me give you some examples:

1. China

In the early days, before China was as open as it is now, there was a great desire on the part of Christians to get tools for evangelism. They especially wanted scriptures. They could buy a limited quantity of Bibles, but the pastors there didn't have study Bibles of any kind.

Some friends of ours called and said, "The next time you come to China, can you bring JESUS videos and study Bibles?" A few months later, I recruited a group of 10-15 to go. When we stopped in Singapore, they gave every one of us a separate suitcase loaded with JESUS videos or Bibles. So I said to my group, "When you get to China, don't put your bags through the x-ray machine, and don't look like you are in a group. When you get there, get a trolley, load your bags on it, and just go right out the door." I thought, "If we get stopped, we'll be detained for hours and they will confiscate all of our materials."

But, things went well. Everybody pushed their carts out the door until there were just two men left who hadn't gotten through. Just then, the customs official stopped the two men. Between them they had 150 videos. The official pointed to the machine and said, "Put them through the x-ray." So, there was nothing to be done. I watched the men lift their bags onto the x-ray belt and saw them begin to go through the x-ray machine. Just as the first bag was going through, up in the balcony a gorgeous Chinese girl dressed in black leather and high-heels came clicking across the balcony. This guy was supposed to be looking down at the x-ray machine. Instead, he watched her walk all the way across

that balcony. By the time he finished looking, all the bags had gone through the machine. I thought, “Isn’t it just like God to send a Chinese angel dressed in black leather at exactly the right time?” Who can plan that? Nobody. It’s just what God does at times.

2. Iran

There was a man in the mountains of Iran. He had a dream that if he would go down to the national highway, he would meet two men with Bibles. He wanted a Bible because he’d heard that’s how you can know how to live forever. He didn’t know how much Bibles cost, so he took a little offering from his village and set out. For several days, he made his way down the mountain until he got to the national highway. When he finally got there, he sat down on a rock to wait. At that very moment, two Bible smugglers were coming across the border with a carload of Bibles. As they approached the man, their steering wheel began to freeze. They couldn’t move it. Finally, they edged the car off the road and threw open the hood to see what was the matter. They couldn’t find anything, but saw a man sitting on a nearby rock who said, “Are you the men with the Bibles?” Their mouths dropped open and they said, “Yes, we have some Bibles.” He gave his little offering, got his Bible, and made his way back up the mountain to his village. Who set that up? Only God.

3. Italy

I was sitting in downtown Rome one day and, looking out the window, I saw inscribed in the base of the window across from me the words, “Solo Deo.” Only God. I believe that God has his people everywhere who will say, “We’ll try to reach one of these groups.” And, when God raises up the workers and the first people respond to His message, you’ll know that God did it.

VII. THE LIST

Now, I am going to ask you to look at the list of Unengaged Unreached People Groups. You can get it electronically, by going to www.Finishingthetask.com, which is our website. This list is updated every month so you always know what the latest progress is.

Let’s look at the columns at the top of the front page on your list. Starting on the left side of the page, you’ll see the FTT number, the next column is the country, the 3rd column is the people group name, and the 4th column is the population. Then you have the language, religion, and then a series of very small columns that give you the resources available to reach each group.

WS stands for written scriptures; OS for oral scripture – these are 50 stories that have been translated from the Scripture that can serve as the basis of ministry until a written Bible is developed. J stands for JESUS film; R for Christian radio; G for an audio recording of the Gospel; C for any churches in that group; and B for any known believers. The last two columns stand for the number of workers – WN for the workers needed and WC for the workers confirmed. We believe we need at least 1 full-time worker for each 50,000 people.

Let’s take a look at the 3rd line: The FTT # is 2; the country is Afghanistan; people group is Laurowan; population is 159,000; their language is the northwest dialect of Pashayi. They’re Sunni Muslims. And, they don’t have many resources – no written scriptures; no oral scriptures, no JESUS film; no Christian radio programming being broadcast in. There is an audio recording of some gospel stories; but, there are no churches and no known believers. We need at least 3 full-time workers, but at this point, there are zero committed.

Now let’s look at the top of the page where we have the color key. Any group with a blue color denotes that these groups have been selected or adopted. That’s a church who says, “We will select or adopt this one with the intent of sending people there or finding people that will become daily workers and church planters.”

The green color stands for groups that have been engaged through international churches, missionaries, local believers and so forth. Frankly, most of these have been launched by indigenous organizations or churches within their own country who've gotten a new vision. Some of them have been supported by churches in Korea or other countries who have said, "We'll help you. Let's just do this together. What do you need to get started?" In most cases, they have people but may need some other resources temporarily. As you page through these sheets, you can see some that have been adopted, but at this point, only 16 of these groups have been engaged with full-time workers. As you look at your sheets, remember that every group that is a white color, there are no full-time workers to our knowledge. These are the places where we need you to go.

I have the privilege of giving leadership to the "Finishing the Task" network that tries to coordinate the activities of churches and organizations that are working particularly on the unengaged groups. We want you to be part of the effort. In fact, if you would like to send someone from your organization to the annual task force meeting, the dates are December 8-9. The conference is held in Southern California, and you can get information by emailing Rick Dunn, in our office, at rick.dunn@ccci.org.

VIII. COMMITMENT FORM

The last thing we want to do today is look over the commitment form. I'd like you to find a partner in the audience, with your organization or another organization, and divide up one- on-one. I'd like you to look through the list and, in particular, at your own country and those countries where you are having a ministry. I want you to tell your partner how you think workers could be recruited to go to those groups and which ones you think there is a good possibility that you could begin some type of activity in the next three years. You're going to have this commitment form with you today and tomorrow. We'd like you to pray about which groups you could take responsibility for. And, we'd like to get the forms back from you at the evening session on Thursday night.

Here are some guidelines and things to remember about the form:

- A. First, we realize there are people you will need to check with in order to get their buy in, consent, or support. That's the wise thing to do.
- B. Secondly, we call this a faith promise commitment in that you say, by faith, "I pray that our organization or church will be able to send a worker to one or more of these groups in the next three years." And, your promise is, that if God provides the workers, you will send them to one of these groups that has been waiting for 2,000 years.
- C. Finally, I want to suggest that you write in at least one people group name before you leave the session. If you're not sure which group to select, select a country and write in the name of the country. And, we'll wait on the people group name until you have a chance to do further research.

Remember, the number one resource you have are near-cultural believers in churches in the country of the unengaged, unreached people group. They will know the trade language and the culture. And, they are the number one resource for you to mobilize.

Let me pray for you as you think and talk together. May God bless you.

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The JESUS Film Project and served as its Director for 25 years. This 2-hour film on the life of Christ has been translated into over 1,000 languages. It has been shown in every country of the world and has been viewed or heard over 6 billion times worldwide.

Paul provides leadership to numerous coalitions and ministry networks. He serves as Director of the “Finishing the Task” Movement, seeking to enlist churches to take the responsibility for the Unengaged, Unreached People Groups throughout the world who have never heard the name of Jesus. Along with his wife, Kathy, Paul resides in Laguna Niguel, CA, USA.