



# **Unreached Peoples, Least Reached Places**

**An Untold Story of  
Lostness in America**

**J. D. Payne**

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## About the Author

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# Chapter 1

## An Untold Story

I am sometimes asked, “Where do we begin our disciple making and church planting activities?” My general response is, “The greatest needs are outside of North America.” It is in those locations that we find the greatest physical and spiritual needs. Most of the two billion who have yet to hear the good news live outside of our context.

But, I do recognize the Lord has placed His Church here to bear witness to His truth. Therefore, I write this book to share with you a contemporary story of reality in the United States.



We know of the unreached people groups “overseas,” those with little to no access to the gospel. While we must continue to tell this story and place a priority on resourcing and sending teams to reach the nations, we have failed to tell the story of lostness in our own backyard.

This book is the story of a glimpse at the least reached areas and unreached people groups in the United States. In this brief ebook, you will come across numbers. These will serve as the characters of our story. Each number,

percentage, and ratio represents something greater than just figures on a screen. These electronic characters represent people, men and women, boys and girls for whom Jesus died so they may live (John 11:25).

What I share is nothing new to the United States. Unreached people groups have been here for many years. Least reached areas have always existed. However, for the most part, the Church in the United States has ignored these realities.

**We know the global story—10/40 Window, unreached people groups.**

**We don't know our story—least reached areas and unreached people groups.**

**We don't know that our story is part of the larger global story and the outworking of God's plan of salvation for the nations.**

This brief ebook is an attempt to tell a story, one that few have heard.

## Chapter 2

### Unhealthy Familiarity

I grew up in Appalachia, in Corbin, Kentucky (population 8800), home of the first Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant. Each day, at high noon, the local volunteer fire department would sound a siren that could be heard across the town. I don't know if this was just a small town thing or that people needed a service to check the accuracy of their clocks.

It was so easy to get used to such a sound that you learned to block it out from your hearing (I think the constant exposure forced our bodies into a defense mode where we learned to close our ears to it.). Noon would arrive. The siren would be blaring, but no one would hear it. Sometimes you would look at your watch and be surprised, "12:30? How did I not hear the siren today?"

Familiarity led to a sense of comfort—even with such a terrible noise—that resulted in the ability to ignore the obvious.

### With Traditional Applications

I am concerned that many of us have become so familiar with traditional applications of Great Commission passages that it is difficult for us to consider



their application to a contemporary, ethnically diverse, United States context. For example:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

“And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

We read these texts and immediately think about making disciples thousands of miles away in some distant land. And, of course, we should think about the application of these texts to those contexts. We should be sending teams to reach the nations in other lands with little to no gospel witness.

Or, we read of John’s grand vision...

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9-10).

... and we think, “That’s so wonderful! I’m so thankful that many in distant lands will be in heaven! Let’s get to them with the gospel!”

But, what happens when we look around our land and realize that the nations are no longer over there but also over here—in our backyard?

**Familiar applications are challenged when...**

**...foreign and domestic merge.**

**...boundaries blur between international and North American.**

**...distant exotic is now a stranger next door.**

## **With Traditional Definitions**

Sometimes familiar definitions are a hindrance to recognizing the obvious. For decades, church planting in the United States has been primarily understood as **gathering a group of long-term, Kingdom citizens** together to start a church to reach a community. While there is a place for such an approach to this ministry, it should not be the norm. An exception? Yes. The expectation? Absolutely not!

Whenever we look to the New Testament for a definition of church planting, we find it is **evangelism that results in new churches** (e.g., Acts 13-14). Sheep are not being shuffled around in the Kingdom so a new church can be added to a list somewhere in Jerusalem or Antioch.

**Evangelism** happens in the fields.

**Disciples are made** and gathered together as churches.

They are **baptized** and **taught obedience**.

**Pastors are appointed** from the new churches.

Applying such a definition to church planting enables us to walk more closely in the tradition of Jesus and the Apostles. Whenever we return to the

Scriptures for such a definition, we should begin to ask about unreached peoples *and* least reached areas in our country.

Why?

Because church planting is about the birth of churches from the fields of lostness.

## Hear the Obvious Wail of the Siren

As Kingdom citizens, we are to be wise stewards with everything the Lord has entrusted to our care. This means **we must know God's Word and we must know God's world**. We must guard ourselves from the familiarity that results in ignoring the obvious. And the three obvious matters that I want to bring to our attention in this book are:

- The Great Commission is about making disciples, beginning in the harvest fields, and is to be applied to our American context.
- Many of the world's unreached people groups live in our communities.
- There are areas in the United States that are less reached with the gospel than others.

It is high noon. A siren of lostness is blaring across the United States. It is time to question the familiar by reading an untold story of lostness in this country.

## Chapter 3

### Determining Lostness

For many years, missiologists have used evangelicals as a benchmark when attempting to discern a reached or unreached people group. A group with a lower number of evangelicals is considered less reached than one with a larger number. In this book, I hold to the definition that an unreached people is one that is comprised of less than 2% evangelicals.

The use of this benchmark is only a tool to help us gain an understanding of the number of followers of Jesus who exist in a particular area or people.



According to the [Association of Religion](#)

[Data Archives](#):

Evangelical Protestant denominations emphasize a personal relationship with Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, and the importance of sharing faith with non-believers.

But, aren't there limitations to using such a measurement?

Absolutely!

The use of such a definition does not mean all evangelicals are followers of Jesus. Also, there are followers of Jesus in non-evangelical traditions. It simply means that when studying seven billion people, a benchmark is necessary

to estimate the number of people who have repented of sin and placed their faith in Jesus as Lord and who work to spread His good news. Evangelicals clearly define themselves in such terms, thus the reason for using this measurement.

In some of the chapters that follow, I show where the least reached states, counties, and metropolitan areas are located in the United States. Please understand, I am not attempting to rule out great amounts of lostness elsewhere. Significant pockets of unbelievers exist in other locations across the country. However, contrary to what we often hear and believe, **not every community is the least reached** in our country!

Keep in mind that some of the most reached places are homes to unreached people groups. We often do not see or think about them. They are often the strangers next door. Kentucky is one of the most reached states in the country. However, Bowling Green is a community that has a large Bosnian population. Likewise, Louisville includes a large Somali community. Just the other day, a friend told me of a sizeable number of Saudi Arabians living in Birmingham, Alabama—the most reached state in the country!

## **Source of the Data**

Unless otherwise noted, the evangelical numbers used throughout this ebook are found on-line at the [Association of Religion Data Archives](#) and are the findings from the [2010 Religious Congregations and Membership Studies](#).

## Chapter 4

### Least Reached States

There are fifty million evangelicals in the United States. For the most part, the Northeastern section of the country represents the least reached states. The only exception to this reality is Utah. The [ten least evangelical states](#) are as follows with their corresponding evangelical percentages:

<b>1. Utah</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>2. Rhode Island</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>3. Massachusetts</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>4. New Hampshire</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>5. Vermont</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>6. New Jersey</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>7. Connecticut</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>8. Maine</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>9. New York</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>10. Delaware</b>	<b>7%</b>

Another way to understand the reality behind these numbers is to reverse them. For example, 98% of the populations of Utah and Rhode Island do not have a relationship with Jesus. For Massachusetts, the number of unbelievers is 97%. New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Maine could be

described as having populations where 96% are lost. Ninety-five percent of New York and 93% of Delaware are separated from the Creator.

To get a glimpse of the different evangelical concentrations in this country, this list should be compared to the ten most reached states in the nation:

<b>1. Alabama</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>2. Oklahoma</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>3. Mississippi</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>4. Arkansas</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>5. Tennessee</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>6. Kentucky</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>7. South Carolina</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>8. Georgia</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>9. North Carolina</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>10. Texas</b>	<b>26%</b>

While the most reached states are not likely to come as a surprise to us in the “Bible-belt,” it is clear that a stark contrast exists between the most reached and least reached states. For those of us living in one of the most reached states where substantial lostness remains (e.g., 58% in AL), it is still difficult to consider the magnitude of lostness found in other parts of this country. If you swim in the ocean all of your life, it is easy to believe that all creatures on the

planet swim in the ocean as well. But, venture onto the shore and a new part of the story opens to you.

If you are looking for the least reached states in this country, consider Utah and several found in the Northeast.



# Chapter 5

## Least Reached Counties

Counties also comprise a part of our untold story. In this chapter, I want to draw attention to [the U. S. counties](#) that are less than 4 percent evangelical. While I would never label a county as an unreached people group, we identify an unreached people group as less than 2 percent evangelical. More

than 100

counties fall

under 2

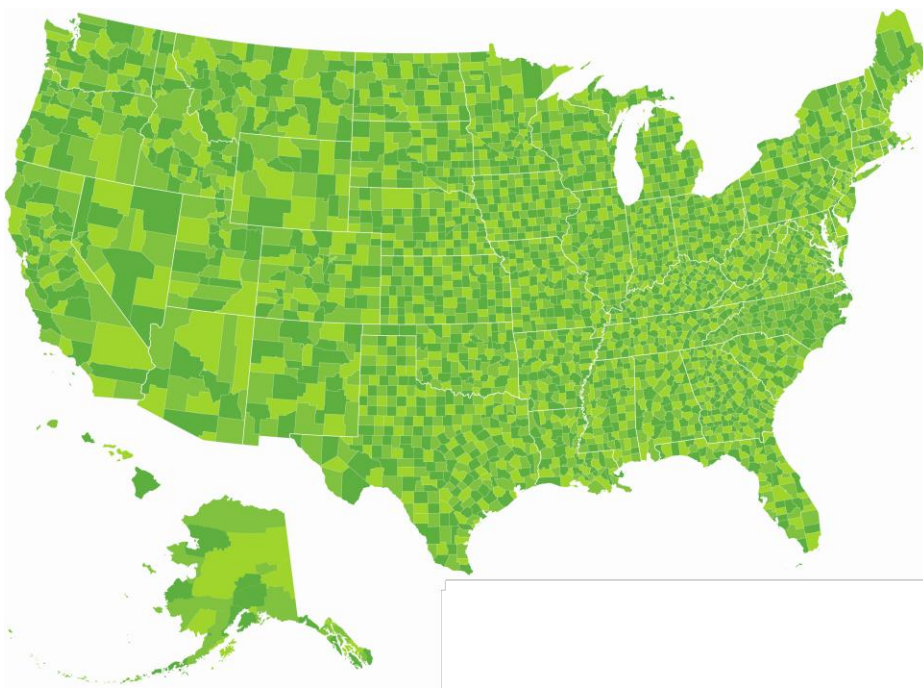
percent.

Yes, such

places exist

in the United

States.



County	% of Population as Evangelical
Keweenaw County, Michigan	0
Skagway Municipality, Alaska	0.2
Teton County, Idaho	0.3
Wayne County, Utah	0.4
Bristol County, Rhode Island	0.4

Beaver County, Utah	0.4
Madison County, Idaho	0.4
Garfield County, Utah	0.5
Utah County, Utah	0.5
Bristol Bay Borough, Alaska	0.6
Wasatch County, Utah	0.6
Storey County, Nevada	0.7
Sanpete County, Utah	0.8
Jefferson County, Idaho	0.8
Caribou County, Idaho	0.9
Oneida County, Idaho	1
Putnam County, Illinois	1
Franklin County, Idaho	1
Putnam County, New York	1
Clear Creek County, Colorado	1
Bear Lake County, Idaho	1
Jackson County, Iowa	1
Cache County, Utah	1
Orange County, Vermont	2
St. James Parish, Louisiana	2
Nantucket County, Massachusetts	2
Box Elder County, Utah	2
Mountrail County, North Dakota	2
Bingham County, Idaho	2
Grafton County, New Hampshire	2
Norfolk County, Massachusetts	2
Stanley County, South Dakota	2
Washington County, Utah	2
Yates County, New York	2
Schuyler County, New York	2
Sullivan County, New York	2
Franklin County, Vermont	2
Newport County, Rhode Island	2
Dukes County, Massachusetts	2
Sullivan County, New Hampshire	2
White Pine County, Nevada	2
Hampshire County, Massachusetts	2
Elliott County, Kentucky	2
Todd County, South Dakota	2
Summit County, Utah	2
Pocahontas County, Iowa	2
Columbia County, New York	2

Berkshire County, Massachusetts	2
Rensselaer County, New York	2
Tooele County, Utah	2
Addison County, Vermont	2
Belknap County, New Hampshire	2
Dundy County, Nebraska	2
Ulster County, New York	2
Herkimer County, New York	2
Kent County, Rhode Island	2
Windham County, Vermont	2
Pike County, Pennsylvania	2
Litchfield County, Connecticut	2
Sioux County, North Dakota	2
Hancock County, Maine	2
Winneshiek County, Iowa	2
Pitkin County, Colorado	2
Middlesex County, Connecticut	2
Fulton County, New York	2
Granite County, Montana	2
Barnstable County, Massachusetts	2
Franklin County, New York	2
Ocean County, New Jersey	3
Rockingham County, New Hampshire	3
St. Martin Parish, Louisiana	3
Monmouth County, New Jersey	3
Davis County, Utah	3
Sevier County, Utah	3
Carroll County, New Hampshire	3
Plymouth County, Massachusetts	3
Tolland County, Connecticut	3
Salt Lake County, Utah	3
Providence County, Rhode Island	3
Bennington County, Vermont	3
Middlesex County, Massachusetts	3
Conejos County, Colorado	3
Wyoming County, New York	3
Mono County, California	3
Essex County, Massachusetts	3
Elk County, Pennsylvania	3
Keokuk County, Iowa	3
Ziebach County, South Dakota	3
Franklin County, Massachusetts	3

Millard County, Utah	3
Coos County, New Hampshire	3
Iowa County, Wisconsin	3
Sussex County, New Jersey	3
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area, Alaska	3
Bethel Census Area, Alaska	3
Clinton County, New York	3
Esmeralda County, Nevada	3
Otsego County, New York	3
Washington County, New York	3
Franklin County, Maine	3
Carbon County, Pennsylvania	3
Nassau County, New York	3
Judith Basin County, Montana	3
Kane County, Utah	3

**Again. Yes, such places exist in the United States.**

## Chapter 6

### Least Reached Metro Areas

We live in one of the most urbanized countries in the world. The cities are not only places of great populations (unlike what we find in many rural counties), but also places of great influence. What happens in the cities shapes the country as a whole.

Here is the list of the [20 metropolitan areas](#) that are under 6% evangelical.

<b>Metro Area</b>	<b>Percent Evangelical</b>
Provo-Orem, UT	0.5
Logan, UT-ID	1
St. George, UT	2
Pittsfield, MA	2
Kingston, NY	2
Barnstable Town, MA	3
Salt Lake City, UT	3
Providence-New Bedford-Fall River, RI-MA	3
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH	3
Norwich-New London, CT	3
Ogden-Clearfield, UT	3
Glens Falls, NY	4
Utica-Rome, NY	4
Springfield, MA	4
New Haven-Milford, CT	4
Portland-South Portland-Biddeford, ME	4
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	4
Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY	4
Burlington-South Burlington, VT	5
Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, PA	5

In addition to considering the overall evangelical percentage, we also need to consider the number of evangelical churches in the population. In a rural area, one common benchmark is one evangelical church for every 500 people—with that church made up of 50 members. In urban contexts, one evangelical church—with 100 church members—for every 1000 people in the city is a



desirable goal.

While such numbers have no biblical support, we do notice that across God's created order, when a group within a

population reaches approximately 10-20%, that society experiences a tipping point, with the beliefs of that group spreading more rapidly and with greater ease.

**Of course, the Holy Spirit is never limited to percentages or tipping points!**

These numbers are presented to assist us in understanding the work that has been accomplished and to provide guidance for developing our future mission strategies as Kingdom stewards.

With this in mind, consider the table below of the evangelical church to the populations in some of the least reached U. S. cities. What is listed on the table below is a ratio showing the number of people living in the area for every

evangelical church. For example, while the population of [Provo-Orem](#) was 527,000 in 2010, only one evangelical church could be found for every 20,300 people. That's a long way from having one evangelical church for every 1000 people!

<b>Metropolitan Area</b>	<b>Population (2010)</b>	<b>Evangelical Church to Population</b>
Provo-Orem, UT	527,000	1 to 20,300
Logan, UT-ID	125,000	1 to 7000
Salt Lake City, UT	1,088,000	1 to 6900
Ogden-Clearfield, UT	597,000	1 to 6200
St. George, UT	138,000	1 to 5500
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH	4,552,000	1 to 5000
NY-Northern N.J.-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	19,567,000	1 to 4900
Providence-New Bedford-Fall River, RI-MA	1,601,000	1 to 4800
Pittsfield, MA	131,000	1 to 4700
Barnstable Town, MA	216,000	1 to 4700
Springfield, MA	622,000	1 to 4600
Kingston, NY	182,000	1 to 4300
New Haven-Milford, CT	862,000	1 to 4100
Norwich-New London, CT	274,000	1 to 3700
Portland-S. Portland-Biddeford, ME	514,000	1 to 3300
Glens Falls, NY	129,000	1 to 3100
Utica, Rome, NY	299,000	1 to 3100

I originally published many of these numbers on my blog ([jdpayne.org](http://jdpayne.org)) sometime ago. Since that time, people have contacted me stating that they are beginning their U. S. church planting efforts in one of these locations.

If you and your church are looking for a U. S. urban context to begin disciple making that results in new churches, then begin by considering these cities. Would you seek the Lord's guidance in this matter to determine if one of these communities may be a starting point for you?

## Chapter 7

### What in the World is God Doing?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was called the Age of Migration. With 214 million people living outside of their countries of birth, the movement of the nations is happening at an unprecedented rate. The United States receives 20% of the world's

international migrants, making her the largest migrant receiving country in the world. While factors such as war, disaster, famine, and disease, “push”



people from their homes, other factors, such as employment and education, “pull” people to new contexts.

Yet, in light of these social factors, the Bible describes people's residences being intimately connected to the Father's plan for the nations to know Him. In his Mars Hill address, Paul makes the following statement about God and the peoples of the earth:

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him (Acts 17:26-27, ESV).



A Divine Maestro orchestrates the movement of the nations.

For what purpose?

That they should seek their Creator and find Him.

Consider the following:

- Between 1990 and 2010, the more developed countries gained 45 million international immigrants, an increase of 55 percent. ([source](#))
- Between 1990 and 2010, the migrant population of the less developed countries increased by 13 million (18 percent). ([source](#))
- Between 2000 and 2010, nine countries gained over one million international migrants: United States (8 million), Spain (4.6 million), Italy (2.3 million), Saudi Arabia (2.2 million), United Kingdom (1.7 million), Canada (1.6 million), Syria (1.3 million), Jordan (1 million), and United Arab Emirates (1 million). ([source](#))
- [By 2010](#), immigrants comprised 22 percent of the population of Australia, 21.3 percent of Canada, 13.5 percent of the United States, and 10.4 percent of the United Kingdom.
- The main nationalities granted [British citizenship in 2008](#) were Indian (11,285), Pakistani (9,440), Iraqi (8,895), Somali (7,165), and Zimbabwean (5,710).
- By 2017, [one Canadian in five](#) could be a visible minority race.

The world is also home to [45.2 million displaced persons](#).

- 15.4 million refugees
- 937,000 asylum seekers
- 28.8 million internally displaced persons in their homelands

War is the main reason for such displacement, with over half of all such persons coming from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Sudan.

Displacement is happening at a very rapid rate. Last year, someone became a refugee or internally displaced every 4 seconds. Developing countries host 81% of the refugees, a number up from 70% in 2002. Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees (1.6 million), followed by Iran (868,200) and Germany (589,700). Twenty-five percent of all refugees are from Afghanistan, with 95% of these residing in Pakistan or Iran. Children under the age of 18 make up 46% of all refugees.

Students are also on the move. In 2013, there were [820,000 international students studying in the United States](#)—a record high for this country. **China** was the leading driver of this growth, mainly undergraduates. Her numbers are on the rise. **Saudi Arabia** had a thirty percent increase over the previous year, a number now at 45,000 students. The Saudi government funds a scholarship program for students to study

here. **Almost half of all international students studying in this country come from China, India, and South Korea.**

In light of the work of the Divine Maestro, the Church must ask how she should respond in the age of migration. Not only has the Lord told us to go into the entire world, but He is also bringing the world to our neighborhoods. Many of these peoples represent unreached people groups across the world.

You are a follower of Jesus.

Your church exists in a specific community.

The Father has moved an unreached people group to your community.

What do you think the Spirit is saying to the Bride in your neighborhood?

## Chapter 8

### Unreached People Groups—Here?

A few Yemeni men and boys surrounded us as we sat on the floor in the mosque. We were warmly welcomed, and after an hour-and-a-half of sharing the gospel and talking about Islam, it was time to leave. During this brief encounter, we had a captive audience interested in hearing about Jesus, and even an invitation to dinner in a Yemeni home!

I was amazed at what the Lord did that night.

There are twenty-eight million people in Yemen, comprising sixteen people groups—all of them unreached. And here we had a captive audience of a few.

But...

We were not in Yemen. **We were in Detroit.**

When I wrote [Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission](#) (2012), it was estimated that 360 unreached people groups had migrated to the United States (and 180 in Canada) including [representatives of 106](#) of the world's

3,100 unengaged-unreached people groups. While such research on North American unreached people groups is being conducted and revised, if such an estimate is correct, that puts the United States among the countries of the world with the most unreached people groups.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Estimated Number of Unreached People Groups</b>
India	941
China	386
United States	361
Brazil	187
Canada	180
Indonesia	177

The call to reach the nations that have migrated to our neighborhoods is not a call to neglect to send missionaries to Majority World countries where large numbers of unreached peoples exist. We have been told to go and must continue to do so, for the greatest needs for the gospel and church multiplication exist in the non-Western world. However, **something is missionally malignant when we are willing to make great sacrifices to travel the world to reach a people group but not willing to walk across the street.**

What kind of theology and missiology supports going “over there” and fails to advocate going “down the street”? What kind of stewards are we if we are willing to spend large amounts of money, time, and energy on reaching people groups—at great risk—and are not willing to connect with someone from that same group who wants to have tea or coffee with us at the local restaurant?

The Great Commission knows no geographical boundaries. The churches, networks, and denominations that will be the most effective in making disciples of all nations in a highly globalized twenty-first century world are those who strategically integrate all of their missional activities. They will bring together the North American and international realms. The silos separating the “domestic” and “foreign must be removed.

**A key to reaching them “over there” is reaching them “over here.”**

**A key to reaching them “over here” is reaching them “over there.”**

## Chapter 9

### Unreached People Groups—Where?

The United States is one of the most studied countries in the world. We know the numbers of about anything you can imagine. How many cars are in the United States? Stop signs in Dallas? Number of school buildings? Number of water fountains in office complexes? Amount of carpet in buildings in this or that city? Etc.

However, with all of our research and resources, evangelicals have failed to identify who lives in our backyard. We have better information on an unreached people group living in the Himalayas than we do of that same people group living in in the United States.

Across the world, we have estimates of the unreached peoples of the world. We can provide their populations, number of believers, and number of churches. We have information to help us know who—if anyone—is working among any given group. For the most part, we know who is living among the countries of the world—except for those who have migrated to North America.

While we should be very thankful for such global information, given the amount of migration that has occurred to North America, our ignorance of our

own neighborhoods is a terrible embarrassment and shows a failure of Kingdom stewardship.

## What is Taking Place?

The encouraging news is that findings have been compiled in a few areas with much research underway even as I write this book. On local levels, groups are doing their own studies of their cities. For example, authors Chris Clayman and Meredith Lee produced [ethNYcity](#) as a resource to understand some of the people groups in New York. [Global Gates](#) did their homework and put together a [list](#) of the most strategic church planting needs among the unreached people groups living in that city.

The Nashville Baptist Association did a study of their city and self-published their findings in *The Peoples of Nashville: Exploring the Religions and Cultures of the People Groups of Nashville*. Lewis McMullen lists several findings that were new to them:

- Nashville is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest metro area for the foreign-born.
- Nashville is home to at least 70 people groups, with 35 having 1000 or more in their populations.
- Many of the unreached people groups in Nashville continue their relationships with people in countries with little gospel witness.
- At least 30 people groups in Nashville are unreached.



- Nashville has at least 15 mosques, an Islamic school, a Hindu temple, a Sikh temple, at least 15 Buddhist temples, and at least 4 Shinto meditation centers (*Peoples of Nashville*, 2011, 7).

I have also heard of similar work conducted in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Houston. And I am sure others are studying their cities as well.

Two Southern Baptist mission agencies, the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board, are working together on a project to study the people groups in the United States and Canada. Information about their work and the findings may be found at [peoplegroups.info](http://peoplegroups.info). Two other resources hosted by the International Mission Board, [peoplegroups.org](http://peoplegroups.org) and [ethnecity.com](http://ethnecity.com), also contain some information on people groups in North America.

Brian J. Considine, in conjunction with Mission America Coalition and Ethnic America Network, authored and edited [\*Ethnic Embrace USA: Blessing the Nations Among US: A 40 Day Prayer Journey\*](#). This unique and helpful book offers a glimpse of many people groups living in the United States. Part prayer guide, part devotional, this work provides important information about some of the nations among us.

## Who Do We Know?

We do have some information on the countries of birth for the peoples living in the United States. Helpful information is available on-line. However, we must get out into our communities and get to know those living here.

Relationships are critical to understanding.

It is very likely that if such people groups are unreached in other countries of the world, then they are also unreached people groups in the United States.

Of the estimated hundreds of unreached peoples, here is a small glimpse of the reality that few know:

- El Cajon, California is home to “Little Bagdad,” with 60,000 **Iraqis**.
- Of the 30,000 **Senegalese** in New York, over half are **Wolof Mourides**.
- The Bay Area of California is home to “Little Kabul,” with tens-of-thousands of **Afghans**.
- Minneapolis, Seattle, and Columbus, Ohio is home to well over 100,000 **Somalis**.
- Irving, Texas is home to 5000 **Kurds** and Nashville is home to the largest number in the country—11,000.
- **Punjabi Sikhs** number 80,000 in New York.

- St. Louis is home to the largest number of **Bosnians**, with estimates ranging between 35,000-60,000.
- Detroit has the largest concentration of **Arab Muslims** (e.g., **Yemeni, Iraqi, Lebanese, Palestinians**) numbering in the tens-of-thousands.
- Outside of Israel, New York is home to the largest number of **Jews** in the world, numbering in the millions.
- Approximately 5000 **Soninke/Serecole Muslims** live in New York.
- Second to metro New York with 60,000, South Patterson, New Jersey is home to thousands of **Egyptian Arab Muslims**.
- 89,000 **Tamils** live in the United States, with the largest concentration in Central New Jersey.
- **Albanians (Tosk and Gheg)** number 122,000, with the largest numbers living in New York, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit.
- A few hundred thousand **Urdu** can be found in the United States with large concentrations in Houston, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, and Atlanta.
- **Turks** are estimated at 378,000 with the largest enclave found in the South Patterson area of New Jersey.
- The **Burmese** have significant populations in New York, Los Angeles, Bay Area of California, Dubuque, Iowa, and Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**If the Divine Maestro has orchestrated such movements, how should we respond?**

(Much of the information on the locations and numbers of the peoples in this chapter was taken from a [list](#) developed by Global Gates and information found in [Ethnic Embrace USA](#).)

# Chapter 10

## Reaching the Unreached: Some Guidelines



People ask me for resources to help them in reaching the unreached living in the United States. Unfortunately, there are few such resources. We do, however, have a history of brothers and sisters who have been ministering to such groups in other parts of the world. While their contexts are different from ours, they have much to share that we can contextualize to various locations in this country.

Are we humble enough to learn from them?

And while I am in favor of helpful resources, I am strongly convinced that church planting teams in the United States need to learn how to apply biblical and missiological principles related to evangelism, teaching new disciples, leading them to be the church, and raising up pastors from among them (see Acts 13-14)—instead of trying to find a working model.

Though the purpose of this ebook is to tell an unknown story, I do want to provide some practical guidelines and a suggested strategy to be of help to you.

**Be Intentional.** Little is accomplished without intentionality. It is necessary to be intentional about reaching the peoples among us.

**Learn as You Go.** Books are good, but you must put the books down and be among the people. Here is where you will learn much. Recognize that you will never know everything about a people. Let them teach you about themselves.

**Be Willing to Make Mistakes.** Making mistakes is part of the journey. Face it. You will sometimes embarrass yourself when trying to reach across cultures. You will feel uncomfortable at times. It will happen. The people to whom you minister expect it, for they know they will make mistakes when relating to you. Relax. Rare is the mistake that devastates a ministry to a people.

**Use the Bridges of God.** God has allowed for social networks to develop among people. These networks usually extend into other countries where family and friends still live. These networks, or bridges as they have been called, are designed for the gospel to travel across. I know stories where unreached peoples in the United States have come to faith and the gospel has returned to their cities and villages, resulting in disciples made and churches planted.

**Spend Time with the More Receptive.** As we encounter different groups in our communities, we should spend the most time sharing with those who are more receptive to the gospel. While we should share the gospel with everyone—

including the most hostile peoples—wise stewardship and the biblical example direct us to give priority to those asking, “what must I do to be saved?” We do not have an unlimited amount of time and resources. If the Spirit is working in someone’s heart as evidenced by being interested in hearing about the good news, then our God-given common sense tells us that we need to spend more time with that person than with those not interested.

Share with everyone; move with those who are ready to move.

**Understand Cultural and Generational Differences.** People groups are not the same. Somalis differ from Indian Hindus. Japanese are not like Afghans. We must not think that everyone is the same when it comes to culture. Also, second and third generations are different from their first generation relatives. The children and grandchildren often reflect more of the mainstream culture and values than their first generation relatives. A third-generation Korean teenager who was born and raised in the United States is likely to have more in common with the average American-born teenager than with his or her grandparents.

**Use Contextually Appropriate Methods.** The methods the Lord used to bring us to faith and grow us in our sanctification may not be the methods needed to reach the unreached peoples in our communities. In the process of reaching and teaching others, we must recognize that our cultural preferences for functioning as a church are not necessarily biblical requirements. We must be

discerning, teaching these new believers what the Bible says about the local church. At the same time, we must avoid (as much as possible) the impartation of our cultural preferences. Our approach should be to assist them in thinking through how to apply biblical principles to their contexts as they plant churches.

**Participate in Evangelism that Results in New Churches.** In some situations, it is appropriate to reach someone from an unreached people and help them join our churches. However, it is likely that the language and cultural gaps are so great that the situation requires planting churches with them. If we desire to see the peoples work across the bridges of God and make disciples in other contexts, then they need to be reached and taught to obey the commands of Jesus in the context of church planting.

**Use a Simple Strategy and Highly Reproducible Methods.** People reproduce what they know, and they know what has been modeled before them. New believers look to us for an example. The way we model disciple making, teaching obedience, and planting churches communicates *the way* they should do it. If our strategy and methods are too complicated for new believers and new churches to reproduce in their contexts across the world, then our strategy and methods need to change.

**Model Partnership not Paternalism.** We must work to raise up these new believers as partners in the gospel ministry. It is important to see them as



equals, rather than infants who are unable to carry the gospel and multiply disciples, pastors, and churches across the world. Remember, they have just as much of the Holy Spirit as we do. We must not be lord over them. Equip them. Release them. Partner with them for local and global disciple making. There are places across the world where they can travel farther and faster with the gospel than we can.

# Chapter 11

## Reaching the Unreached: A Strategy

There are many different ways to reach the unreached peoples who have arrived in the United States. In this chapter, I want to suggest one strategy that is designed to be contextualized by churches and teams serving the nations among us. I refer to it as the R.E.P.S. strategy: **Reach, Equip, Partner, and Send.**



**Prayer in All Things.** It is out of an intimate walk with the Lord that we are able to carry out the Great Commission. It is a futile and foolish attempt to reach the nations without

prayer. Prayer must not be understood as something to do only before putting together a strategy; rather we are to pray without ceasing (1 Thes 5:17). Without prayer, all strategies are impotent, especially the R.E.P.S. strategy!

**Reach.** We must connect with the people and then connect them with the Father who created them, calling them to repentance and faith. This may include working alongside of them, inviting them into your home, eating with them,

drinking tea or coffee, playing sports, etc. Some questions to ask at this stage include:

- **What do we know about the people (e.g., culturally, spiritually, demographically)?**
- **Why are they living in this community?**
- **What are the barriers to reaching them with the gospel?**
- **What are the bridges to connect with them?**
- **What are some ways to share the gospel, start Bible studies, and plant churches with them?**

**Equip.** We are not commanded to make converts, but disciples. This calling includes teaching them to obey (Matt 28:20), and teaching them how to lead. Some questions to ask at this stage include:

- **Now that they are believers, what is the best way to teach them the Scriptures?**
- **How can we teach them the importance of accountability for applying the Scriptures to their lives?**
- **Are we casting the vision for them to return to reach their social networks and cross cultures?**
- **How can we model spiritual disciplines and local church involvement before them?**

- **How can we teach them about the local church in such a way that they understand their need to self-identify as a local church?**
- **Who might the Lord be raising up (from among them) to pastor this new church?**
- **What are the immediate leadership skills that we need to be cultivating in the lives of the leaders?**
- **Who might the Lord be preparing to return to their peoples as missionaries?**

**Partner.** Jesus never abandoned His Church; He sent the Holy Spirit to be with Her. The Apostle Paul would return to visit, write letters, and send others to visit the new churches. The third stage of the strategy involves developing healthy partnerships with the new churches. Some questions to ask at this stage include:

- **Are we treating the new church as partners in the gospel ministry?**
- **What do all parties believe are the necessary components for healthy partnership?**
- **What should they expect from us and what should we expect from them in such a partnership?**
- **How will we continue the encouraging, training, and coaching after they return to their people?**
- **Does the partnership avoid paternalism?**

- **Does the partnership encourage the growth and development of the new believers and their church?**

**Send.** The Great Commission does not end with them. They are to go into all the world, both locally and globally. They are to reach their relatives and cross cultural gaps to reach other unreached people groups.

Partnership and sending go hand-in-hand. We are not to be paternalistic. But we must recognize that they are our children in the faith. We need to lock arms with them to go to the nations. Some questions to ask at this stage include:

- **How do we assist them to return to their peoples across the globe?**
- **How do we travel with them to assist them in the planting of churches in other parts of the world?**
- **Are we sending long-term workers to serve alongside of them in church planting endeavors?**
- **What are our plans for remaining in contact with them for on-going encouragement, training, and coaching?**

## Conclusion

This brief ebook has been an attempt to tell a story, one that few know. The traditional familiarity that primarily seeks to apply the truths of the Great Commission to the peoples “overseas” often leads us to overlook the obvious in the United States. The familiarity that the United States is a “reached” nation leads us to overlook the lostness around us. The familiarity that the unreached people groups of the world are always on the backside of the Himalayans, deep within an Amazonian rainforest, or in a desert tent, leads us to miss the fact that the Sovereign Lord has moved such peoples to the United States.

You know the story of the unreached peoples and least reached places in the world. . . . now you can share a missing piece to that story!

May the Lord use you and your church to make disciples of all nations throughout the world, including in the United States! And may the words of our brother Paul guide what we do in this country to advance the gospel:

I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” (Romans 15:20-21).

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