

The State of the Unfinished Task: A 2020 Update

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In 2010, I spoke at the Global Mission Consultation in Tokyo. I presented initial thoughts on the “State of the Unfinished Task.” Ten years after the Global Consultation, it is appropriate to revisit our ideas and ask how we are doing, in the Global Church, with making disciples in every people group as well as presenting the Good News of the gospel to every person. The commands of Jesus to His disciples and to us that we call the Great Commission are the basis for this inquiry.

The Scriptural Foundations for the Great Commission:

- A. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus defines the **depth** of the Great Commission in terms of making disciples of all nations.
- B. In Mark 16:15, He emphasizes the **breadth and quantity** of the sowing. “...*Go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation.*”
- C. Luke 24:46-47 says that as surely as Christ rose from the dead, so will repentance be preached to all the nations. That’s the **surety** of the Great Commission.
- D. In John 20:21, we see Jesus as the **model** of the Great Commission. “...*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*” Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. So should we.
- E. Acts 1:8 speaks of the **extent** of the Great Commission that begins in Jerusalem and stretches to the ends of the earth. “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”
- F. How do we do all this? In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus says in His Great Commandment that it’s by loving God with all of our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

Reviewing the 10 global evangelization priorities I proposed a decade ago, in what ways are we not being obedient to the Great Commission? What part of His commands are we neglecting?

First, let me state my assumptions.

- A. First, the focus of these priorities is toward seeing a **disciple-making breakthrough** in every people group of the world. Evangelism is not enough. “*Teaching others to observe all that Jesus has commanded*” must be a part of the ongoing process.
- B. Second, these priorities concentrate on where the Church is **NOT**. They don’t try to address every mission that the Church is called to do. The purpose of addressing these priorities is to **accelerate the proclamation and demonstration** of the gospel where it has **not** yet been proclaimed.
- C. Third, this article assumes that every part of the world is called to go to every part of the world. No country is exempt from sending or receiving.
- D. Fourth, we have not lived our faith as we should. Our message is hollow if our lives do not back up the words we speak.
- E. Finally, we haven’t loved one another and worked together enough. If we know what the evangelization priorities are for the global Church, we can “*stimulate one another to love and good deeds*”—and do what hasn’t been done thus far.

In 2020, I believe these elements are still appropriate. The Global Church did better in some than others. But a tremendous response and church growth occurred wherever we worked together. Let’s take a look at the progress and continuing challenges in some of these elements.

Element #1 - Scripture Translation in Every Language

The Progress:

“Faith comes by hearing the word of God,” so translating the Scriptures continues to be the number one priority. Making disciples is extremely difficult without a biblical foundation.

During the last three years, leaders of the biggest translation and Scripture distribution organizations met together monthly. They delivered a comprehensive plan and a common framework for translation. They developed a joint fundraising approach. They held ongoing conversations on priorities, and they set up a constant communication plan to keep users and partners aware of progress and hurdles.

Working together, they believe they can begin Scripture translation in every language that needs it in five–10 years.

	2010	2020
Languages with a complete Bible	448	697
Languages with a full New Testament	1,185	1,549
Languages with a portion	870	973

The Challenges:

There are still 3,969 languages that have no Scripture and no current work in progress. As many as 2,000 of these have no alphabet and need Scriptures in an oral format. On the encouraging side, it is exciting to realize that the people who will begin the translation of the last language are probably alive right now.

The Deaf comprise a portion of the groups without Scripture. In the last several years, interest grew to reach more Deaf communities with the gospel. Of the 400 known sign languages worldwide, none has a complete Bible translation. The American Sign Language Bible will be the first, celebrating its completion in October 2020. More Deaf church planters and translators are needed to translate the Bible into the world’s sign languages.

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Element #2: Sending Workers to Every Unengaged, Unreached People Group

The Progress:

In 2005, there were over 3,500 people groups that had no Bible, no known believers, and no Body of Christ. We call them *Unengaged*, Unreached People Groups. The combined population of these groups was over 700 million people. By 2010, 386 of these groups had been engaged with full-time workers, but staggering growth occurred between 2010 and 2020.

	2010	2020
People Groups Engaged	386	3,057
Full-Time Workers Sent	1,382	29,500
Bi-Vocational Workers	2,595	87,191
Churches Planted	7,083	139,671
New Believers Reported	104,987	3,237,647

In addition to mobilizing workers, the 24:14 Coalition now reports 1,053 Kingdom Movements. These movements are characterized by at least four generations of church-planting and involve over 74 million believers. As never before, the gospel is going to places and to peoples in the most remote corners of the world.

In 2010 there were over 3,500 people groups with no workers. The total population of these groups was 350 million. Today there are fewer than 250 people groups that do not yet have a missionary.

The Challenges:

New people groups are being discovered and we need to recruit workers to reach out to them. Jesus cared about one lost sheep, one lost coin and one lost son. In addition, 70 million Deaf people have been neglected for too long. More workers are needed to share the gospel with more than 300 Deaf groups worldwide.

Element #3: Increase Evangelism among Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists

The Progress:

The gospel proclamation continues to increase as new methodologies are put into practice. Here are a few examples of organizations that have seen dramatic numeric increases in people hearing the gospel during the last decade:

1. The JESUS Film Project now has 1,808 different language translations available and the film touches more than 150 million people each year.
2. Global Media Outreach reports that 1.8 billion people read the gospel on one of its 102 websites. In just one month in 2019, 4.3 million people from Muslim countries read God's Word and 732,000 indicated a decision to follow Christ. The YouVersion Bible app helps with follow-up. It has now been downloaded by 400 million people, mostly between 2010-2020.
3. Every Home for Christ has reached over 100 million homes each year since 2015.

The Challenges:

The Global Church continues to develop new ways of presenting the gospel. One of the great needs globally is for both evangelistic and discipleship materials to be translated into more languages. We also must be intentional to share the gospel where no one else is working. Otherwise, we will keep going to the easy places and another generation will be lost to the kingdom.

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Element #4: Planting Churches Everywhere

The Progress:

The Global Alliance for Church Planting, along with the 24:14 Coalition, is reporting 2.5 million churches planted in just the last eight years. Churches start everyday by people who simply want to pray together.

In a Muslim area in India, I met a man who planted 22,000 churches among Muslim background believers. I asked him how he started so many. He said, "We just look for a man who will inform all his family that he is a believer in Jesus, and also has a good reputation in the community. Then we go and hold church in his house."

When I asked him what they did in their church service, he said, "We read the Bible, we ask the Holy Spirit to tell us what it means, and then we do what it says."

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The Challenges:

Gathering information on where churches are located is essential to determine where more evangelism and church-planting is strategic. The fear of this data becoming a security risk keeps some major churches and organizations from participating. A solution to this dilemma is needed.

We also desire more resource producers to work on simple tools for house church leaders that can be delivered by cell phone and are oral in design.

Additionally, work is required to reach oral learners and to ensure that foundational truths are present in every ministry. We pray for the day when there are:

- Zero languages without the Scriptures
- Zero people groups without disciple-makers
- Zero people who have not heard the gospel
- Zero villages or neighborhoods without a church

May we all look forward to our lives counting toward Zero. 