

# 24:14 Goal



Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (42 months)

## Obedience to God's Word Overcomes Systemic Prejudice

By **THE WALKER FAMILY**

The "Walker" family began cross-cultural work in 2001. In 2006, they joined Beyond ([www.beyond.org](http://www.beyond.org)) and in 2011 started applying CPM principles. They moved countries in 2016 and have been supporting the movements from a distance.

The movement with which we are connected is bringing transformation—not just to the lives of families and individuals, but also to deeply rooted social problems including systemic prejudice.

The early church celebrated the Lord's Supper: "They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity" (Acts 2:46 NLT). A few years ago, we learned of some churches in the Listening Movement that were not taking the Lord's Supper. India's systemic sin of casteism was the root of the problem. Casteism dictates that eating with a low-caste person makes a high-caste person spiritually unclean. "We cannot take the Lord's Supper across caste lines," they explained.

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Sanjay,\* the main leader in the area, didn't know how to tackle this issue. We were out of the country at the time, so he wrote to us for advice: "What should we do?"

Teaching obedience is very different from simply teaching *about* Jesus or about the Bible. Jesus' final command to His disciples was to make more

disciples, "teaching them to *obey* everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). At its core, casteism is racism. Prejudice in any form is unacceptable to God. It runs contrary to the truth that *all* of us are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). Within His Church, racism violates the Lord's commands to both "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34), and "in humility value others above yourselves" (Phil. 2:3b). Casteism, meanwhile, teaches that from birth, some people are better and more valuable than others.

In the Indian context, caste is a huge issue. The churches needed heart changes about this systemic Indian problem. Mere verbal assents to a teaching we might give weren't going to suffice. We needed God to touch their hearts. To get there, the churches needed to learn from the Bible, not from us. We gave Sanjay a list of verses addressing the equality of all people in God's kingdom, and how in Jesus, all barriers – including gender – are dissolved. We also prayed like crazy.

Sanjay took these Scriptures to the leaders of the movement. They studied God's Word together. They discussed what God was saying regarding casteism and the Lord's Supper. Sanjay did not preach or teach. He gave them the Scriptures. He prayed. He asked questions. They all looked at Scripture together. Finally, the leaders (*not* Sanjay) came to the conclusion that, "If I am in Jesus, I am no longer

Brahmin (or whatever caste I was born into). I can either be a Brahmin, or in Jesus, but I cannot be both. If that's the option, then I want to be in Jesus!"

It is important to note that we are not turning the above personal application statements into doctrinal statements for all the churches. These particular churches wrestled with the Scripture, then applied it to their personal lives in this context of casteism. This is what it means to teach others to obey Jesus. From the very beginning, even before these Brahmin families called themselves followers of Jesus, they had been taught to not just listen to Bible stories, but to apply them. Thus, when this issue arose, the DNA of "obey the Word" was already established. They had no idea that casteism was anathema to Jesus' kingdom. So we gave them the Word, they wrestled with it and then applied it to their personal lives. They chose unity over disunity, to count all things as loss compared to knowing Jesus. And since they are committed to teaching their disciples to also obey Jesus, we know they will share the Bible verses with others.

How do we know they really meant what they said? Through their actions. After declaring they wanted to be "in Jesus," the leaders did something seldom seen in their context. They apologized. In front of each other, without attempting to save face or defend themselves, they admitted: "We are sorry; we were wrong" both to Sanjay *and* to their disciples. Apologizing in public is a big deal anywhere, but it's huge in Asia. Usually, apologies here are passive at best. For someone here to take ownership of a wrong they have done *and* apologize, not just to someone they consider "above" themselves (Sanjay), but also to people who look up to them (their disciples), is stunning. We were speechless!

That's not all. After apologizing, the leaders intentionally gathered multiple churches with mixed caste-background people, and they all took communion together! This may sound like a small thing to outsiders, but this is a *huge* thing for India. Casteism is *the* filter through which the vast majority of Indians think about relationships and community. God broke into their hearts and minds through His

Word alone. Hebrews 12:4 says, "For the Word of God is living and active *and* full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing *and* judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart" (AMP). We have always believed this to be true. Now we have seen it in action, bringing transformation to individuals and to whole churches. What a joy!



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"Teach them to obey all that I've commanded you." Sadly, we Christians tend to believe that lectures, sermons and codified theological doctrines will accomplish this task. But we need to ask ourselves: is all the sharing of information resulting in obedient disciples of Jesus, even when His commands run directly counter to their deeply ingrained cultural patterns and habits? When the Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible, people recognize that they are accountable to Jesus for their obedience (or disobedience). Praise God that discovering His will through group study of His Word helps people learn to obey Jesus *for themselves*. It is a priceless, humble privilege to watch God tear down destructive attitudes and practices, and build up an out-of-this-world fellowship among people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds. Hallelujah! MF