



Why ask what it takes to “engage” a people group? Good news!

Ralph D. Winter



We used to concern ourselves with listing all the “Unreached Peoples” in the world. The cover story this time is “What does it take to ‘engage’ a people group?” Why ask that? Good news!

So many agencies have turned their attention to Unreached Peoples that now the Southern Baptists (as evidenced in our January-February 2006 issue) are trying to list Unreached Peoples which are still “unengaged” by any agency or entity.

Jeff Liverman proposes a four-fold test. Jim Haney tweaks all four, suggesting that it is not necessary to have a resident missionary, and that a foreign missionary may not even be necessary if someone within the culture goes outside and later, as a bi-cultural believer, goes back into his own people.

Bravo! The bi-cultural possibility has often been overlooked by mission agencies. They may not realize that the two most prominent “missionaries” in the New Testament (Paul and Barnabas) were both bi-cultural.

When the Jerusalem Council needed a missionary to go to the new Greek believers in Antioch, they chose a *bi-cultural* (Barnabas). When Barnabas needed help, he sought out another *bi-cultural* (Paul).

Today around the world there are thousands more bi-culturals than at any previous time in history. This is due to massive migration of peoples. Only a handful of the smallest groups locked away in some hidden valleys do not yet have a number of their people in the outside world.



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Migrating people are a global phenomenon today. When people migrate, they often are much more open to new ideas than back in their homeland.

Thus, we need not merely list Unreached Peoples and Unengaged Peoples and send foreign missionaries. We must assiduously seek out *bi-cultural*s who are already introduced to Jesus Christ and who can reach their own people better than any outsider.

I must add one caution to what both Liverman and Haney have said. *My suggestion: let’s stop talking about “church planting.”* Why? Because of what we often assume a “church” to be.

We Americans live in a country where families are almost expected to drift apart, creating *artificially* “individualized” people. Thus, as a result we produce *artificial* “church” fellowships which collect loose individuals or family fragments (such as “nuclear families”) into a helpful surrogate family — which we then call a “church.”

However, in much of the world our missionaries find that multi-generational families are still intact! Often the only thing they know to do is to pull people out of those families so they can gather in an artificial “church” family. What an astounding contrast to the New Testament! *There worshipping households were the “churches.”*

I am sure that both Liverman and Haney know this. But, in that case, wouldn’t it be better not to continue to use such a misunderstood term as “church” for what they are advocating?

In our last issue Bob Goodmann presented a crucial series of charts talking not about “church planting” but instead about “movements to Christ”, namely, *fellowships built on families, not groups made up of loose individuals.* Way to go!

But, are we finishing the task? (Part 1)

Yes, in a way. However, this issue of *Mission Frontiers* could easily be taken to reinforce the common assumption that if we can see a movement to Christ in every nation, tribe, and tongue, we will have fulfilled the Great Commission and have even fulfilled the final conditions for the return of Christ! Wrong.

Admittedly, Matthew 24:14 does say, “This Gospel must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to every people and then the end will come.” But did you note that I left a word out of that quote?: “Kingdom” — “this Gospel of the *Kingdom*.” This reminds us of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth”

The most shocking, tragic and incredible delusion built right into contemporary Evangelicalism in many areas is the idea that we are here on earth simply to get more people fixed up for eternity.

That aspiration is basic, of course. But it’s preliminary to a life lived 24/7 in an all-out battle against those things that dishonor God: evil things, disease germs, corruption, dishonesty in industry and government. 1 John 3:8 says, “The Son of God came for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil.” And, as the Father sent Him, so He sends *us!*

In fact, glorifying God by fighting evil is the best way to win people to Christ. Jesus Himself fought evil,

Jeff Liverman and Jim Haney tackle the question, “What does it mean to effectively ‘engage’ a people?” This is a significant question. But the term “engage” takes us back to 1982 to a two-day conference near Chicago convened jointly by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and what was then called the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (now the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies). The Chicago conference came up with six “stages” in the reaching of a people. To “engage” a group is the final stage before a people can be considered “Reached.”

Unreached Peoples / Least-Reached Peoples (Joshua Project)

	Number of Individuals	Number of Groups	Avg. Size of Groups	Avg. # of Adherents per group
(1) pop > 10,000, adherents ≥ 1,000	1,186,352,000	406	3,000,000	21,000
(2) pop > 10,000, adherents < 1,000	1,392,691,000	2,758	500,000	80
(3) pop < 10,000	6,781,043	3,473	2,000	6
	<u>2,585,824,043</u>	<u>6,637</u>		

dishonesty and greed — and disease. He did this to reveal to us the character of our heavenly Father. It is not merely a case of overcoming evil with good, as when we run up against “flesh and blood.” We must also deliberately seek out and destroy evil *in order to defend and confirm the character of our Father in Heaven.*

I just read that annually over 200,000 hours of work are lost in the USA to dental disease among seniors. By contrast, in Africa, 45 million work years are annually lost to malaria. That’s 2 million times as many man-hours! Is that why Africa’s people

are malnourished and poor? You bet. Should we fight malaria as Christians? Yes. Are we doing so? NO. (Bill Gates is). We have no theology to fight disease. We think *caring for the sick* is all we need to do. Yes, we must reach every Unreached People. But we must also faithfully reveal the Father, or we won’t win very many.

Are we finishing the task? (Part 2)

Yes, in a way. If we confine our attention to the remaining Unreached Peoples and not for the moment concern ourselves with all the Lord’s

Prayer means, we can deal with some very concrete figures.

An Unreached People has been technically defined as lacking an indigenous community of believers. A department of the USCWM (www.JoshuaProject.net) uses a more researchable definition of less than 2% believers and 5% adherents. Their total of 6,637 such groups I have divided into three categories. Some of the first category may actually be “Reached” as defined technically.

Probably the most surprising number in the chart is the small total population for the 3,473 groups in the third category – 6.7 million. That is less than one-tenth of one percent of the global population (about one-thousandth).

Note well that there are now thousands of churches worldwide which could become part of the harvest force for each of these “least-reached” groups. And mission outreach is now exploding in Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, Brazil, etc. Not bad! 🌐

Student Profile # 238

NAME: Long Fai
 AGE: 21
 YEAR: College Senior
 FAVORITE NBA PLAYER: Yao Ming
 BEST FRIEND: Mark Smith,
 North American
 English Teacher

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