

Megachurches Multiplying Rapidly in India

If you take the **Great Commission** seriously you must take India seriously.

I've been to more than 60 countries and no nation pulls at me like India. With its more than 1 billion people, this ancient land of contrasts is an emerging economic superpower and one of the poorest nations on earth. India is a nuclear power where cattle roam the streets; a democracy that has consistently denied basic **human rights** to millions of its citizens.

There's good historical evidence that, after experiencing firsthand Christ's **resurrection**, the apostle Thomas risked his life to plant the **gospel** in India. Eventually he was martyred in the city now known as Chennai. The litany of missionaries who gave their hearts and lives to India comprise a spiritual ring of honor. Among the notables: William Carey, Amy Carmichael, E. Stanley Jones, Mother Teresa, Mark Buntain and P. J. Titus.

Thomas saw significant success for the gospel among the cultured and wealthy. But with the advent of British and American missionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Christian message went almost exclusively to the lower classes. Despite heroic mission efforts, most estimates of the number of Christians in India has remained at only around 3 percent.

But something amazing has happened in the last 20 years. Massive evangelistic crusades have witnessed millions of Indians turning to Christ. When I first went to India in 1981, there were no more than a handful of churches of 1,000 people. Today they are multiplying rapidly. In some states of India,

the population is overwhelmingly Christian. And behind the scenes, knowledgeable Indian missiologists believe that the percentage of evangelical Christians in India may now be as high as 10 percent.

Recently Nashville pastor Dale Evrlist and I had the privilege of **equipping** hundreds of India's great church leaders. Our first stop was a one-day seminar with 120 of the denominational and network leaders of northern India. Northern India is home to the largest cluster of peoples yet unreached with the gospel. These church leaders are literally on the frontlines of the church's advance in northern India. They are the ones best positioned to take the light and life of Jesus to these unreached peoples.

Frankly, I know of nothing more strategic in missions than equipping close-proximity indigenous leaders to reach the unreached of this area. Northern India is certainly one of the most gospel-needy areas in the world.

The "Macedonian call" of areas that need the gospel of Jesus Christ continues to reverberate today. An old missions hymn, written in 1819, still beckons us as Christ's followers in the 21st century to take His light and life to those who have never heard. The language may be archaic, but the vision pulsates with contemporary challenge to you and me:

"From Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strands/
Where Africa's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand/
From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain/
They call us to deliver their land from error's chain.

"Shall we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high/
Shall we to those benighted the lamp of life deny?/
Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim/
Till Earth's remotest nation has learned Messiah's Name."